

LILLIAN R. NICHOLSON S.T.E.M. ACADEMY

6006 S. Peoria St, Chicago, Illinois 60621



Phone: (773) 535-3285

Mark Carson
Principal

“Group Effort for Maximum Student Success”

Fax: (773) 535-3443

Stacey Bouier
Assistant Principal

June 15, 2026

The Honorable David A. Fink
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Fink:

Nicholson STEM fully supports the Illinois Department of Transportation’s (IDOT) application, on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program, for funding through the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program. The CREATE Program is the largest public-private partnership of its kind, involving the nation’s rail industry and all levels of government.

Federal funding will advance CREATE’s Rock Island Connection project (P2), the next phase of the larger 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project, which will construct a flyover bridge to eliminate a major chokepoint and reduce conflicts between freight and passenger trains. P2 directly aligns with the goals of CRISI by improving safety, reliability, and travel times for both passenger and freight trains in the country’s most congested rail terminal. P2 is necessary to fully realize the delay reductions for freight rail users at Belt Junction once passenger trains are separated from freight traffic.

A key benefit of the project is to reduce conflicts between freight and passenger trains in the corridor, which use the same tracks at the Belt Junction. Freight operators run 90 trains through the corridor daily, Amtrak runs 6 weekly Cardinal trains (serving 98,583 riders in fiscal year 2025), and Metra currently runs 30 weekday SWS trains through the corridor (serving 976,376 riders in 2024). Because passenger trains are prioritized, freight trains are curtailed at least twice daily on the corridor, during peak morning and afternoon commuting periods (totaling six hours daily) and occasionally during non-peak periods. Rerouting Metra SWS using the P2 bridge will reduce the state of good repair backlog and improve freight flows through Belt Junction, particularly to and from the adjacent NS Landers Intermodal Facility (which handled 352,775 annual lifts in 2024). The P2 project is also critical to improving passenger rail performance across the Chicago terminal and the Midwest. Chicago’s Union Station (CUS) is the National Network’s busiest station, home to 17 intercity lines and serving nearly 17 million passengers annually.

P2 will greatly improve the reliability of passenger rail service at CUS by allowing Metra to direct 30 weekday trains away from CUS to the LaSalle Street Station. This change strengthens

Amtrak's ability to provide reliable service with improved travel times and reduced freight conflicts for intercity rail service across the Midwest, including the Cardinal route, which connects New York Penn Station and Chicago Union Station via major destinations such as Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Charlottesville, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis.

The P2 project advances the CREATE Program's overarching goals—increasing the efficiency, capacity, safety, and reliability of passenger and freight rail throughout Chicago and the nation. Chicago is the nation's premier freight hub, handling nearly half of all U.S. intermodal units and one-third of rail cars. This investment is not merely an infrastructure upgrade – it is a pivotal step toward enhancing supply chain resilience and driving economic growth nationwide.

Nicholson STEM fully supports this application and looks forward to the successful implementation of the P2 project with your award of CRISI.

Sincerely,

Mark L. Carson
Principal, Nicholson STEM Academy