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Governor Pritzker and other CREATE Program Partners Celebrate Groundbreaking for Forest Hill Flyover (P3) and 71st Street Grade Separation (GS19) Projects

First half of the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project will help eliminate the most congested rail chokepoint in the Chicago Area

October 25, 2022 – Governor J.B. Pritzker, Congressman Bobby Rush, Congresswoman Marie Newman, Congressman Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, and Chicago Region Environment and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program partners, including Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, President and CEO of the Association of American Railroads (AAR) Ian Jefferies, Metra CEO/Executive Director Jim Derwinski and CSX EVP & Chief Legal Officer Nathan Goldman broke ground Tuesday on the largest CREATE project to date, [The Forest Hill Flyover \(P3\)](#), at CSX Forest Hill Railroad Yard. The groundbreaking also kicked off construction of the [71st Street Grade Separation \(GS19\) project](#), which will eliminate an existing grade crossing of the CSX railroad with 71st Street, improving safety and convenience for community members including pedestrians, bicyclists, and local drivers. These projects are also the first two components out of four major projects that will be implemented as part of the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (75th St. CIP).

The estimated total cost for the Forest Hill Flyover and 71st Street Grade Separation projects is \$380 million. In 2018, the U.S. Department of Transportation awarded \$132 million to the CREATE Program partners through the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) grant program for the 75th Street Corridor Improvement and Argo Connections (B9) projects. The federal investment, combined with \$260 million in state, local, and private funding will support the construction of the Forest Hill Flyover (P3) and 71st Street Grade Separation (GS19) projects.

“As someone who represents Chicago in the U.S. Senate, I understand how integral this city is for efficient transportation across the United States,” said Senator Durbin. “That’s why I pushed to secure the INFRA grant funding to support essential projects like the Forest Hill Flyover (P3) and 71st Street Grade Separation (GS19). These groundbreaking projects will allow for more movement of people and goods across the region as well as the country. This is a perfect example of state, local, and federal dollars working together to improve our community. I will continue to do all I can to bring additional federal funding home to Illinois so we can continue to improve our infrastructure.”

“When I worked with the legislature to build out our Rebuild Illinois capital plan, the largest infrastructure investment in state history, we made it a priority to dedicate nearly half a billion dollars in state funding to bring 21st century design to CREATE’s roads and rail,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “That means maintaining our status as America’s railroad hub with fewer bottlenecks, less traffic, increased safety, and more economic vitality for the entire region.”

“Cook County is a proud partner of the CREATE program, which is making significant progress toward unsnarling the region's rail lines,” said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. “Every single project in the program's portfolio, big or small, ensures goods and people are able to travel throughout the County easily and safely. The County is committed to making investments in infrastructure and looks forward to beginning work on this critical project.”

“Chicago is the largest North American rail gateway, and nearly half of the nation’s intermodal trains move through our region,” said Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. “As the first projects in the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project to start construction, the Forest Hill Flyover and the 71st Street Grade separation will be transformational—improving neighborhood



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connectivity while reducing freight delays. I thank all the local, state and federal partners, along with Amtrak, Metra and the freight railroads, for working together to modernize our rail network.”

“The CREATE Program is an innovative public-private partnership that is tackling one of the most congested points in our nation’s rail network,” said Association of American Railroads CEO Ian Jefferies, “The CREATE Program railroad partners are committed to enhancing safety and increasing fluidity throughout the Chicago region for both freight customers and rail passengers.”

The Forest Hill Flyover (P3) project will construct a bridge to eliminate conflicts between north-south and east-west train movements at Forest Hill Junction. By significantly eliminating conflicts between the Belt Railway Company, CSX, Norfolk Southern and Metra train service at this location, the flyover connection will also enhance freight fluidity, increasing capacity and improving reliability. This north-south rail-rail flyover at 75th Street will eliminate conflict between 30 SouthWest Service Metra trains and 35 freight trains operating on the Western Avenue Corridor (CSX).

Metra trains cross freight train tracks at several locations within the 75th St. CIP footprint, including the Forest Hill Junction. During peak commuter periods only Metra trains are allowed to run in these areas. As a result, freight trains - and sometimes Metra trains - may encounter lengthy delays. This project will seek to remove those delays and increase fluidity.

“The Forest Hill Flyover project will be a significant improvement for Metra’s SouthWest Service, eliminating one of the major points of conflict between Metra trains and freight trains and improving the reliability of our service,” said Metra CEO/Executive Director Jim Derwinski.

The accompanying 71st Street Grade Separation (GS19) project will solve conflict points at this rail-rail crossing, where pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers using 71st Street must currently wait for trains to pass. This crossing also presents a safety risk for drivers and pedestrians which will be ameliorated by the GS19 project.

“The Chicago region dominates the U.S. rail market in both market share and total volumes moved,” Belt Railway of Chicago President and General Manager Percy E. Fields III said. “The investments being made as part of the CREATE Program’s 75th St. CIP will have a major impact on our region’s ability to keep goods moving across the country.”

The 75th St. CIP is the most complex piece within the overall CREATE Program and is a group of four projects that were advanced as a singular project due to their logistical and environmental similarities. This rail and roadway improvement project is located on the south side of Chicago in the neighborhoods of Ashburn, Auburn Gresham, Englewood and West Chatham along two passenger and four freight rail lines.

“As a Member of the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee it's great to be breaking ground today at the Forest Hill Flyover and 71st Street Grade Separation,” said U.S. Representative Jesús “Chuy” García. “The CREATE program continues to blaze the trail as the first partnership between the U.S. DOT, State of Illinois, Cook County, City of Chicago, Metra, Amtrak and the nation's freight railroads. For too long, we have been slapping band aids on our infrastructure problems without making the investments we need to solve them. Funding these projects is critical to advancing commuter travel.”

“As Congressman for the district, I’m pleased to support this project of national significance,” said U.S. Representative Bobby Rush. “Improving community mobility through community partnership is central to CREATE’s mission.”



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CREATE Program partners include the United States Department of Transportation, Illinois Department of Transportation, Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways, Chicago Department of Transportation, Metra and the Association of American Railroads.

“As a longtime advocate of the CREATE Program, our teams have collaborated closely to take on issues impacting freight and passenger rail in the Chicago region, ” said U.S. Representative Marie Newman. “The CREATE Program partnership is meeting the moment as we face unprecedented challenges in our regional and national supply chain.”

It was recently announced that CREATE partner CSX selected Granite Construction Company for two major portions of the 75th St. CIP: the Forest Hill Flyover (P3) and the 71st Street Grade Separation (GS19). The CREATE partners' commitment to creating economic opportunities in the surrounding neighborhoods is reflected in the 15 Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) firms that comprise the Granite project team. The 75th St. CIP also provides workforce development programs and business-to-business networking events to encourage local participation.

“This project will help ease congestion for the motoring public,” said Zach Wright, CSX Manager of Network Planning and Performance. “CSX is excited to be a part of this public-private team effort which will eliminate the existing CSX grade crossing at 71st Street, not only enhancing safety but also helping improve fluidity in one of the most heavily trafficked rail corridors.”

The P3 and GS19 projects have linked stage 1 construction work schedules. The Forest Hill Flyover (P3) project construction is scheduled to take two years. Substantial construction will begin in October 2022 and completion is anticipated for 2024. The 71st Street Grade Separation project is closely interconnected with the P3 project therefore, there are design efficiencies on the projects were done in tandem. After P3 construction is complete, a second section of GS19 will begin construction in 2024. It is two of 70 projects in the CREATE Program. The CREATE Program is a first-of-its-kind multimodal public-private partnership to improve the rail and roadway transportation network within the Chicago region. To date, 33 CREATE projects have been completed, with four more projects under construction and 15 in various stages of design.

Visit createprogram.org to learn more.

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Media Note: Photos from the groundbreaking ceremony will be available 10/26/22. If you are interested in receiving these images, please email Katie Dillon at kdillon@rmchin.com.