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Chicago Program Opens New Rail Link

Small project under CREATE plan affects many railroads

Chicago's multi-layered plan to revamp rail connections in the city and region just checked its \$13.1 million McCook Connection off its list, improving links between several freight carriers and reducing potential passenger train delays.

The Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program, or CREATE, said the first trains have begun rolling over the rebuilt McCook segment, which improves connections between lines there of BNSF Railway, CSX Transportation and Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad.

CREATE said completing the yearlong construction project, which was paid for by public and private funds, means "trains that had to wait, or travel at a maximum speed of 10 miles an hour, are now able to proceed through the area at 25 miles per hour as they move onto mainline tracks near the United Parcel Service Willow Springs Distribution Center."

Although this project is a small part of the total CREATE program, which is projected to cost around \$3 billion, it is an example of how the various rail operations in that area are so intricately linked that altering one section can smooth the flow for numerous carriers.

The McCook project, for instance, affects more than the three lines mentioned above, as multiple carriers move their trains in and out of the busy Chicago hub region using tracks owned by other railroads. One of the first trains to move over the revamped trackage was from Union Pacific Railroad.

CREATE says besides the 15-20 freight trains a day that now use the connection, improving the line's capacity and speed also means freight haulers can more quickly clear both the McCook Connection and an adjacent crossing that links IHB with Canadian National Railway.

And that, in turn, reduces the chance that freight trains will be using the IHB/CN crossing one of 16 passenger trains needs to move through there each weekday.

So far, CREATE has completed seven construction projects in its multi-year plan, has six

more under way and hopes to receive federal stimulus grants to help fund others.

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