

# CREATE backers inch ahead

Chicago congestion relief program scores some hard-won victories



The Chicago Railroad Superintendents Association toured proposed CREATE project sites on July 15. Ray Weart

**Trains often spend** as much time wending through the congested Chicago region rail network as they do traversing half the country. In an effort to solve that problem, the railroads that serve Chicago proposed a private-state-federal partnership to reinvent a series of junctions and ease the flow of rail traffic through the city. The program, unveiled in June 2003, was known as the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program, or CREATE [see "News," TRAINS, September 2003].

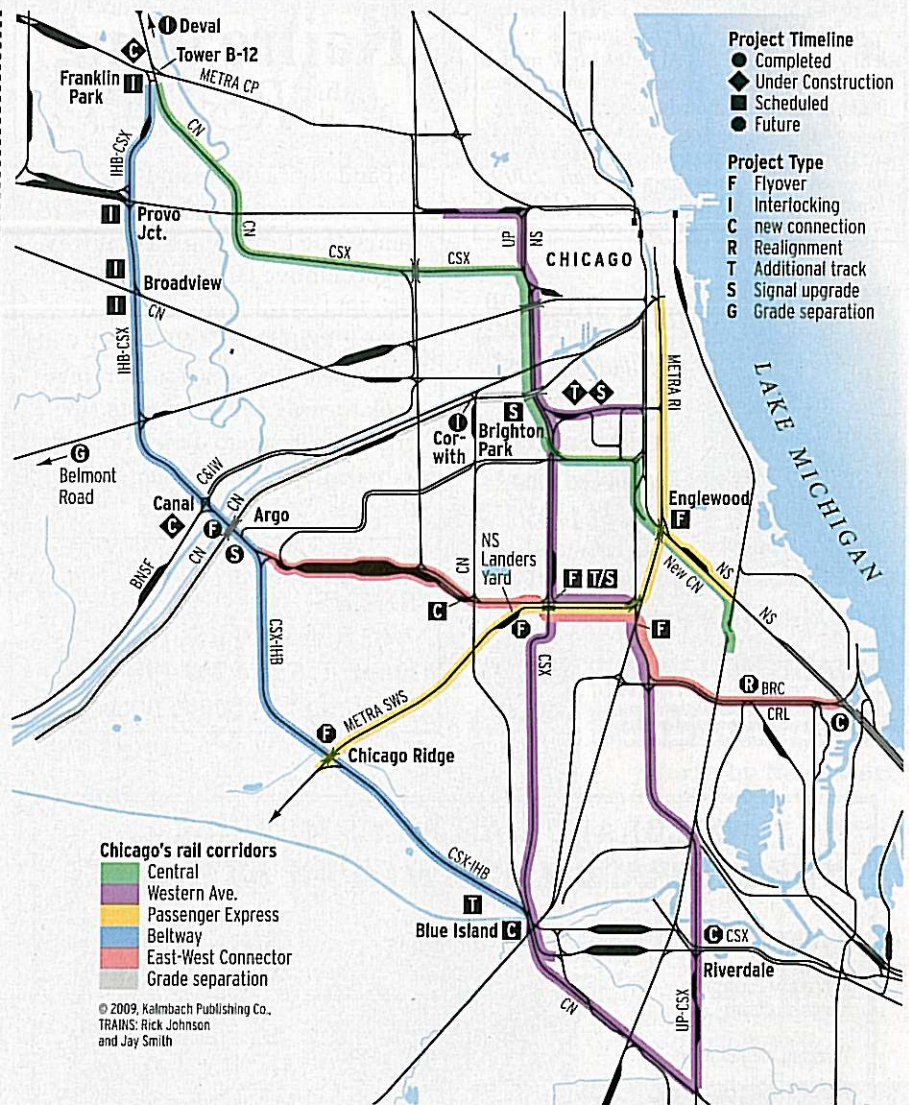
Six years later, only five of the 78 component projects are complete, a disappointment for CREATE supporters. But the program appears to be getting back on track.

The 78 components fall into three categories: Freight railroad projects; Metra projects, aimed at Chicago's commuter network; and public projects, consisting mainly of rail/road grade separations. The railroads were to fund most of the first category, while public money was to go toward the latter two. Four of the five projects completed so far have been freight railroad projects due to anemic public funding levels.

After years of delays caused by political infighting, the state of Illinois dedicated \$322 million of state money to CREATE in July as part of its "Illinois Jobs Now" bill. The CREATE partners are also requesting \$300 million in federal stimulus funds.

State and federal high speed passenger train backers could also assist on the funding front. The state jobs bill also included \$400 million for high speed projects, and that could net some federal stimulus funds as well. That money could help build CREATE projects along the Chicago-St. Louis fast-train corridor in the Chicago area.

One of CREATE's biggest setbacks came in 2005, when the federal surface transportation reauthorization bill allocated only a frac-



tion of hoped-for money. But with a new surface transportation reauthorization due this year, there's hope for funds there as well.

Illinois Department of Transportation's CREATE program manager, Larry Wilson, estimates the projects will likely come in at \$2.5 billion, so the money that's been allocated still falls far short of what's needed. But it's become apparent that whatever hap-

pens, CREATE will be built project by project as money becomes available. By that measure, recent events could be the best news possible for CREATE after six years of sitting on the back burner. — Jim Giblin

JIM GIBLIN is a Chicago-based transportation consult and a long-time observer of the railroad and trucking industries.

## >> ABANDONMENTS & ACQUISITIONS

**7/2: Union Pacific Railroad** applied for permission to abandon the McHenry Industrial Lead, a 5.18-mile branch stretching from Escalon to McHenry, Calif. The line, which sits in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley north of Modesto, dates to the **Tidewater Southern**, a **Western Pacific** subsidiary.

**7/10: Mississippi Central Railroad**, a subsidiary of **Pioneer Railcorp**, applied for permission to operate the 10-mile northern Mississippi spur currently operated by the **Tishomingo Railroad Co.** The state-owned line connects the Tri-State Commerce Park with **Norfolk Southern Railway**.