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*Bringing Together
State Leaders from
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for Passenger Rail
Improvements*

The Midwest Interstate
Passenger Rail Commission is
an eight-state interstate
compact commission that
promotes, coordinates and
supports regional
improvements to passenger
rail service. Our member
states include
Illinois, Indiana, Kansas,
Michigan, Minnesota,
Missouri, North Dakota and
Wisconsin.



May 1, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC) fully supports the Illinois Department of Transportation's applications for funding from the Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Opportunity (MPDG) and Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Programs 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 and these grants will also set the stage for improving Amtrak's intercity passenger rail service to and from Chicago Union Station.

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. In addition, it will allow for future re-routing of Metra's SouthWest Service trains from Union Station 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 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 will EW2a support broader economic growth, but neighboring communities will also benefit from cleaner air, reduced railroad delays and improved development opportunities.

MIPRC fully supports this application and looks forward to the project's successful implementation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Laura Kliewer
Director