

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1303

February 24, 2016

The Honorable Randy Blankenhorn
Secretary
Illinois Department of Transportation
2300 S. Dirksen Parkway
Springfield, IL 62764

Mr. Joseph Szabo
Executive Director
Chicago Metro. Agency for Planning
233 S. Wacker Drive, Ste. 800
Chicago, IL 60606

Ms. Rebekah Scheinfeld
Commissioner
Chicago Department of Transportation
30 N. LaSalle Street
Suite 1100
Chicago, IL 60602

Mr. John Yonan
Director
Cook County Dept. of Transportation
69 W. Washington
Room #23000
Chicago, IL 60602-1369

Mr. Edward Hamberger
President and Chief Executive Officer
Association of American Railroads
425 3rd St SW, #1000
Washington, DC 20024

Dear CREATE Stakeholders:

I write to you to reiterate the national, regional, and local importance of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program and to strongly urge you to ensure that projects with public benefits are prioritized – especially highway-rail grade separations – as this critical transportation congestion relief program continues to move forward. As CREATE has advanced, many of the projects directly benefiting Chicagoland residents and commuters have lagged behind and it is imperative to tend to all aspects of CREATE as funding options become available.

CREATE has been a significant beneficiary of federal funds. It has been over a decade since the first significant infusion of federal funds for CREATE occurred. As you know, I secured \$100 million for CREATE through an earmark in the 2005 surface transportation reauthorization bill. Prior to this effort, freight projects– especially freight rail projects– were largely ignored by policymakers and public agencies. This contributed to millions of wasted dollars and even more wasted hours for shippers, consumers, motorists, and commuters who waited for delayed goods, sat stuck at blocked crossings, or suffered through passenger rail delays. As the first significant infusion of federal funds, this 2005 effort kick-started a number of projects in the CREATE Program and it started a shift in how policymakers conceptualized infrastructure investment, thus beginning the process of transitioning from a siloed approach to a multimodal perspective that

permitted rail projects to benefit from federal investments. Since 2005 I have helped lead successful efforts to secure additional federal funding for CREATE, including a \$133 million grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and a total of \$110 million in TIGER grants in 2010 and 2012.

As the senior Illinois Member on the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee and Illinois' only House T&I member on the House-Senate Conference Committee that finalized the recently passed Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, I was pleased to help ensure that this legislation included \$4.5 billion in competitive grants over 5 years through the new Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects program. As a member of the T&I Committee's Special Panel on 21st Century Freight Transportation in the last Congress, I made creation of such a program which could benefit CREATE a top priority, and with the FAST Act was able to get that accomplished.

In the T&I Committee, on the floor of the House, and during the House-Senate Conference Committee, I successfully fought to ensure that grade separations and freight rail improvements stayed in as eligible projects in the legislation so that CREATE could effectively compete. Additionally, I worked to make sure that grade separations were not subject to any funding caps given their importance to the public. With the creation of this freight program, which itself prioritizes projects that benefit both the general public and the efficient movement of freight, we are in a position to refocus our collective efforts on more effectively leveraging federal resources towards the next phase of CREATE – with a greater emphasis on projects with public benefits. However, capitalizing on this opportunity will require an all-in approach from all stakeholders, and it is critical that we work collaboratively to complete projects that benefit not only our individual interests, but those with a **priority on direct and specific public benefits, such as highway-rail grade separations.**

I am confident that CREATE projects will be competitive under this new freight program and that we can be successful in leveraging these funds with contributions and cooperation from your organizations to advance projects that improve the quality of life in the region while bringing the Chicago region freight rail network into the 21st century.

As federal funding opportunities are announced in the near future, I look forward to working with the CREATE stakeholders to develop a strategy to forge ahead on completing projects that benefit the general public and goods movement, and to submit competitive applications to the grant program that I helped put in place for this very purpose.

Sincerely,



Daniel Lipinski
Member of Congress