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May 28, 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:

On behalf of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), I am pleased to express our support for 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.

NIRPC serves as the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Council of Governments for Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties in Northwest Indiana. In this role, NIRPC is responsible for regional transportation planning, programming federal transportation funds, and advancing strategies that support economic development, environmental stewardship, and quality of life. Given Northwest Indiana's integral connection to the greater Chicago metropolitan transportation system — particularly as a critical link in the nation's freight rail network — projects that improve rail efficiency and reliability in the Chicago terminal region are directly relevant to NIRPC's mission and to the communities we serve.

The CREATE Program represents a nationally significant public-private partnership that supports the efficient movement of both freight and passenger rail traffic through the Chicago region—the most critical freight hub in the United States. The proposed Rock Island Connection Project (P2) is a vital next step within the broader 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project and will construct a grade-separated flyover to eliminate a major rail chokepoint, improving safety, reliability, and efficiency across the network.

From NIRPC's perspective, the P2 project is strongly aligned with the priorities and goals outlined in *NWI 2050+*, our region's long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan. The plan emphasizes the importance of:

- **Enhancing multimodal connectivity and system reliability**, particularly in corridors critical to both passenger mobility and freight movement;
- **Improving freight efficiency and reducing bottlenecks** to support regional and national supply chains;

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- **Advancing transportation safety and system resiliency;** and
- **Promoting economic vitality through strategic infrastructure investments.**

The P2 project directly advances these goals by separating freight and passenger rail operations at Belt Junction, reducing conflicts that currently constrain both systems. By eliminating delays and improving operational fluidity, the project supports the *NWI 2050+* objective of creating a more **reliable, efficient, and integrated regional transportation system.**

For Northwest Indiana, these benefits are especially critical. Our region is deeply connected to the Chicago rail network, and disruptions within this system directly impact freight-dependent industries, commuter reliability, and broader economic competitiveness. As highlighted in NIRPC's planning framework, investments that improve throughput in the Chicago terminal region yield **outsized benefits for regional mobility, supply chain performance, and economic development.**

The project's ability to improve freight movement to and from major intermodal facilities — including those serving Northwest Indiana — further supports NIRPC's goal of strengthening the region's role as a **key logistics and freight hub** within the national network. Additionally, improved passenger rail reliability aligns with our commitment to **enhancing commuter travel options and reducing congestion on the broader transportation system.**

The CREATE P2 project also contributes to a more resilient and sustainable transportation system by reducing idling, improving travel time reliability, and supporting more efficient rail operations — outcomes that are consistent with the focus of *NWI 2050+* on **environmental stewardship and system performance.**

In summary, this project represents a strategic investment that will deliver meaningful benefits across local, regional, and national scales. It advances shared priorities among federal, state, regional, and private partners, and it is precisely the type of infrastructure improvement envisioned in NIRPC's long-range plan.

NIRPC fully supports this application and strongly encourages the Federal Railroad Administration to award CRISI funding for the CREATE P2 project. We look forward to its successful implementation and the lasting improvements it will bring to the transportation network serving Northwest Indiana, the Chicago region, and the nation.

Sincerely,



Ty Warner FAICP
Executive Director
Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission