



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA - CHAMPAIGN



RAIL TRANSPORTATION AND ENGINEERING CENTER

Christopher P.L. Barkan, Ph.D.

Professor

1241 Newmark Civil Engineering Laboratory, MC-250
205 North Mathews Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801-2352

George Krambles Director – RailTEC
Director – National University Rail Center of Excellence

16 June 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,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) application, on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program, for funding via the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program. As you know, 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. It will build a new flyover bridge that will eliminate a railroad crossing at grade thereby eliminating a major chokepoint and reduce conflicts between freight and passenger trains, allowing both to operate more quickly and reliably. P2 precisely aligns with the goals of the CRISI program because it will improve safety, reliability, and travel times for both passenger and freight trains in the most congested rail terminal in the US. Because such a large volume of freight traffic passes through Chicago, improving its fluidity and reliability, this project will benefit freight customers throughout the US. P2 is needed to reduce delays of freight rail users at Belt Junction once passenger trains are separated from freight traffic.

Freight railroads operate 90 trains per day through the Belt Junction corridor, while 6 weekly intercity passenger trains bound for Indiana and other states along this route (Amtrak's Cardinal - serving 98,583 riders in fiscal year 2025). Meanwhile, Metra runs 30 weekday SWS trains through the corridor (serving 976,376 passengers in 2024). Because passenger trains are prioritized, freight trains are prevented from operating during morning and afternoon rush hours (totaling six hours of delay daily) and occasionally during additional non-peak periods as well. Rerouting Metra SWS using the P2 bridge will improve the state of good repair and 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 in the Chicago terminal and the Midwest in general. Chicago's Union Station (CUS) is the national rail

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 LaSalle Street Station. This will strengthen Amtrak's ability to provide faster, more reliable service and reduce freight train conflicts for intercity rail service across the Midwest, including the Cardinal route that 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 freight cars. This investment is not merely an infrastructure upgrade – it is pivotal step toward enhancing supply chain resilience and driving economic growth nationwide.

In summary, the P2 Project will provide wide-spread benefit to both freight and passenger rail transportation and benefit rail shippers and passengers in many dozens of states. As such I fully support IDOT's application for an FRA CRISI award for the P2 project.

Thank you very much for your agency's consideration of the IDOT application and of my letter supporting it.

Sincerely,



Christopher P.L. Barkan, Ph.D.