

# passenger rail benefits



## Passenger Rail Benefits of the CREATE Program

A primary objective of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program (CREATE) is to expedite the movement of passenger trains at chronically congested locations in the Chicago region. Twenty four rail projects directly benefit Metra or Amtrak:

- **20 CREATE projects directly benefit Metra commuter service.**
- **18 CREATE projects directly benefit Amtrak intercity service.**

### Accomplishments

With the funding received as of 2013:

- 8 projects benefiting passenger rail have been completed
  - 7 projects benefiting passenger rail are funded and expected to be completed by 2015
- However, 9 projects benefiting passenger rail still await funding.

### Trends in Passenger Rail Demand

- Demand for Amtrak service is growing: The number of passengers with origins or destinations in Chicago has increased 7.1 percent between 2010 and 2012, reaching 3.5 million. Ridership on State-supported Amtrak routes to destinations in downstate Illinois has grown 142 percent from 2006 to 2011.
- Metra provided 81.3 million commuter rail trips in 2012. From 2007 to 2013, Metra ridership has exceeded 80 million rides annually.

### Passenger Rail Uses Freight Railroads' Right of Way

- Freight and passenger trains in the Chicago region operate on the same tracks in most locations, which can result in schedule conflict and delay. Nine of eleven Metra lines operate on freight-owned or controlled tracks.
- Freight railroads defer the right of way to Amtrak and Metra by protocol during peak travel periods, so when passenger trains move, freight trains usually stand aside. However, when freight trains are moving, passenger trains may need to stand aside in many locations, due to railway capacity constraints, resulting in passenger delays.
- In order to reach its own trackage at Chicago Union Station, Amtrak depends on the freight railroads and Metra to handle 56 Amtrak arrivals and departures on eight routes to and from Chicago every day.
- In 2013, trains on Amtrak routes to the east and south suffered more than 950 hours of delay entering and exiting the Chicago area due to interference from freight, commuter and other Amtrak trains – equivalent to 2.6 hours of delay every day for the 16 daily round trip Amtrak trains to downstate Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and other points to the east and south.

# passenger rail benefits



## Key CREATE Benefits to Commuter and Intercity Rail

CREATE will eliminate conflicts between freight and passenger trains in several locations on the south side of Chicago, solving the problems that currently reduce reliability and constrain expansion opportunities for regional Metra commuter service and Midwest Amtrak trains from southern Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.

Over 100,000 passenger trains pass through the Chicago area terminal annually, and additional service will likely be needed to meet future passenger demand. Most passenger service operates on freight-owned tracks, sharing space with more than 100,000 freight trains annually. Growing congestion on the rail system is estimated to result in a three-fold increase in passenger delay per train if CREATE is not completed. Through increasing the capacity and efficiency of the rail system, the full CREATE program will prevent an average of 817,000 passenger hours of delay annually.

In 2013, 2.5 million passengers boarded or alighted Amtrak trains in Chicago on routes that will be benefited by CREATE. Once CREATE is complete, significant segments of the Amtrak corridors connecting Chicago's Union Station with points to the south and east will be grade-separated.

CREATE will provide significant benefits to five Metra routes that served 36 million passengers in FY 2013: the *SouthWest Service*, *Heritage Corridor*, *Rock Island*, *BNSF*, and *Union Pacific (UP)-West Lines*. Service on each route will experience less delay and improved reliability when conflict points with freight trains are reduced.

## Projects Completed and Under Construction

- A number of freight rail projects have been completed along the Indiana Harbor Belt Railway (CREATE Beltway Corridor) to enhance the speed of freight operations and reduce the potential for passenger train conflict.
  - Completed projects **B6**, **B8**, and **B9** have improved freight operations and reduced conflict between Beltway corridor freight trains and Amtrak *Lincoln Service* and *Texas Eagle* trains and Metra *Heritage Corridor* trains. Project **B12** improved freight operations, resulting in reduced potential for conflict with Metra *Rock Island* trains.
  - Project **B15** to improve operations in the Blue Island freight railyard has been completed and **WA11** to upgrade and reconfigure the CSX/IHB/UP connections at Dolton Interlocking is funded. These projects improve freight operations and reduce the potential for freight conflict with daily Amtrak *Hoosier State/Cardinal* service to Indianapolis/Cincinnati and the East Coast, improving reliability
- Completed project **WA5** has improved signals, upgraded track and reconfigured the Corwith Interlocking to increase fluidity and reliability of freight trains in and out of the BNSF Corwith Yard. This has resulted in improved Metra reliability on the adjacent *Heritage Corridor* as well as reductions in conflict with Amtrak *Texas Eagle* and *Lincoln Service* trains. Project **WA2** signal and track upgrades under construction and the **Brighton Park Connection (WA7)** will further improve freight operations in this area and reduce the potential of Metra and Amtrak conflict.

# passenger rail benefits



- The completed **UP Third Mainline-Proviso Yard (B2)** project reduced freight conflict on the Metra *UP-West* line with the new third main line, improved the Bellwood and Berkeley Metra stations, and increased pedestrian safety via new pedestrian underpasses.
- In Downers Grove, the completed **Belmont Road grade crossing separation (GS7)** on the Metra *BNSF* Line (94 daily trains) and the Amtrak route to Galesburg/Quincy and the West Coast (8 daily trains) has eliminated the potential for highway traffic conflicts and improved rail service reliability. A pedestrian underpass has also been added so pedestrians no longer have to cross the tracks.
- The **63<sup>rd</sup> and State Flyover (P1)** currently under construction will grade separate two rail lines and eliminate the potential for conflict between 68 daily Metra *Rock Island* trains and 60 freight and 14 Amtrak trains daily on the Norfolk Southern (NS) tracks. The new bridge over the NS/Amtrak route will also benefit future high speed rail from the east. The signal improvements for completed project **EW4** to the east of **P1** also benefit Amtrak trains to Indiana, Michigan, and the East Coast because of improved freight operations and reduced likelihood of passenger conflict.
- The **Ashland Avenue and CJ Mains project (WA3)** is underway to upgrade signals and power switches over a five-mile stretch of track, which will improve reliability for the 14 daily Amtrak trains traveling to the south and east of Chicago, as well as Metra's *SouthWest Service*.
- **Ogden Junction (WA1)** improvements to freight tracks that cross the eastern section of the *UP-West* route, will improve freight operations via adding a double track connection and upgrading signals. When completed, the likelihood of freight conflict with Metra *UP-West* trains will be reduced.

## Projects Seeking Funding

- The **75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project (Projects P2, P3, EW2 and GS19)** will eliminate the most congested rail location in the region: "Belt Junction," where the routes of four freight railroads conflict with each other and with Metra's *SouthWest Service*. With this project, the reliability of 30 daily Metra *SouthWest Service* trains will increase because they no longer will need to cross tracks handling 50 freight trains per day. The 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project will also enable shifting of Metra *SouthWest Service* trains from their current downtown terminal at Union Station, which is at or near capacity, to LaSalle Street Station, which has additional capacity. This will allow Amtrak and Metra service growth at Union Station. This project will also improve the reliability of the daily Amtrak *Hoosier State/Cardinal* service to Indianapolis/Cincinnati and the East Coast because Amtrak trains will no longer cross freight trains at grade in the vicinity of 80<sup>th</sup> Street. For more information visit [www.75thcip.org](http://www.75thcip.org).

# passenger rail benefits



- The **Grand Crossing (Project P4)** connection will make trips for Amtrak service to/from Champaign/Carbondale/New Orleans into Union Station more direct and shave approximately 19 minutes each way from the current schedule for six daily trains. See [www.grandcrossingrail.com](http://www.grandcrossingrail.com) for more information on the environmental study underway.
- The **Brighton Park Flyover (Project P5)** will separate Canadian National (CN) tracks handling 5 daily CN freight trains as well as Amtrak and Metra *Heritage Corridor* trains from five freight tracks handling 55 daily freight trains.
- The **CP Canal Flyover (Project P6)** will separate CN tracks handling 5 daily CN freight trains, Amtrak and Metra *Heritage Corridor* trains from two Indiana Harbor Belt freight tracks handling 76 daily freight trains.
- The **Chicago Ridge Flyover (Project P7)** will separate NS tracks carrying 30 daily Metra SouthWest Service trains from Indiana Harbor Belt tracks handling 76 daily freight trains. This project will alleviate potential freight conflict with Metra passenger trains resulting in delays.
- The **Harlem Ave. grade crossing separation in Berwyn (GS18), and Maple Ave. grade crossing separation in Brookfield (GS24)** on the Metra *BNSF* line still await funding for design and construction. Once funded and built, they will reduce the potential for conflicts with highway traffic crossing the tracks and improve rail service reliability.

# passenger rail benefits



## Map of CREATE Projects Benefiting Passenger Rail



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