



CREATE:

IMPROVING RAIL NETWORKS THROUGH A REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

As a major manufacturing hub, the Chicago area handles one-fourth of the nation's freight rail traffic, making the rail network critical to commerce in the Midwest and across the country. Nearly 500 freight trains and 760 passenger trains pass through the region every day, and freight levels are expected to almost double by 2045. With this growth comes an increase in congestion along Chicago's freight corridors, many of which are more than a century old, and can slow trains passing through the city for an average of 30 hours.

In 2003, the federal Surface Transportation Board convened CREATE (Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program), a task force made up of local and regional stakeholders and all six of the freight railroads that are active in Chicago. This task force recognized that growing rail congestion threatened the economic competitiveness of the region and businesses across the country. Since then, CREATE has invested billions of public and private dollars to upgrade regional rail infrastructure. The program has completed nearly 30 projects, which together have created increased rail network capacity and decreased the travel time needed to move freight across the city by 45 percent. The projects have also decreased travel times for motorists, transit users and passenger rail riders.

In total, the program will invest \$4.4 billion in infrastructure improvements over a 30-year period, which are estimated to generate \$31.5 billion in economic benefits.

In 2018, CREATE received almost \$200 million in federal, state and local grant awards to invest in projects. Most significantly, the CREATE Program partners were awarded a federal "Infrastructure for Rebuilding America" (INFRA) grant for the 75th St. Corridor Improvement Project (CIP) and Argo Connections Project. The \$132 million INFRA grant will leverage public and private funding commitments of \$342 million to fix the most complex and congested segment of railroad in North America. The 75th St. CIP and Argo Connections projects will reduce rail and highway delays and expand freight, commuter and passenger railroad capacity not only in Chicago, but serving the nation. However, much CREATE Program work remains to be done. There are nearly 20 projects for which funding sources have yet to be identified, including grade separation projects as well as passenger rail corridor upgrades. Another dozen projects are in the planning and environmental review phase but are still years away from completion.