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TONI PRECKWINKLE
PRESIDENT

May 3, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

I strongly support the Illinois Department of Transportation's applications for the Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (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.

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 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.

Project segment EW2a helps achieve the CREATE Program's overall goals to improve rail operations in the Chicago metropolitan area and improve quality of life in neighborhoods near rail. Beyond these local

and regional benefits, these improvements will have a significant positive impact on the national supply chain. The efficiencies resulting from this project support the movement of people and consumer goods throughout the nation. The 75th Street CIP project includes investments in K-12 education and workforce opportunities as well as community mobility improvements (CMI). These CMIs enhance the safety, accessibility, quality of life, and visual appeal of the community while enhancing local transportation systems for people walking, bicycling, taking transit, and driving. Not only does EW2a support broader economic growth, but neighboring communities also benefit from cleaner air, reduced railroad delays and improved development opportunities.

Cook County supports this application with a financial commitment documented in a separate letter with our CREATE partners. I thank you for your leadership and look forward to this project's successful implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Toni Preckwinkle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Toni" and last name "Preckwinkle" clearly legible.

Toni Preckwinkle
President
Cook County Board of Commissioners