



# 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project

## Cook County, Illinois

### RECORD OF DECISION

The FHWA approves the decision to construct and operate the Selected Alternative as identified in the attached Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP). The project involves two rail flyover structures, 29.4 miles of new rail track, and 10.8 miles of relocated track. There will be new rail bridge structures at 4 locations, replacement of existing rail bridges at 3 locations, rehabilitation or modification of existing rail bridges at 23 locations, and one highway-rail grade separation. The proposed action is located in the City of Chicago, Cook County, Illinois. The proposed action will eliminate major rail conflicts at three rail junctions and one at-grade roadway crossing. It will also provide substantial structural, drainage, roadway, and lighting improvements at 36 existing rail viaducts to improve local mobility. The proposed action will require the acquisition of a total of 16.7 acres of right-of-way, of which 14.9 acres are currently vacant residential or industrial parcels. A total of 27 residential dwelling units (26 occupied and 1 vacant) and one church will be acquired.

The Selected Alternative meets the project purpose of improving mobility for rail passengers, freight trains, and motorists. It also responds to the identified transportation and freight needs of reducing rail-to-rail crossing conflicts, reducing road-to-rail conflicts, improving passenger train service reliability, and reducing local mobility problems. FHWA has also identified the Selected Alternative as the environmentally preferred alternative, given that it represents the best option for the 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP. FHWA also finds that all practicable measures to minimize environmental harm have been incorporated into the design of the Selected Alternative. Appropriate environmental commitments will be carried out to mitigate impacts.

This decision is based on an evaluation of information presented in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the attached FEIS, all technical reports, and supporting documentation incorporated by reference in the DEIS and FEIS. Additional basis for this decision is contained in the remainder of this Record of Decision.

President Obama signed the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (MAP-21) into law on July 6, 2012, with an effective date of October 1, 2012. MAP-21 includes several provisions designed to accelerate decision-making in project delivery, such as encouraging concurrent issuance of a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD). Under this provision, the typical 30-day review period between the Notice of Availability for the FEIS and the issuance of the ROD is not applicable.



Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) consulted with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) about the new MAP-21 provisions and determined that a combined Final EIS and ROD was appropriate for the 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP).



# RECORD OF DECISION

## 1. Introduction

The 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP) is a major element of the CREATE (Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency) Program. The CREATE Program was initiated in 2003 as a public-private partnership to improve the rail and roadway transportation network within the Chicago region.

The *CREATE Program Final Feasibility Plan and Final Preliminary Screening* documents were drafted in 2005 to establish overall “Program Level Goals and Strategies” and to define the objective of each component project within the Program. There are currently 70 individual projects included in the CREATE Program, all designed to improve the movement of passengers and freight on the railway system, and to reduce delays to travelers on the roadway system.

Funding for the CREATE Program will be provided by a combination of public and private contributions. The eight participating freight railroads will provide an amount equal to the potential economic benefits they expect to receive from the Program.<sup>1</sup> The remaining funds will come from federal, state, and local governments.

The 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP is located in a rail corridor that generally follows 75<sup>th</sup> Street on the south and southwest sides of the City of Chicago (see Figure ROD-1). The entire study area of the 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP has been fully urbanized for many decades, with no remaining “natural” areas.

The 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP includes four CREATE Program elements originally identified as separate components of the CREATE Program but which were subsequently determined to be linked logically and environmentally, and are now all addressed in this single Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

- ◆ *CREATE East-West Corridor Project 2 (EW2)* – This project will reduce congestion and delays in the 75<sup>th</sup> Street corridor between the Dan Ryan Expressway (I-94) southeast of 80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction, and Ashburn Junction near Columbus Avenue and 81<sup>st</sup> Street to the southwest.
- ◆ *CREATE Passenger Corridor Project 2 (P2)* – This project will reduce rail conflicts for Metra operations by constructing a flyover bridge to connect the Metra SouthWest Service (SWS) Line to the Rock Island District (RID) Line.

*Footnotes are listed at the end of this section*

### CREATE Partners:

- ◆ Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- ◆ Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT)
- ◆ Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT)
- ◆ Association of American Railroads (AAR)

### AAR Members:

- ◆ Amtrak
- ◆ BNSF Railway Company (BNSF)
- ◆ CN Railway Company (CN)
- ◆ Canadian Pacific Railway Company (CP)
- ◆ CSX Transportation (CSX)
- ◆ Metra
- ◆ Norfolk Southern Railway Company (NS)
- ◆ Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP)



- ◆ *CREATE Passenger Corridor Project 3 (P3)* – This project will eliminate conflicts at Forest Hill Junction (75<sup>th</sup> Street between Damen Avenue and Western Avenue) between the Metra SWS and the north-south CSX tracks through the construction of a rail-rail flyover.
- ◆ *CREATE Grade Separation Project 19 (GS19)* – This project proposes to grade-separate 71<sup>st</sup> Street and the north-south CSX tracks.

This study has been developed following IDOT's Context-Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process, using extensive public outreach through all phases of the study.

## 2. Purpose of and Need for the Action

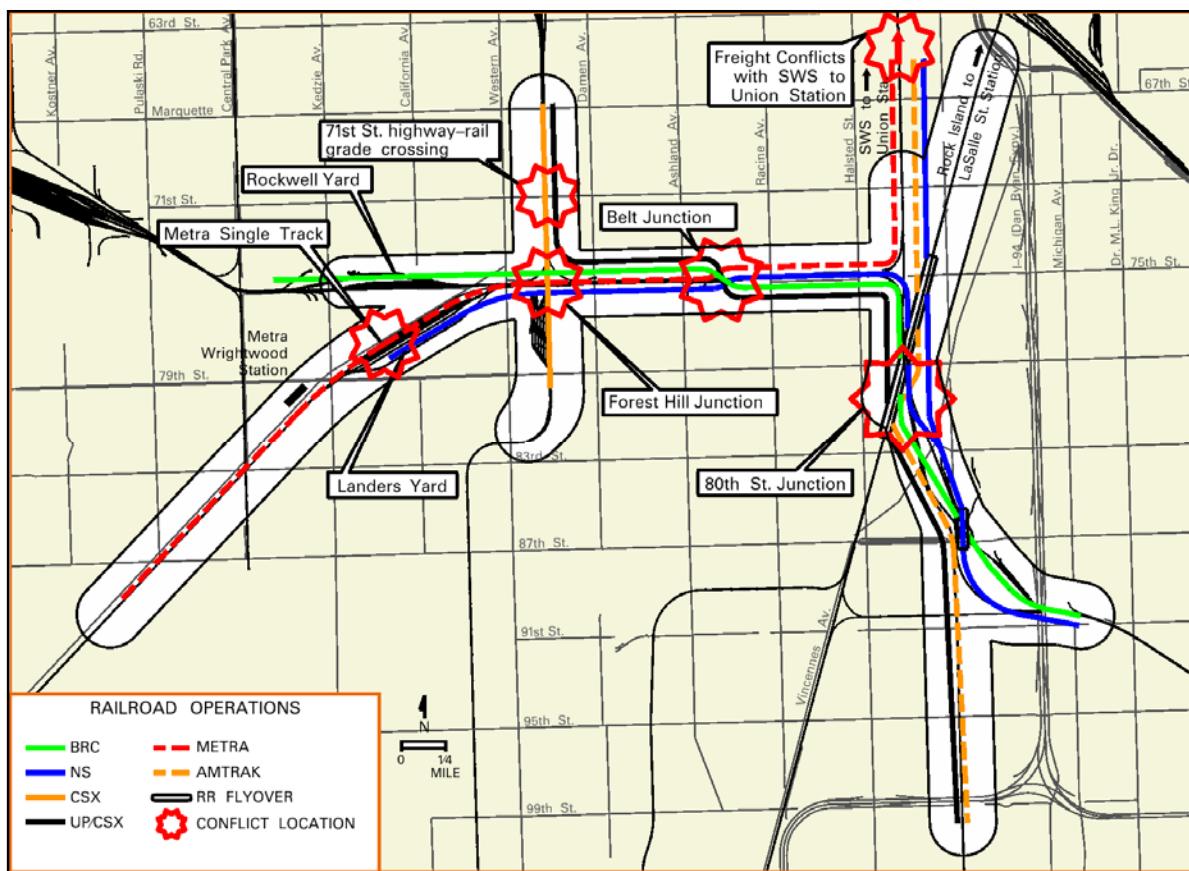
The purpose of the 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP is to improve mobility for rail passengers, freight, and roadway users. The specific needs for this project include:

- ◆ Reduce Rail-Rail Conflicts

There are three major rail-rail conflicts in the study area: Forest Hill Junction, Belt Junction, and 80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction (Figure ROD-1). Since many of the desired train movements through these junctions must cross paths, often only one train can pass through each of these crossings at any given time. The crossings thus become choke points, causing long delays for many trains attempting to pass through the study area and potentially affecting train operations throughout the entire Chicago region. The distances between these junctions are also shorter than modern train lengths. This requires trains to wait outside of all the junctions until the junctions are all cleared of other rail traffic before starting.

Metra SWS commuter trains pass through both Forest Hill Junction and Belt Junction, causing the freight railroads (BRC, CSX, NS, and UP) to suspend operations through these areas for approximately three hours during both the morning and evening peak commuting hours. By allowing Metra relatively full use of the corridor for essentially six hours of each day, the actual daily freight capacity of the entire corridor is substantially reduced during these periods.

There are additional conflicts north of the study area between Metra SWS trains, Amtrak trains, and freight trains on the Norfolk Southern's Chicago and Western Indiana (CWI) line. In most instances, the freight operations are delayed to allow passenger trains to pass; however, there are also delays to Metra and Amtrak along the CWI line while the passenger trains wait for the crossings along the line to clear.



**Figure ROD-1: 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP Conflict Map**

◆ Reduce Highway-Rail Crossing Problems

Highway-rail grade crossings create delays for roadway users – including motorists, pedestrians, and emergency responders – and increase the risk of crashes. The 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP study area includes the grade crossing at 2200 W 71<sup>st</sup> Street in Chicago, where the roadway crosses four north-south CSX rail tracks. Observations by the study team showed that the gates can be down for over four hours of a typical day at this location, causing over 350 total vehicle-hours of delay to drivers every day. In addition, the nine crashes at the 71<sup>st</sup> Street crossing over the past 30 years (0.30 crashes per year) is seven times the Cook County average of 0.04 crashes per year per highway-rail grade crossing.

◆ Reduce Local Mobility Problems

The rail lines in the study area also act as a barrier to vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian transportation. Within the approximately 14 miles of rail corridor encompassed by the 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP, there are seven stretches of more than a half-mile where there are no crossings of the rail corridor. In other locations, crossing may be possible, but certain viaduct conditions make crossing unappealing and unsafe, particularly for bicyclists and pedestrians. Issues raised by local residents, the two Community Advisory Groups, and elected officials included poor



visibility due to inadequate or inoperative lighting, poorly maintained vegetation, poor drainage for bridge structures and roadways, crumbling and falling concrete from bridges, and poor roadway pavement and sidewalk conditions.

◆ Improve Rail Transit Passenger Service Reliability

Reliability of Metra SWS and Amtrak trains are affected by the rail crossings at Forest Hill Junction, Belt Junction, 80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction, and the conflict points on the CWI line.

Additionally, the Metra SWS Line currently operates on a single track from Ashburn Junction, southwest of Wrightwood Station, to just east of Western Avenue (2400 W). This does not allow Metra trains to operate in both directions at the same time through the single-track section, so one opposing train must idle at either end of the single track section waiting for clearance. Trains are generally scheduled to avoid this issue, but if one train is delayed it can cause a train in the opposite direction to wait until the oncoming train has cleared the single track section.

The purpose of the 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP) is to improve mobility for rail passengers, freight, and motorists. The specific needs for this project include:

- Reducing conflicts that affect rail;
- Reducing highway-rail crossing problems;
- Reducing local mobility problems; and
- Improving the reliability of rail transit passenger service.

### 3. Alternatives Considered

The alternatives for detailed evaluation in this study were developed through the following general steps:

- ◆ Dividing the 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP study area into several “improvement areas” based on geography and the ability to meet certain project needs.
- ◆ Developing a range of “preliminary alternates” to address the components of the project’s Purpose and Need statement within each of the “improvement areas”.
- ◆ Screening preliminary alternates using both qualitative and quantitative criteria to select the most effective alternates.
- ◆ Combining the remaining alternates that passed the screening process from each of the improvement areas into an overall “Build Alternative” for the entire project corridor.
- ◆ Defining a “No-Build Alternative” to serve as a baseline for evaluating the Build Alternative.

## Alternate Development and Screening

The study area was divided into five unique “improvement areas” shown in Figure ROD-2. Preliminary alternates were developed within each improvement area with the primary goal of meeting the specific elements of the project’s Purpose and Need. Alternates that did not adequately address some element of the project Purpose and Need were eliminated from consideration. Additionally, improvements to *local mobility* were identified as a specific project need through the stakeholder involvement process. Improvements to address this project need are focused not in one specific location or area, but rather at railroad viaduct locations throughout the study area.

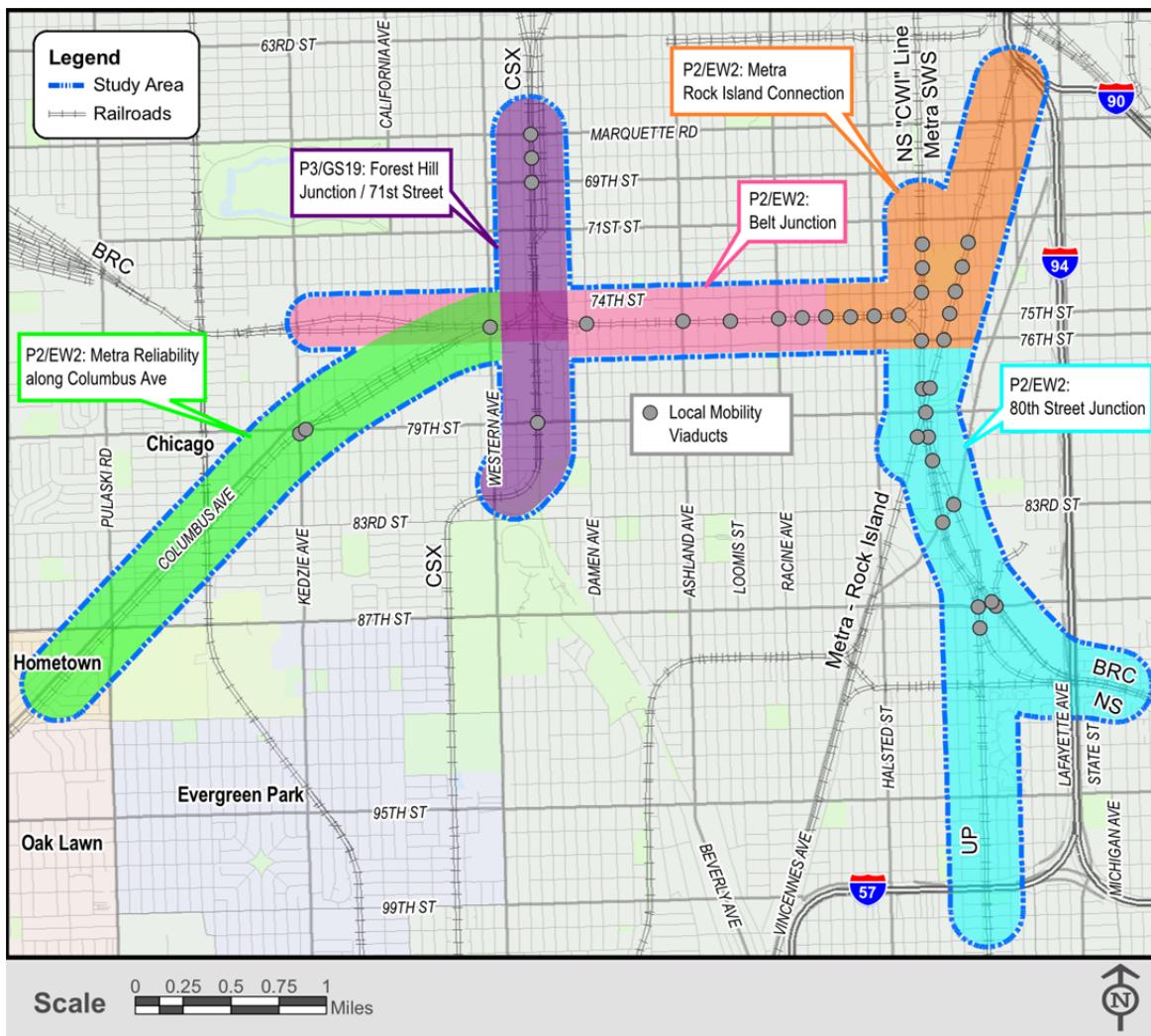


Figure ROD-2: Improvement Areas Map



Other criteria used in the screening process included:

- ◆ The degree to which the alternate would improve railroad operations through the corridor.
- ◆ The amount and nature of new right-of-way acquisition that would be required.
- ◆ The planning-level construction cost of the alternate.
- ◆ The degree to which the alternate met railroad and roadway design criteria.
- ◆ Other identified impacts (positive or negative) of the specific alternate.

Following is a description of the alternates analyzed for each improvement area:

### **Forest Hill Junction/71<sup>st</sup> Street**

Two north-south CSX railroad tracks currently cross four east-west tracks at Forest Hill Junction, creating delays for freight and passenger rail. One half-mile north of Forest Hill Junction, the CSX tracks cross 71<sup>st</sup> Street at-grade. The two issues are linked because the option selected at Forest Hill Junction affects what is feasible at 71<sup>st</sup> Street.

Three alternates were developed to address rail line at-grade conflicts at Forest Hill Junction, highway-rail crossing problems at 71<sup>st</sup> Street, and rail transit passenger service reliability issues for the Metra SWS Line.

- ◆ *Alternate FH-1* would raise two east-west Metra tracks over the two north-south CSX tracks at Forest Hill Junction, and a roadway bridge would carry 71<sup>st</sup> Street over the CSX tracks. This will leave an at-grade crossing of two north-south CSX tracks, three east-west BRC tracks, and two east-west NS tracks
- ◆ *Alternative FH-2* would raise the two north-south CSX tracks over all the east-west tracks at Forest Hill Junction *and* over 71<sup>st</sup> Street. Two temporary tracks would be constructed east of the existing CSX tracks (primarily on property currently owned by the City of Chicago) while the new structure is being constructed.
- ◆ *Alternate FH-3* would raise all east-west tracks over the two CSX tracks at Forest Hill Junction and construct a bridge for 71<sup>st</sup> Street over the CSX tracks.

**Alternate FH-2** was advanced to the Build Alternative in this improvement area over Alternate FH-2 and Alternate FH-3 because it would remove all rail-rail crossing conflicts at Forest Hill Junction, maintain rail operations, avoid the need for residential property acquisition, and avoid impacts to the street network.

### **80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction**

Amtrak, BRC, CSX, NS, and UP rail operations all must traverse the 80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction interlocking (i.e., train switches and signals), with many required crossing maneuvers. The reduced number of

tracks through the junction and the arrangement of the tracks make it impossible in most cases for more than one train to move through the junction at a time.

Two alternates were developed to address rail line at-grade conflicts at 80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction and Belt Junction, and rail transit passenger service reliability issues for the Amtrak Cardinal/Hoosier State route.

- ◆ *Alternate 80-1* provides two additional through tracks and reconfigures the 80<sup>th</sup> Street interlocking; however, it would not eliminate the existing crossing conflicts.
- ◆ *Alternate 80-2* would also provide two additional through tracks through 80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction, but would eliminate crossing conflicts by relocating Amtrak, CSX, and UP operations from the west side of the corridor to the east side of the corridor by utilizing an existing bridge over the BRC tracks north of 87<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Alternate 80-2** was advanced to the Build Alternative over Alternate 80-1 because of its superior performance in improving railroad operations by eliminating all crossing conflicts at both 80th Street Junction and Belt Junction.

### **Metra SWS Connection to Rock Island District (RID) Line**

Metra SWS trains currently travel east and west through the 75<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, connecting to the CWI line to Union Station in downtown Chicago. The trains must cross the BRC, CSX, and UP freight movements at Belt Junction and face additional rail conflicts and delays as they travel north along the CWI line.

Alternates in this area would re-route Metra SWS trains to LaSalle Street Station in downtown Chicago via the RID Line, which has very limited freight traffic from Class I railroads. This would address rail line at-grade conflicts at Belt Junction and along the CWI line, and rail transit passenger service reliability issues for both the Metra SWS Line and the Amtrak Cardinal/Hoosier State route.

Several potential corridors were considered for the proposed Metra SWS connection to the RID Line: tunnel under Hamilton Park, overhead structure through Hamilton Park, overhead structure north of Hamilton Park, and overhead structure south of Hamilton Park. The tunnel alternate was dropped from further consideration due to the combination of impacts and costs. The overhead structure through Hamilton Park was dropped from further consideration due to its protection under Section 4(f) of the 1966 Department of Transportation Act, which prohibits the use of public park lands or historic sites for transportation projects unless it can be shown that there are no prudent and feasible alternatives, or it is determined that the impacts are minimal. The overhead structure south of Hamilton Park was chosen because it would result in the shortest possible length of new overhead rail structure, thus minimizing the noise, visual, property, and cost impacts compared to any of the other “Overhead Structure” alternates.



Three detailed alignments were evaluated for the overhead structure south of Hamilton Park:

- ◆ *Alternate RI-1* – Metra flyover bridge on 40 MPH reverse curve, connecting to the RID Line at 74<sup>th</sup> Street;
- ◆ *Alternate RI-2* – Metra flyover bridge on 36 MPH curve, connecting to the RID Line at 74<sup>th</sup> Street; and
- ◆ *Alternate RI-3* – Metra flyover bridge on 40 MPH curve, which would connect to the RID Line north of 74<sup>th</sup> Street, and require the acquisition of 0.03 acres of Hamilton Park.

**Alternate RI-1** was advanced to the Build Alternative over Alternate RI-2 and Alternate RI-3 based on the ability to meet Metra design criteria (i.e., 40 MPH curve), the lack of property impacts to Hamilton Park, strong community support, and fewer residential dwelling units remaining directly adjacent to the property to be acquired.

### **Metra along Columbus Avenue**

Metra currently operates on a single track for 2.0 miles between the Ashburn Interlocking (north of 83<sup>rd</sup> Street) to approximately Western Avenue, generally parallel to Columbus Avenue. This sometimes requires trains traveling one direction to wait on a train traveling the opposite direction to clear the area before continuing, thus creating delays.

Two alternates were evaluated to add a second track to address rail transit passenger service reliability issues for the Metra SWS Line and reconfigure the NS Landers Yard to provide room for the second Metra track.

- ◆ *Alternate CA-1* would add a second mainline track on the northwest side of the existing Metra track, moving Metra trains as close as 13 feet from the existing roadway edge-of-pavement along Columbus Avenue.
- ◆ *Alternate CA-2* would add a second mainline track southeast of the existing Metra track, through the existing NS Landers Yard.

**Alternate CA-2** was advanced to the Build Alternative for further evaluation due principally to the safety and maintenance concerns associated with moving the track closer to Columbus Avenue in Alternate CA-1.

### **Belt Junction**

The number of tracks in the 75<sup>th</sup> Street corridor is currently reduced from five to two at Belt Junction, with most trains required to cross from the south side of the corridor to the north side of the corridor or vice versa. This generally means that only one train can pass through the corridor at a time. The freight conflicts at both Belt Junction and at 80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction would be eliminated by track realignment included in Alternate 80-2. The conflicts between Metra SWS trains and freight traffic at Belt Junction would be eliminated by elevating the two Metra tracks over the BRC and NS tracks as part of the connection to the Metra RID Line. Thus, the rail line at-grade conflicts and

passenger service reliability issues at Belt Junction would be entirely addressed by alternates in other improvement areas.

### Local Mobility

The study area includes 48 locations where railroad bridges cross over roadways or pedestrian passages. Residents of the community consistently identified several safety issues with viaducts that negatively impact local mobility within the study area. These issues include low visibility due to lighting conditions, poor drainage, crumbling concrete, and poor pavement conditions on roadways and sidewalks. A total of 37 viaduct locations were surveyed to document these deficiencies.

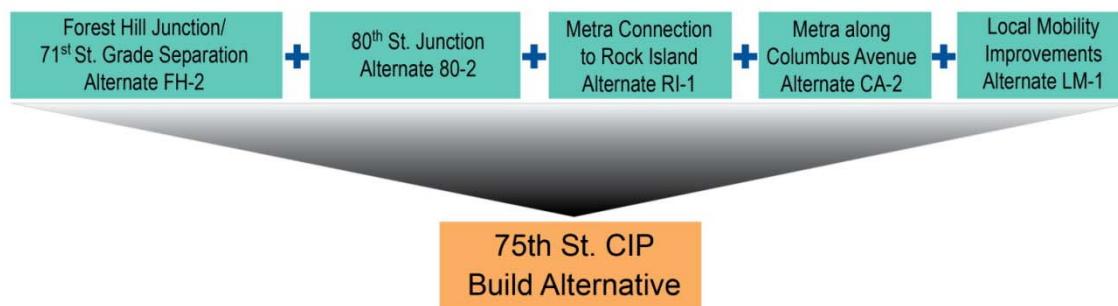
Two alternates were developed to address the deficiencies at the viaducts that are eligible for inclusion in the project.

- ◆ *Alternate LM-1* would correct the identified local mobility deficiencies at 36 surveyed viaducts within the study area. Union Avenue, the remaining surveyed viaduct, would be permanently closed.
- ◆ *Alternate LM-2* would be less-comprehensive, correcting the identified local mobility deficiencies only at those viaducts which would require substantial structural work associated with the track improvements making up the Build Alternative. Substantial structural work is anticipated at 11 of the 37 viaduct locations.

The local community identified impediments to local mobility caused by the conditions at the viaducts as a primary issue to address in the project. Correcting the deficiencies at the viaducts would provide direct positive benefits to the communities in which the railroads operate. Based on these considerations, **Alternate LM-1** was recommended to advance to the Build Alternative for further evaluation.

### Development of the Build Alternative

One alternate from each improvement area was advanced for more detailed evaluation. Chapter 2 of the FEIS describes the Alternates considered in detail, as well as the decision-making process used to choose the alternate for each improvement area. These alternates were combined into a single Build Alternative as shown in Figure ROD-33.



**Figure ROD-3: Composition of the Build Alternative**



## 4. Primary Reasons for Choosing the Selected Alternative

The Build Alternative would meet all major elements of the project's Purpose and Need statement. It would:

- ◆ Eliminate rail line at-grade conflicts at Forest Hill Junction, Belt Junction, and 80th Street Junction;
- ◆ Reduce rail conflicts along the CWI line;
- ◆ Eliminate highway-rail crossing problems at 71<sup>st</sup> Street;
- ◆ Reduce local mobility problems at 36 viaducts in the project area; and
- ◆ Improve rail transit passenger service reliability by providing a second Metra track along Columbus Avenue and by eliminating the rail line at-grade conflicts at existing junctions within the study area.

The No-Build Alternative would not provide any improved rail or roadway facilities and would therefore not address any elements of the project Purpose and Need statement. Existing safety and transportation efficiency problems related to these project needs would only worsen over time as rail transportation demand through the corridor continues to grow. Rail traffic projections indicate that the 75<sup>th</sup> Street corridor only has capacity to allow rail freight traffic to increase up to the year 2024, at which point no additional growth in train traffic could be accommodated.

By eliminating rail conflict points and providing additional through tracks, the Build Alternative would allow considerably more rail freight traffic through the project corridor than would be possible with the No-Build Alternative.

Table ROD-1 shows projected freight volumes in the Build and No-Build Alternatives for the design year of 2029. The Build Alternative would allow the corridor to accommodate 21 percent more freight trains and 23 percent more freight cars per day through the study area than the No-Build Alternative. As shown in Table ROD-2 projected freight and passenger rail travel times through the corridor would also decrease with implementation of the Build Alternative.

**Table ROD-1: Rail Freight Traffic through the Study Area**

Route	Existing 2009	No-Build Alternative 2029	No-Build Increase Over Existing	Build Alternative 2029	Build Alternative Increase Over No-Build
Average Daily Freight Train Trips Through the Study Area, All Lines	84	124	48%	150	21%
Annual Freight Cars Through the Study Area, All Lines	1,918,440	3,412,257	78%	4,184,456	23%

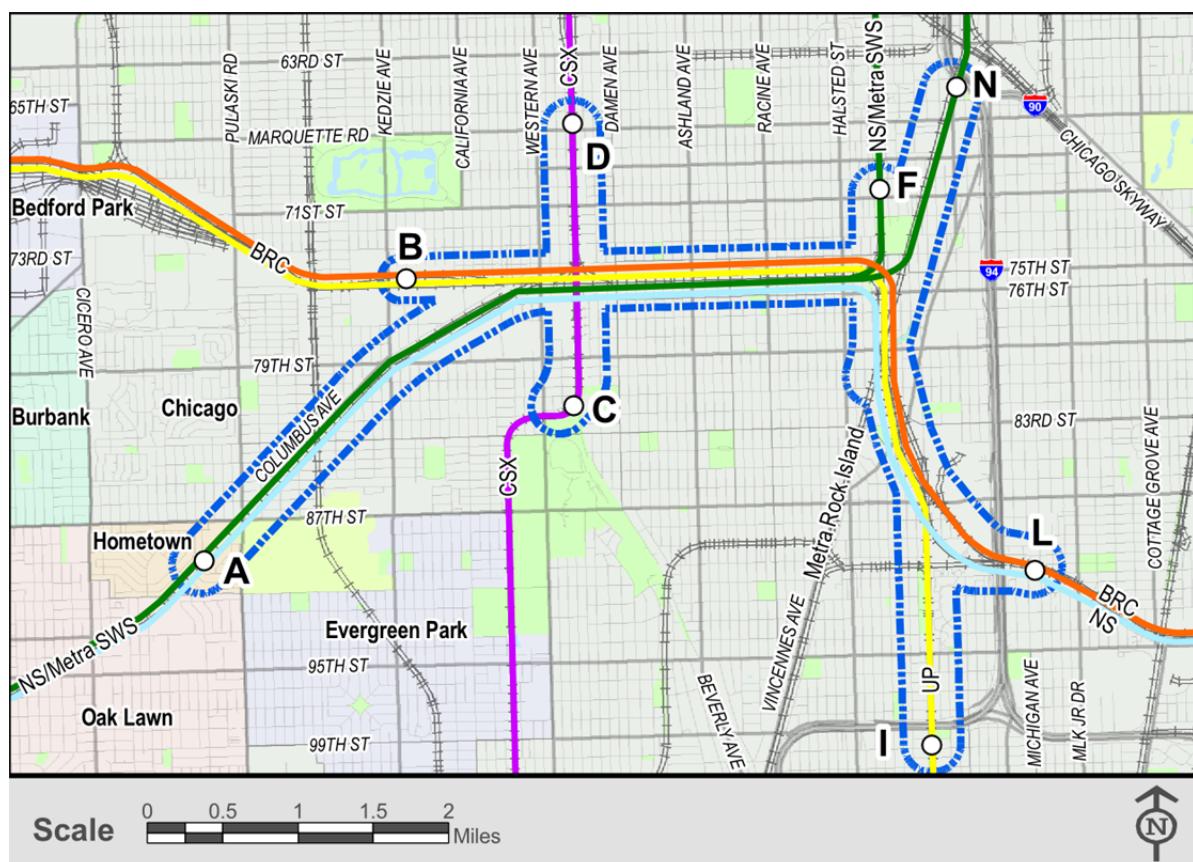
Source: CTCO Train Model Output, May 27, 2011.

**Table ROD-2: Average Travel Time through the Study Area**

Route	Map Nodes <sup>a</sup>	Existing 2009 (min:sec)	No-Build 2029 (min:sec)	Build 2029 (min:sec)	% Improvement Over No-Build
<b>Freight</b>					
Rockwell Yard to 95 <sup>th</sup> St.	B to I	25:58	30:33	19:21	37%
Rockwell Yard to Dan Ryan	B to L	44:15	39:14	22:06	44%
Columbus Ave. to Dan Ryan	A to L	43:13	57:42	32:33	44%
79 <sup>th</sup> St. to Marquette Rd. through Forest Hill Jct.	C to D	33:32	45:38	08:24	82%
<b>Passenger (Metra SWS)</b>					
Columbus Ave to N. of 69 <sup>th</sup> St.	A to F/N	12:24	12:36	10:16	18%

<sup>a</sup>Map Nodes for this route are shown on Figure ROD-4.

Source: CTCO Train Model Output, May 27, 2011.

**Figure ROD-4: Routes for Typical Rail Travel Time Analysis**



The Build Alternative would eliminate one of the major highway-rail grade crossings in the study area at the 71<sup>st</sup> Street crossing of the CSX tracks. The No-Build Alternative would make no change at the 71<sup>st</sup> Street grade crossing, and vehicle delay would increase over time from today's level due to both an increasing number of trains passing through the crossing and increasing vehicular traffic on 71<sup>st</sup> Street. The risk of further crashes at this crossing would also grow as the traffic through the crossing grows. The No-Build Alternative would not meet the purpose and need of the project.

The Build Alternative fully meets all of the elements of the project's Purpose and Need statement by improving rail system performance, eliminating the highway-rail grade crossing at 71<sup>st</sup> Street, and improving local mobility at viaducts in the study area. The No-Build Alternative fails to address any of these issues. In addition, the Build Alternative has been developed and validated through an extensive stakeholder involvement program including meetings with the general public, Community Advisory Groups (CAGs), and stakeholders such as the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Department of Transportation. These agencies concurred with the recommendations in the Build Alternative, and the CAGs expressed no objections. The Build Alternative was recommended as the Preferred Alternative in the DEIS and is referred to as the Selected Alternative in the ROD.

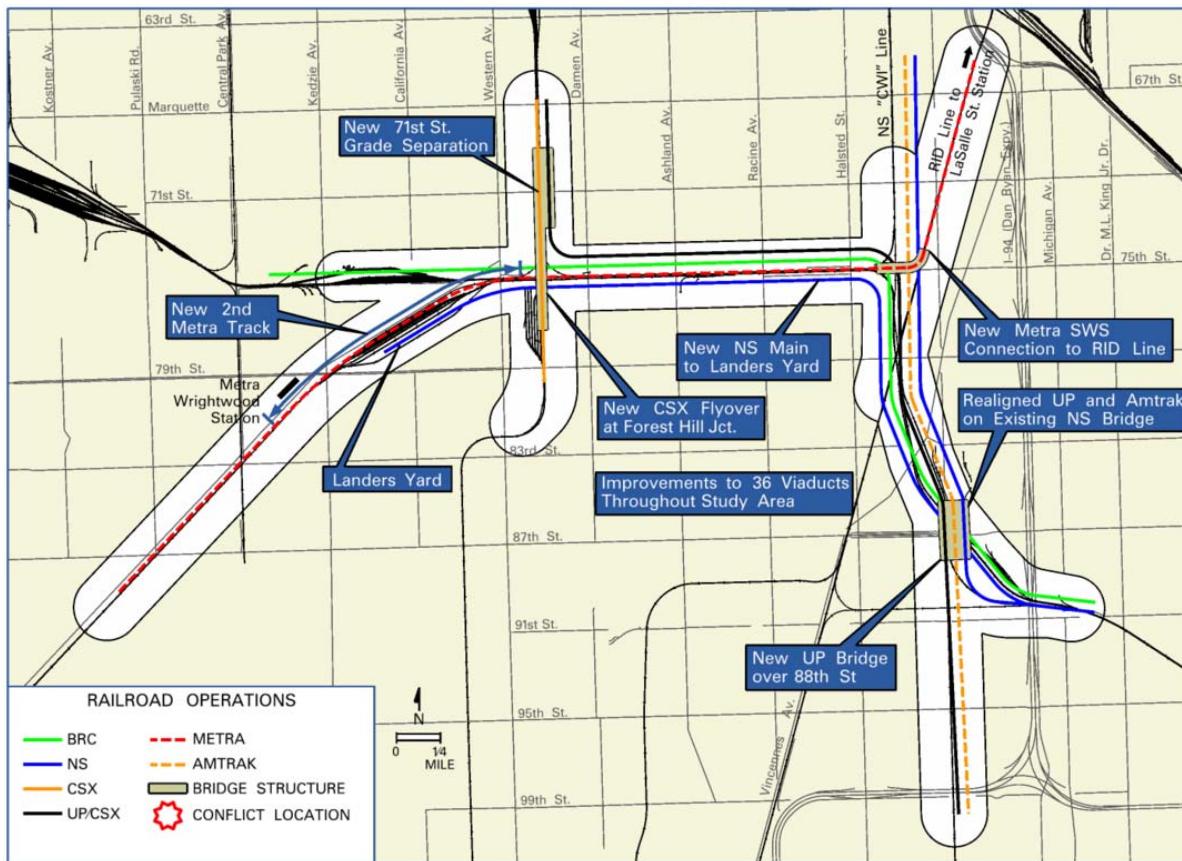
### Description of the Selected Alternative

The principal features of the Selected Alternative are shown in Figure ROD-5 and summarized in the following paragraphs.

At Forest Hill Junction, the Selected Alternative will provide a new double-track elevated structure to carry the CSX mainline track over the existing at-grade rail crossing and over the existing highway-rail grade crossing at 71st Street, thus eliminating all conflicts associated with these crossings. No new right-of-way will be acquired for these improvements, which will all be constructed on current railroad or City of Chicago property.

At 80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction, the Selected Alternative will realign existing tracks and provide additional new tracks, including a new NS mainline track from the southeast portion of the study area to Landers Yard, to eliminate rail conflicts at both 80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction and Belt Junction. Approximately 9.5 acres of vacant industrial land bounded by the existing NS tracks, BRC tracks, 81<sup>st</sup> Street, and Vincennes Avenue will be acquired to construct two new UP tracks. Additionally, a 3.3-acre portion of a parcel of vacant land south of Vincennes Avenue will need to be acquired to accommodate additional tracks and service roads.

The Selected Alternative will provide a new double-track flyover connection for the Metra SWS from the existing tracks in the 75<sup>th</sup> Street corridor to the existing RID Line tracks. The new connection will be located entirely on structure through the residential neighborhood immediately south of Hamilton Park. Twenty parcels totaling approximately 2.3 acres and including 23 dwelling units and one institutional facility will be acquired in this area.



**Figure ROD-5: 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP Selected Alternative Schematic**

Union Avenue will be closed at the 75<sup>th</sup> Street rail embankment and cul-de-sacs will be constructed on either side. Four dwelling units on three parcels totaling 0.3 acres will be acquired on Union Avenue and Emerald Avenue in the vicinity of this closure.

Along Columbus Avenue, the Selected Alternative will provide a new second through track for Metra along the west side of Landers Yard and through the Wrightwood Station. Tracks in Landers Yard will need to be relocated to provide room for the new Metra track. No new right-of-way will be required.

The Selected Alternative will improve 36 viaducts within the study area. Improvements will include roadway resurfacing at 8 locations and roadway reconstruction at 8 locations; reconstruction of sidewalks at 13 locations and addition of 90 accessible sidewalk ramps; replacement of complete lighting systems at all 36 locations; reconstruction of drainage systems at 19 locations; and waterproofing of 13 bridge decks, reconstruction of 7 bridge abutments, and reconstruction of underdrains at 4 bridge locations. No new right-of-way will be required for the viaduct improvements.

Construction of the project will likely be conducted in several phases to better accommodate day to day rail operations through the corridor and to match the likely availability of funding. With a



continuous, adequate stream of funding for the project, construction could begin in 2017 and be completed by the close of 2021. Any shortfalls or delays in funding could result in breaks between the separate phases of construction; which could extend over a period of years in the worst case, thus extending the date for overall project completion further into the future. At the present time, there is no funding committed for right-of-way acquisition or construction of this project. Based on the results of a formal FHWA Cost Estimate Review session held the week of June 23, 2014, the total year of expenditure (YOE) cost for the project may range from approximately \$952 to \$984 million dollars.

## 5. Measures to Minimize Harm

The study team has worked to avoid, minimize, and mitigate the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project. This process included working with the stakeholders and the public, as described below in Section 8. Table ROD-3 summarizes the impacts of the Selected Alternative on each environmental resource, as well as the proposed mitigation measures and the project commitments.

The main adverse impacts of the project include noise, vibration, and visual resources. All impacts would have a disproportionate affect on low income and minority communities. Noise impacts will be mitigated through the construction of noise barriers in several locations. Vibration impacts will be minimized through the use of regular maintenance procedures. Visual impacts will be mitigated by landscaping parcels of land adjacent to the two new rail flyover structures. Additional mitigation and enhancement measures are also proposed for further evaluation during Phase II final design as described in Table ROD-3 under Social/Environmental Characteristics.

**Table ROD-3: Summary of Environmental Consequences, Commitments and Mitigation**

Environmental Resource / Commitment Category	Impacts	Commitments and Mitigation
Social/Economic Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 42 parcels to be fully or partially acquired, or transferred from the City of Chicago; 27 dwelling units to be displaced (26 occupied and 1 vacant); 1 community facility to be displaced</li> <li>• Disproportionate adverse noise, vibration, and visual impact on Title VI and Environmental Justice populations as defined by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and EO 12898 will remain even after mitigation.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Land Acquisition</i> – IDOT, CDOT, and/or the lead participating railroad will complete the acquisition of private property in accordance with the federal Uniform Act<sup>2</sup> and the IDOT Land Acquisition Manual.<sup>3</sup> See Section 3.2.6.3 of the FEIS for additional details.</p> <p><i>Environmental Justice</i> -- Measures considered under the IDOT/CREATE Program policies which were found to be effective, have been incorporated into the project, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four feasible and reasonable noise barriers</li> <li>• Vibration minimization involving routine maintenance procedures</li> <li>• Visual impact screening</li> <li>• Viaduct improvements</li> </ul> <p>Under the flexibility provided by the FHWA's Environmental Justice Order 6640.23A, IDOT, CDOT, FHWA, and/or the participating railroads are committed to providing the following additional practicable mitigation and enhancement measures that would not normally be considered under the current IDOT and CREATE Program policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One feasible and practicable noise barrier</li> <li>• Mortgage assistance for eligible property owners with negative home equity</li> </ul> <p>IDOT, CDOT, FHWA, and/or the participating railroads also commit to further exploring the following additional measures during Phase II final design:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job training programs (FHWA excluded)</li> <li>• A quiet zone on the UP Villa Grove Subdivision</li> <li>• Bus stop improvements</li> <li>• Sidewalk improvements</li> <li>• Bicycle facility improvements</li> <li>• Remnant and vacant parcel improvements</li> <li>• Streetscape improvements</li> </ul> <p>See Section 3.2.7 of the FEIS for additional details.</p>
Transportation	No Adverse Impacts	See <i>Traffic</i> commitment below in the Construction row.
Agriculture	No Adverse Impacts	None



Environmental Resource / Commitment Category	Impacts	Commitments and Mitigation
Cultural Resources	Although the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency has determined the Damen Avenue bridge to not be eligible for listing on the National Register, they recognized that the structure has aesthetic merit.	IDOT, CDOT, and/or the lead participating railroad will continue coordination with the IHPA during Phase II final design to ensure the Damen Avenue viaduct Art-Deco façade and railing that currently exists will be replaced in-kind and replicated to the extent feasible. See Section 3.5.2.2 of the FEIS for additional details.
Air Quality	No Adverse Impacts	See <i>Air Quality</i> commitment below in the Construction row.
Noise and Vibration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1,092 residences and 3 institutions will have moderate impacts; 267 residences will have severe impacts; and 7 institutional facilities will have interior impacts</li><li>• 755 properties will experience ground-borne vibration impacts; and 77 properties will experience ground-borne noise impacts</li></ul>	<p><i>Noise</i> - Based on the preliminary design, IDOT and/or the lead participating railroad is likely to implement four noise barriers, benefiting 189 residences and one park:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Barrier G (benefiting NEA R10)</li><li>• Barrier H (benefiting NEA R11)</li><li>• Barrier M (benefiting NEA R14/15)</li><li>• Barrier N (benefiting NEA R17)</li></ul> <p>A fifth barrier, Barrier O (benefiting 57 residents in NEA R18), is likely to be implemented to mitigate impacts to low-income and minority populations, as described above in Social/Economic Characteristics. A final decision on the implementation of the noise barriers will be made upon completion of the 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP's final design and corresponding public involvement process. See Section 3.7.1.6 and Section 3.2.7 of the FEIS for additional details.</p> <p><i>Vibration</i> - The following maintenance procedures will be accomplished by the rail industry to mitigate vibration impacts through minimizing vibration sources: regularly scheduled rail grinding, wheel-truing programs, vehicle reconditioning programs, and the use of wheel-flat detectors. See Section 3.7.2.5 of the FEIS for additional details.</p> <p>The noise and vibration analyses for this project may need to be reassessed if: a) the project is revised in a manner in which impacts of the project may change due to the project revisions (e.g., a new track alignment is moved closer to a receptor), or b) the CREATE Program's train model is updated due to projects being removed or added to the CREATE Program.</p> <p>Also see <i>Noise and Vibration</i> commitment below in the Construction row.</p>

Environmental Resource / Commitment Category	Impacts	Commitments and Mitigation
Energy	No Adverse Impacts	None
Natural Resources	43 neighborhood trees will be removed	IDOT, CDOT, and/or the lead participating railroad will replace public street trees, landscape trees, and all other trees over six-inch diameter not located on railroad property on a one-for-one basis. The locations of all tree replacements will be coordinated with the City of Chicago Bureau of Forestry during Phase II design.
Wetlands and Water Resources	No Adverse Impacts	None
Floodplains	No Adverse Impacts	None
Special Waste	52 sites with a Moderate or High Risk Finding have the potential to be affected	IDOT, CDOT, and/or the lead participating railroad will conduct Preliminary Site Investigations at the 52 sites prior to the completion of Phase II final design and prior to excavation or disturbance of soils for construction. Required remediation, if needed, will also be completed by the responsible agency.
Special Lands: Section 4(f), Section 6(f), and OSLAD Lands	Noise levels will increase at Leland Giants Park, Fernwood Parkway and Smith Playlot.	As discussed above in <i>Noise and Vibration</i> , IDOT recommends construction a noise barrier (Barrier G) that will benefit Leland Giants Park. A final decision on the implementation of Barrier G will be made upon completion of the 75 <sup>th</sup> Street CIP's final design and corresponding public involvement process.
Visual Resources	New rail infrastructure will alter views in parts of the study area, including a portion of Hamilton Park and homes adjacent to new flyover structures.	IDOT, CDOT and/or the lead participating railroad will install landscaping on the remnant portions of those parcels acquired for construction of the proposed rail flyover south of Hamilton Park to visually screen the view of the proposed structure.  IDOT, CDOT, and /or the lead participating railroad will also use landscaping along the east side of the CSX railroad tracks to minimize visual impacts of the proposed rail flyover at Forest Hill Junction. Trees will be planted along the eastern side of the CSX right-of-way and/or on adjacent City of Chicago property parallel to the new flyover structure.  Many design details (e.g., color, texture, public art) could still be changed or added in the final engineering phase of the project. Because the 75 <sup>th</sup> Street CIP is designated as a CSS project, IDOT will continue to seek community input at meetings through the Phase II design process. Some type of aesthetic treatment for the walls could potentially be used to minimize the visual impacts in some locations. The public will have the opportunity to provide input about various design details during the Phase II final design of the project. Potentially, funding could be designated for new or replacement murals, or other public art, as a mitigating action.



Environmental Resource / Commitment Category	Impacts	Commitments and Mitigation
Permits/ Certifications	The project will disturb at least one acre of land	<p>IDOT, CDOT, and/or the lead participating railroad will obtain a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for stormwater discharges, and will prepare the required Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) prior to construction. The permit will require that all of the control measures identified in the SWPPP be regularly inspected and maintained and repaired or replaced as needed to function properly. Provisions will be made in the SWPPP to contain the waste and washout from concrete trucks at the construction sites. These facilities will be designed to prevent such discharges from reaching the normal stormwater drainage systems.</p> <p>Additionally, following Phase II final design, IDOT and/or the lead participating railroad will also be required to obtain a number of permits from the City of Chicago. These could include tree removal permits, pavement opening permits, public way use permits, temporary street or lane closure permits, sewer permits, and similar permits depending on the specific contractor activities.</p>
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Potential to affect traffic on project area roadways.</li><li>• Demolition and construction activities can result in short-term increases in fugitive dust and equipment-related particulate emissions in and around the project area.</li><li>• Temporary noise and vibration increase due to trucks and machinery used for construction and temporary tracks.</li></ul>	<p><i>Traffic</i> – IDOT, CDOT, and/or the lead participating railroad will develop a Traffic Management Plan in coordination with the relevant public agencies and local officials, which will be required for each major construction contract.</p> <p><i>Air Quality</i> – IDOT, CDOT, and/or the lead participating railroad will submit a Dust Control Plan for approval prior to beginning construction; adhere to all federal, state and local laws pertaining to dust control; maintain the construction site to minimize dust conditions that will adversely affect construction or railroad operations, including equipment operation and worker safety; maintain the construction site to minimize spreading of dust to adjacent land and property owners including homes and businesses; ensure that the operating safety of adjacent highways and roadways is not adversely affected by spreading of dust from the construction site.</p> <p><i>Noise and Vibration</i> – IDOT, CDOT, and/or the lead participating railroad will assure compliance with applicable Cook County, City of Chicago, and City of Hometown regulations. To reduce noise and vibration impacts during the period of construction, the use of pile-driving, if determined to be necessary, will adhere to all applicable City of Chicago ordinances for noise and vibration. IDOT, CDOT, and/or the lead participating railroad will develop contract documents that will require the contractor to coordinate with local schools to schedule pile driving activities so as to not interfere with State of Illinois mandated testing periods.</p>

Environmental Resource / Commitment Category	Impacts	Commitments and Mitigation
Construction (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporary construction activity will occur in Hamilton and Leland Giants Parks.</li> <li>• Potential to disturb or attract nuisance species</li> </ul>	<p><i>Parks</i> – Permits will be obtained from the Chicago Park District to allow for construction of the new retaining walls. IDOT, CDOT, and/or the lead participating railroad will develop and implement landscaping plans to restore the areas of the parks affected by construction in coordination with the Chicago Park District. At Hamilton Park, the landscape plan will also be coordinated with and approved by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, as well as to coordinate the aesthetic treatment of the exposed face of the new retaining wall at Hamilton Park.</p> <p><i>Nuisance species</i> - Contractors will control nuisance species, such as rodents, to protect the adjoining residential areas per City of Chicago municipal ordinance 13-32-325.</p>
Indirect and Cumulative Effects	<p>Potential indirect effects associated with the 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP are reduced neighborhood desirability and reduced property values resulting from noise, vibration, and visual impacts.</p> <p>Increases in freight volumes will result in roadway congestion at highway-rail grade crossings within and outside the project study area in both the Build and No-Build scenarios.</p>	<p>None</p>
Consultation with Local Stakeholders	No Adverse Impacts	IDOT and the CREATE Partners will work with local stakeholders during Phase II final design to provide them with opportunities for input on various design features and other aspects of the work affecting the neighborhoods.
Final Bridge Plans	No Adverse Impacts	During Phase II final design, the individual railroads or their consultants/contractors will coordinate the development of all bridge plans with the IDOT Bridge Office to allow for all required reviews and will obtain the required permits.

In addition to the environmental mitigation commitments summarized in Table ROD-3, all construction will comply with applicable local ordinances, as well as federal and state laws. Environmental issues addressed by such ordinances and laws include, but are not limited to, practices such as the control of dust at construction sites and stormwater management.



## 6. Monitoring and Enforcement

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are responsible for monitoring and enforcement of mitigation measures. IDOT, as well as the participating railroads and the contractors, are responsible for compliance assurance of all related commitments and regulatory permit conditions made or obtained for the 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project.

## 7. Other Federal Actions Required for the Proposed Action

The project is not anticipated to affect any waters of the United States and will therefore not require a Section 404 permit under the Clean Water Act, nor will a Section 401 Water Quality Certification be required. The project will result in the disturbance of one or more acres of total land area, and therefore be subject to the requirement for a Section 402 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for stormwater discharges from the construction sites. Permit coverage for the project will be obtained either under the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) or under an individual NPDES permit. No other federal permits are anticipated.

Funding for the project is anticipated to come from a combination of sources, including federal and state transportation funds and contributions from the involved railroads. At present, no funding has been committed for either right-of-way acquisition or construction of the project. Funding commitments will be required before those project development activities can commence.

## 8. Public Involvement

An extensive, targeted public involvement program was implemented by IDOT for the CREATE 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP, as described in detail in Chapter 4 of the FEIS. The goal of the program was to ensure that all interested stakeholders were provided meaningful opportunities to be involved in the project. The 75<sup>th</sup> Street CIP used *Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS)* design principles to help develop transportation solutions that reflect the values and concerns of the neighborhoods and communities surrounding the project. Based on the analysis presented in this document and the stakeholder input provided throughout the study process, the Build Alternative has been recommended as the Selected Alternative.

A Notice of Availability for the DEIS was published in the Federal Register on March 28, 2014, and made available for public review on several websites, at seven area libraries, and at the Illinois Department of Transportation's Chicago office. A formal public hearing to solicit public and agency feedback was held on April 22, 2014, with the public comment period extending from March 28 to May 22, 2014.

A *Public Comment Period and Public Hearing Summary Report* was prepared and is presented in Appendix J of the FEIS. This appendix also contains the public and agency comments and responses to their comments. All comments received were considered to determine whether a change or

additional information was required in the FEIS, whether the commenter needed additional information to understand the project, or whether the comment was concerned about an existing railroad issue. None of the comments required a change to the Selected Alternative or substantial changes to the FEIS.

## 9. Conclusion

The environmental record for this decision includes the following documents:

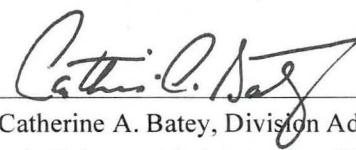
- ◆ The 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (March, 2014)
- ◆ The 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (October, 2014)
- ◆ All technical reports and supporting documentation incorporated by reference into the DEIS and FEIS.

These documents, incorporated here by reference, constitute the statements required by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and Title 23 of the United States Code on the environmental impacts of the project; the adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided should the project be implemented; alternatives to the proposed project; and, irreversible and irretrievable impacts on the environment that may be involved with the project, should it be implemented.

Having carefully considered the environmental record noted above, the mitigation measures as required herein, the public and agency comments on this record, and the written responses to these comments, FHWA has determined that the Selected Alternative is also the environmentally preferred alternative. The Selected Alternative represents the best option for the 75<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Improvement Project. FHWA finds that all practicable measures to minimize environmental harm have been incorporated into the design of the Selected Alternative. FHWA will ensure that the commitments outlined herein will be implemented as part of Phase II (final) design, Phase III (construction), and post construction monitoring. FHWA also determines that this decision is in the best overall public interest.

9/19/2014

Date of Approval



Ms. Catherine A. Batey, Division Administrator,  
Federal Highway Administration, Illinois Division



## Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> Association of American Railroads, Chicago Department of Transportation, Chicago Transportation Coordination Office, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Railroad Administration, Federal Transit Authority, and Illinois Department of Transportation. *Final Feasibility Plan Amendment 1 (Modified)*. Publication. January, 2011. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended, CFR 49, Part 24.

<sup>3</sup> Illinois Department of Transportation, Land Acquisition Policy Procedure Manual and Revisions, November, 2011; <http://www.dot.state.il.us/landacq/lappm.html>.