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May 10, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

I write to support 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 overall CREATE Program. These four improvements are being advanced as a single project due to their logistical and environmental linkages. The first two components began construction in 2022 and are on schedule for completion in 2026. The remaining two components, projects EW2 and P2, are critical to ensure the full overall benefits.

Project EW2 is being designed as multiple project segments, with EW2a being the first phase of the effort. It will reconfigure Belt Railway Company (BRC), Norfolk Southern, and Metra tracks and rebuild 14 century-old railroad structures, including 86 bridges, over streets in three South Side Chicago neighborhoods. A third dedicated BRC main track will be constructed, eliminating route conflicts for freight and Metra trains. In short, it 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 and Metra rail service.

Project EW2a helps achieve the CREATE Program's overall goals to improve rail operations in the Chicago metro area and improve quality of life in neighborhoods near rail. Also, these improvements will have a significant positive impact on the national supply chain, creating efficiencies to support the movement of people and consumer goods throughout the nation; improve rail mobility; enhance the safety, accessibility, quality of life, and visual appeal of the community; support broader economic growth; and reduce train delays and climate pollution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin L. Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robin L. Kelly  
Member of Congress