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June 11, 2026

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

RE: FY2025-2026 CRISI Program – IDOT – Rock Island Connection (P2) Project

Dear Administrator Fink,

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) supports the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) FY2025-2026 application to the Federal Railroad Administration's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program for the Rock Island Connection (P2) project, 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 the region's transportation stakeholders to improve the system for decades, and this project provides an opportunity to boost safety and reliability on a critical rail corridor.

The vision of *Transit is the Answer*, RTA's regional transit strategic plan, is safe, reliable, accessible public transportation that connects people to opportunity, advances equity, and combats climate change. Improving the Midwestern region's rail system is vital to supporting the RTA's goals. With federal funding, the P2 project can advance the shared goals of IDOT, RTA, and the CRISI program by improving reliability, travel times, and safety for both passenger and freight trains in the country's most congested rail terminal.

The P2 project focuses on constructing a flyover bridge between Belt Junction and Metra Commuter Rail's Rock Island District (RID) line to reduce conflicts between freight and passenger trains in the corridor, which will have a significant positive impact on the national supply chain. Chicago is the nation's premier freight hub, handling nearly half of all intermodal containers and one-third of U.S. carload

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freight. Freight operators run 90 trains through the corridor daily, Amtrak runs 3 weekly Cardinal trains (serving 98,583 riders in fiscal year 2025), and Metra currently runs 30 SWS trains daily 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 improve freight flows through Belt Junction, particularly to and from the adjacent NS Landers Intermodal Yard (which reported 352,775 annual lifts in 2024).

Implementing P2 will improve passenger rail service by enabling Metra to shift its SouthWest Service (SWS) trains to the RID line, ultimately reducing congestion and conflicts and opening capacity at Chicago Union Station (CUS) by directing 30 daily trains away from CUS to LaSalle Street Station. This will greatly improve the reliability of passenger rail service at CUS, the National Network's busiest station, home to 17 intercity lines and serving more than 3 million customers annually. 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..

Your support of this project and a grant award will promote more efficient train movements, enable future service expansion, and boost the regional and national economies. For these reasons, the RTA urges FRA's full consideration of IDOT's CRISI proposal under the applicable guidelines and looks forward to the successful completion of the Rock Island Connections (P2) project.

Sincerely,



Leanne Redden
Executive Director