



May 13, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary  
United States Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership) is fully supportive of IDOT's applications for the Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Opportunity (MPDG) and Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Programs funding on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program. These grants will fund the first segment of the Belt Junction and 80th Street Junction Replacements project, known as EW2a. The project includes reconfiguring the Belt Railway Company (BRC) main tracks between the Dan Ryan Expressway and Belt Junction where four freight railroad tracks intersect with each other and Metra's SouthWest Service operations.


The Partnership is the designated workforce development administrative agency for the City of Chicago and all of Cook County. As such we manage federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds and regional programs including services for job seekers ranging from individualized career planning to occupational training and job placement. Our work is performed through our universally accessible, information-driven network of American Job Centers, delegate agencies and training providers.

This project is a key part of the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP) - a grouping of four major improvements that make up the most complex portion of the overall CREATE Program. These four improvements are being advanced as a single project due to their logistical and environmental linkages. The first two components of the CIP (projects P3 and GS19) began construction in October 2022 with the support of a 2018 INFRA grant and are on schedule for completion in 2026. The remaining two project components of the 75th Street CIP, projects EW2 and P2, are critical to ensure the full benefits of the overall project. Project EW2 is being designed as multiple project segments, due to the scope and scale of the project, with EW2a being the first phase of the effort.

Project segment EW2a will reconfigure Belt Railway Company (BRC), Norfolk Southern (NS), and Metra tracks and rebuild 14 century-old railroad structures, including 86 bridges, over local streets in three South Side Chicago neighborhoods. A third dedicated BRC main track will be constructed, eliminating route conflicts for freight and Metra trains. This project will begin to alleviate the most congested rail chokepoint in North America, Chicago's Belt Junction, where 30 Metra and 90 freight trains cross each other's paths each day. The project will also improve neighborhood connectivity by replacing railroad structures over city streets and will set the stage for re-routing Metra's SouthWest Service trains out of Union Station and into LaSalle Street station via upcoming CREATE project P2, which will greatly increase Union Station capacity for future Amtrak intercity and Metra commuter rail service.

The Partnership fully supports this application and looks forward to the project's successful implementation.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:  
  
George Wright  
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Chief Executive Officer