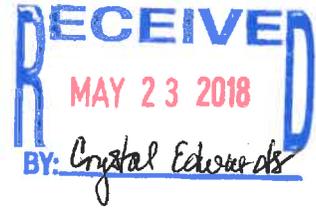




May 18, 2018



Mr. Arun Rao, AICP
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Wisconsin Department of Transportation
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Madison, WI 53707

Mr. Elliot Ramos, PE
Passenger Rail Engineer
Illinois Department of Transportation
69 West Washington Street, Suite 2100
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Re: Comments on Chicago-Milwaukee Hiawatha Corridor Environmental Assessment (EA)

Dear Mr. Rao and Mr. Ramos:

Thank you for your team's continued coordination with Metra in the Chicago-Milwaukee Hiawatha Corridor Environmental Process. This letter serves to provide further feedback on the infrastructure investments proposed along the Hiawatha Chicago-Milwaukee Corridor.

Completing quantitative analysis of proposed transportation infrastructure is critical to making decisions regarding those investments. Discussions with the project team and a review of the project materials have allowed us to better understand the recent results of the RTC capacity analysis that has been completed and further revised throughout the project. The RTC results confirm our assertions for the need for several proposed elements of the project. These include the following capacity enhancements on or connected to Metra territory:

1. Adding Universal Crossovers at Lake Forest and Glenview
2. Extending the connecting track at A-20 between Metra and Union Pacific
3. Adding a second main track on the Metra Fox Lake Subdivision up to St. Mary's Road
4. Adding a short segment of third main track in the Rondout area on the Chicago-Milwaukee Corridor

The objective of the four capacity enhancements mentioned above is simply to clear trains both off the mainline and Fox Lake Subdivision at Rondout and Tower A-20 plus to provide additional fluidity on the Chicago-Milwaukee Corridor. All of these proposed improvements are necessary to permit growth of Metra service on the corridor and to implement the proposed additional Amtrak Hiawatha service. Metra continues to support the implementation of additional Amtrak service. The analysis indicates that these improvements will positively impact the reliability and fluidity of all rail operations in the corridor, including Metra, Amtrak, and freight trains.

In order to move passenger trains efficiently and on schedule in this corridor, it is necessary to enhance fluidity and get passenger and freight trains off the corridor. These four projects will support achieving this objective of efficiently moving freight and passenger trains off of the Chicago-Milwaukee Corridor. Metra's objective is to move, not hold, any train on its railroad.

The Milwaukee District North (MD-N) Line is the most difficult line to operate within the Metra system. This is the result of:

1. Three level crossing with other railroads, two of which are controlled by those other railroads,
2. 17 miles of single track between Rondout and Fox Lake with limited capacity for trains to pass each other, and
3. The number of trains, especially between Rondout and Tower A-20 in Northbrook, operating on only two main tracks.

To assist in moving trains on the Fox Lake Subdivision between Rondout and Fox Lake, Metra has used its own capital to invest in:

1. Building a 1,500 foot long siding in Libertyville,
2. Replacing mainline switches and replacing 17,000 ties on the subdivision,
3. Installing a CTC system to control the mainline switches and signals, and
4. Installing powered switches at Grayslake, Libertyville, and Fox Lake (in progress).

As indicated in Metra's November 7, 2016 letter, Metra remains committed to the long-term vision of a three-track corridor between Rondout and Chicago to meet the growing demand for commuter rail service, when funding and other considerations allow. In that letter we also suggested changing references throughout the EA from the "Rondout Siding Extension" to "Rondout Third Main Track" to emphasize this long-term vision for the line and stress Metra's intention to keep all trains moving through Rondout and the corridor as a whole.

Metra has no intention of using this additional capacity for extended storage of freight or passenger trains. Metra does not dispatch this portion of the railroad.

As noted in the November 7, 2016 letter, Metra recommended that the Rondout Third Main Track be extended to south of Illinois Route 60 (IL 60). The purpose of that prior recommendation was to eliminate the capital and operating/maintenance cost of a separate control point north of IL 60, less than a mile from a control point south of IL 60. The control point south of IL 60 is at the Lake Forest universal crossover that is absolutely necessary for flexibility in moving trains.

However, as the RTC capacity analysis has progressed, it has indicated that the proposed third main track from Rondout to Lake Forest is only required to support the expansion of Metra service. This extended length of third main track is not needed for Metra's current operations. Since Metra is focused on investments in our existing system to work towards a state of good repair, we are not currently in a position to actively pursue major capacity expansions of Metra infrastructure beyond the short-term needs of the MD-N Line.

Therefore, Metra requests that proposed third main track from Rondout to Lake Forest be reduced to a third main track through the Rondout interlocking limits to a point approximately 2,500 feet geographically south of the CN/EJ&E crossing. The purpose of this shorter third main track is to be able to move inbound Metra trains off of the Fox Lake Subdivision and through the Rondout interlocking limits while permitting simultaneous movement on the corridor's two main tracks.

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Metra remains committed to the long-term vision of creating a three-track corridor on the MD-N Line between Chicago and Rondout with as much separation as possible from crossing highway traffic.

To that end, although we recognize that this is beyond the scope of the current project, Metra supports strong future consideration of highway-rail grade separations of both the Metra MD-N tracks and the connecting tracks at Techny Road in Northbrook and the Union Pacific freight tracks at West Lake Avenue in Glenview. The reason for this is that the current length of freight trains changing tracks and moving through switches results in a considerable length of time that these crossings are occupied by freight trains.

Metra does not have resources to contribute to grade separations at these locations at this time, but we feel that grade separations at both of these locations would significantly improve railroad operations, decrease highway congestion, and increase safety in this area above and beyond the improvements proposed in this project.

Metra remains committed to working with WisDOT, IDOT, the project team, and our fellow railroad stakeholders as the project progresses. Metra has a significant interest in the outcome of this project, and we look forward to its implementation.

Sincerely,



James M. Derwinski
CEO/Executive Director

cc: Randall Blankenhorn, Secretary, Illinois Department of Transportation
Beth McCluskey, Director, Office of Intermodal Project Implementation, Illinois DOT
Kirk Dillard, Chairman, Regional Transportation Authority
Leanne Redden, Executive Director, Regional Transportation Authority
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Frank Rothing, President, Village of Bannockburn
Harriet Rosenthal, Mayor, Village of Deerfield
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