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Business: Transportation

Railroad group presses for funding

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SPRINGFIELD – Members of a public-private railroad partnership testified before House members Thursday about the need for \$100 million in state funds to improve railways in Chicago.

These improvements would reduce congestion on railways and decrease times for commuters, leaders said while advocating their Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency program to the House committee on railroad safety.

Although the program wouldn't directly benefit a line going from Chicago to Rockford, it would alleviate problems in Chicago that affect railroads leading into the city, said Marc Magliari, spokesman for Amtrak.

The intercity service from Rockford to Chicago hasn't been active since 1981, Magliari said, and if the state were to restore the service, it would pay Amtrak to provide it.

"If there are snags, bottlenecks and backups in one part of the region, it affects the entire region," Magliari said. "Certainly, there would be some benefit to service between Chicago and Rockford ... with the CREATE program, because a better-functioning network affects all the routes."

The CREATE program would cost \$330 million for the first phase and would be the largest-ever investment in railroads in Illinois.

The Federal government will provide the first \$100 million, freight railroads will invest \$100 million and \$30 million would come from Chicago.

The state would contribute the final \$100 million to the program. This money would be tied to a capital construction bill, which lawmakers would have to approve.

The last major capital construction plan was passed in 1999 during former Gov. George Ryan's administration.

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