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## **CREATE Partners Initiate Education Program in Conjunction with 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project**

*Professionals working on the project will partner with schools, parks and libraries to expose students to transportation, engineering and technical careers.*

October 15, 2019 – Today, the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program partners joined community leaders and residents from the Ashburn, Auburn Gresham, Englewood and West Chatham neighborhoods of Chicago to announce bolstered education programs for students and residents, as part of the 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project (75<sup>th</sup> St. CIP). The CREATE partners committed to supporting programs in these communities to encourage students' interest and foster learning in transportation, engineering and technical fields throughout the design and construction of the 75<sup>th</sup> St. CIP, which is anticipated to last through 2024.

The 75<sup>th</sup> St. CIP is the most complex project in the CREATE Program. The rail and roadway improvement project is located on the southwest side of the city of Chicago in the Chicago neighborhoods of Ashburn, Englewood, Auburn Gresham and West Chatham along two passenger and four freight rail lines.

“The CREATE Program is demonstrating what it means to invest not only in the physical infrastructure of our communities, but in the educational tools that will power the next generation of urban planners, engineers, government officials, and technical workers,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “I’m pleased to foster this work – and my administration is committed to bringing more opportunities for good jobs to young people across Illinois.”

“CREATE partners are investing in local students by giving these students an opportunity to see, first-hand, what goes into the design and construction of a major infrastructure project and perhaps even inspire some of them to pursue a career in construction, project management, or STEM fields,” U.S. Senator Dick Durbin said. “I’m proud to have worked with my colleagues in the delegation to secure \$132 million in federal funding for the 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project and am looking forward to watching the positive effect of these educational partnerships unfold.”

“While CREATE’s infrastructure projects break down barriers to efficient transportation in these communities, this initiative removes barriers to achievement by exposing students to a host of study areas and careers that they may have never had the opportunity to consider,” said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. “As a teacher by profession, I understand just how critical a program like this can be in shaping a child’s future, especially in traditionally underserved communities.”

Starting with the current school year, professionals working on the 75<sup>h</sup> St. CIP will share career insights and technical project information with local students, as well as host field trips and expose high school students to the engineering challenges and skills required for large transportation infrastructure projects like this. More than a dozen internship positions for young adults are being planned for summer 2020.

“The future of Chicago’s economy will not only be built on the foundation of our transportation infrastructure, but also by the young men and women we prepare to run and operate it,” said Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. “This exciting program will ensure Chicago's roads and railways continue to serve as the national standard for transportation excellence, as well as expand opportunities for young people in every community to gain access to well-paying jobs and build the infrastructure that will power Chicago's success for years to come.”

“I am excited that the CREATE partners have made the decision to invest in the stakeholders of the community. I think it is important that our students see themselves as active members of the STEM workforce and this partnership helps make this a reality,” stated Elizabeth Meyers, Principal, A. Phillip Randolph Elementary School.

As part of the CREATE partners’ investment in the neighborhood, Norfolk Southern has donated \$40,000 directly to Chicago Public Library Foundation for the CyberNavigator and Teacher in the Library programs at Kelly Branch Library and Thurgood Marshall Branch Library, respectively.

“The CREATE partners are ‘Reimagining Possible’ by tackling old railroad infrastructure challenges in new ways. Bottlenecks we experience with rail infrastructure are similar to those in education – without sufficient funding to remove these barriers, the full benefits potential will never be realized. Developing new digital literacy skills for adults through these programs, we hope to harness the full potential of future railroad employees. Investing additional learning time for students outside the classroom, we want to give children confidence that no challenge is too large to resolve, whether it is their homework assignment or the largest railroad bottleneck in North America,” stated Herbert Smith, Norfolk Southern’s Executive Director, Government Relations.

Brenda Langstraat, President, Chicago Public Library Foundation stated, “Our Teacher in the Library and CyberNavigator programs are designed to close Chicago’s achievement and opportunity gaps, and are uniquely accessible through the city-wide footprint of our public library system. We are grateful for philanthropic partners like Norfolk Southern and the CREATE partners who invest in these resources in order to transform lives and communities. Together, we are working to empower all Chicagoans and to make our city’s Library one of the very best in the nation—and the world.”

Collectively, the CREATE partners will also donate \$200,000 to enhance existing educational programs Chicagoans can access for free at parks and libraries in the neighborhoods around the project. Additional opportunities will be considered and announced throughout the duration of the 75th St. CIP. The CREATE partners are also supporting workforce development, contracting opportunities for minority and women-owned businesses and construction careers training as part of the 75th St. CIP.

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The CREATE Program is a first-of-its-kind public-private partnership to improve the rail and roadway transportation network within the Chicago region through the completion of 70 interrelated infrastructure projects. The CREATE Program is a partnership that includes U.S. Department of Transportation, State of Illinois, Cook County, City of Chicago, Metra, Amtrak and the nation's freight railroads. It is designed to eliminate freight rail and motor vehicle bottlenecks, boost the economy of northeastern Illinois and improve the overall safety and environment of the region.

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