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May 1, 2024
The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) application for the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Opportunity (MPDG) on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program.

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) supports the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) in its application for Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Opportunity (MPDG) funding for the Belt Junction and 80th Street Junction Replacements, defined as “EW2a,” on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program. The RTA is the unit of local government created to oversee finances, secure funding, and conduct transit planning for the Chicago region’s transit operators: the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra, and Pace. The RTA has worked with partners at IDOT and CREATE and the region’s transit operators to improve public transportation for decades, and the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP) is a key component of our regional strategy to provide a high-capacity transit network throughout Chicagoland.

The vision of *Transit is the Answer*, RTA’s regional strategic plan, is safe, reliable, accessible public transportation that connects people to opportunity, advances equity, and combats climate change. The plan outlines 14 key areas of advocacy and action that were co-created with stakeholders to guide priorities in areas like funding, safety, speed, and reliability. This project will help the region make progress towards our plan vision by improving Metra service in a critical commuter corridor.

The EW2a project is part of the 75th Street CIP, a grouping of four smaller projects that make up the most complex portion of the overall CREATE Program and have been advanced as a single project due to their logistical and environmental linkages. The four projects take place along two passenger routes and six freight

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rail lines. The first two components of the CIP (projects P3 and GS19) began construction in October 2022 with the support of a 2018 INFRA grant. The remaining two components, projects EW2 and P2, are critical to ensure the complete benefits of the 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.

This segment of EW2 project will reconfigure Belt Railway Company (BRC), Norfolk Southern (NS), and Metra tracks. A third BRC main track will be constructed, eliminating multiple conflicting paths for freight, Metra, and Amtrak trains. This project will start to alleviate the congestion at the most congested rail chokepoint in North America in the Chicago Terminal, the Belt Junction, where 30 Metra and 90 freight trains cross each other's paths per 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.

Metra has made a number of infrastructure investments in the corridor and has programmed an additional \$3 million for the CREATE EW2 Bridge Lift project between 78th Street and 79th Street on Metra's Rock Island (RI) Line. The bridge spans over three sets of railroad tracks owned by The Belt Railway of Chicago and Norfolk Southern in Chicago at milepost 8.7. This CREATE project, as well as the other EW2 portions and P2 are necessary components of Metra's new Auburn Park station project and complement this application.

For these reasons, the RTA urges USDOT's full consideration of IDOT's funding application under the applicable guidelines and looks forward to the successful implementation of the 75th Street CIP and the CREATE Program.

Sincerely,



Leanne Redden
Executive Director