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April 29, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

On behalf of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association (IMA) and our nearly 4,000 member companies and facilities across Illinois, I am expressing our full support 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.

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 CREATE Program. These improvements are advancing 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, 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 its scope and scale, with EW2a the first phase of the effort.

Project segment EW2a will reconfigure BRC, Norfolk Southern (NS), and Metra tracks and rebuild 14 railroad structures, including 86 bridges, in three South Side Chicago neighborhoods. A third 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 intersect daily.

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 St 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.

Manufacturers rely on rail infrastructure, bridges, and roadways every day to move their life-saving products, transport people and products around the world, feed our nation, power our homes and businesses, continue researching and developing our future technology, and providing for our nation's defense. It is absolutely imperative that industry see these improvements in order to continue providing the single largest share of the Illinois economy. The IMA reiterates its support of this application and looks forward to the project's successful implementation.

Sincerely,



Mark Denzler
President & CEO

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