

February 27, 2012

The Honorable Ray LaHood
 Secretary of Transportation
 U.S. Department of Transportation
 West Building - 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
 Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

The Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) urges support of the application for a TIGER IV Discretionary Grant by the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program.

MPC has been actively shaping freight and passenger rail policy for over a decade in the Chicago region. Beginning in 2001, under the guidance of MPC's Business Leaders for Transportation, MPC set out to identify causes of surface freight delays and possible solutions. The 2002 report *Critical Cargo, A Regional Freight Action Agenda for Jobs, Economic Growth, and Quality of Life in Metropolitan Chicago* outlined the goals and initial findings of this effort.

Since that time MPC has continued to be a leader in transportation throughout the region: MPC now chairs the Civic Advisory Committee on the proposed West Loop Transportation Center; Governor Quinn recently appointed MPC to an advisory group on the feasibility of a high-speed rail service connecting Chicago, Urbana-Champaign, and other regional locations.; and in August 2011 MPC completed the *Bus Rapid Transit: Chicago's New Route to Opportunity* report detailing a vision for Bus Rapid Transit implementation in Chicago. MPC continues its ongoing work to attract manufacturing companies to locate near freight facilities, and encouraging residential development near transit. Additionally, MPC is committed to the analysis, reporting, and promotion of innovative transportation finance tools for capital development, maintenance, and operations.

Through MPC's work in Northwest Indiana, we have highlighted the \$165 million expansion of the Canadian National Railway Kirk freight yard that it uses to build and repair general freight trains. The project also includes adding more freight car classification tracks and arrival-and-departure tracks to handle longer trains and increase car processing capacity to 2,500 a day from 1,500 now.

MPC fully supports the application for a TIGER IV Discretionary Grant by the CREATE Program. This grant will enable the construction of important transportation infrastructure investments in greater Chicago. The proposed program will result in increased economic competitiveness for the region and nation, including the creation of jobs, and improvement of community livability, sustainability, and safety.

Illinois and the Chicago Region have been the nation's rail hubs for more than 150 years. Illinois ranked first in the nation in 2010 for volume of freight carried, and one-fourth of the nation's rail cargo passes through the region. With over 1,300 freight, passenger, and commuter trains travelling through the Chicago region on a daily basis, the significant role of rail to our region is clear. Chicago is a critical origin, transfer, and destination point for both Amtrak's intercity and Metra commuter passenger rail service, which share freight rail tracks and depend on efficient operations. This project will help mitigate increased rail congestion and allow economic growth and continued leadership in rail transportation.

The projects proposed for TIGER IV are important components to the full CREATE Program, targeted to streamline rail service in the Chicago region. This will improve passenger rail

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service, ease highway congestion, enhance safety, and improve air quality. It will also ensure Chicago's place as a national competitor for efficient freight operations, guaranteeing jobs and providing businesses an efficient way to move products throughout the nation and world.

CREATE has the potential to directly impact the economy of the Chicago Region and the State of Illinois. However, funding for CREATE will also bring significant benefits to the nation as a whole: our national economy depends on an efficient and well-maintained freight and passenger transportation system. In that light, I urge you to support the TIGER IV funding application for CREATE.

Sincerely,



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Vice President

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