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CREATE Partners Support Youth Access to Science Programs During Pandemic in Conjunction with 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project

Programs and activities available online and in parks and libraries help students maintain access to quality educational materials with infrastructure-related themes.

July 27, 2020 –The Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program partners have collaborated with the Museum of Science and Industry and the Chicago Public Library Foundation to sponsor Summer Brain Games, Summer Learning Challenge and other educational programs available for free to the public, as part of the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (75th St. CIP).

Summer Brain Games is an initiative of the Museum of Science and Industry that provides free and fun at-home science activities with step-by-step instructions, easily done with everyday items. Take home activity kits will be available at several Chicago Public Library locations near the 75th St. CIP this July. The Summer Brain Games kit will encourage youth to discover their neighborhood and explore STEM in the city, a theme that is closely related to the CREATE partners efforts to engage local students with the 75th St. CIP.

During the school year, the CREATE partners worked with several Chicago Public Schools to engage South Side students in engineering and urban planning activities. Professionals from Chicago Department of Transportation, Illinois Department of Transportation, Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways and the railroad industry led students in structure building, street design and railroad crossing design activities to expose them to elements of the 75th St. CIP that will be completed near their schools. From November through early March, the CREATE partners engaged over 300 students from Kindergarten to middle school.

With support from the CREATE Program, Chicago Public Library will offer online and grab-and-go activity kits for this year's Summer Learning Challenge. Known as "Building Stories," activities created for this year's challenge will explore science and art in architecture. Community members can visit the library to pick up an activity book filled with puzzles, design challenges and hands-on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) activities to try at the library or at home.

"We are pleased that we are still able to motivate students to pursue their education, and hopefully inspire some careers in transportation, urban planning and construction too. Despite the adverse circumstances during the school year, we hope families and students will use these resources to stay engaged and excited about learning about engineering," stated Samuel Tuck, Illinois Department of Transportation's Bureau Chief for Freight Rail. The CREATE partners have also provided support to maintain the Science Connections, CyberNavigators and Teacher In the Library programs at branches nearby the project area in 2020.

The CREATE partners had additionally planned to host field trips to locations like Union Station and Illinois Institute of Technology for students in the spring but were forced to postpone those activities due to the pandemic. Summer internships and engagements with high school students were also planned for the end of the school year but are also postponed.

The CREATE partners committed to supporting programs in the neighborhoods around the project to encourage students' interest in transportation, engineering and technical fields throughout the design and construction of the 75th St. CIP, which is anticipated to last through 2024. The 75th St. CIP is the most complex project in the CREATE Program. The rail and roadway improvement project is located on the south and southwest sides of the city of Chicago, approximately bounded by Pulaski Road, 63rd Street, I-94 and 103rd Street.

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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.