



January 12, 2017

VIA EMAIL

Robert Kiely, City Manager, City of Lake Forest
Kent Street, Village Manager, Village of Deerfield
Maria Lasday, Village Manager, Village of Bannockburn
Richard Nahrstadt, Village Manager, Village of Northbrook
Don Owen, Acting Village Manager, Village of Glenview

Re: Benefits of Proposed Hiawatha Service Improvements to Metra and Communities

Thank you for meeting with us and for the opportunity to discuss the infrastructure investments proposed along the Hiawatha Milwaukee-Chicago Corridor. As we have discussed, there are significant benefits for Metra customers and the communities we serve.

Due to the system nature of railroad service, a congestion point or delays in service impacts the entire route, in this case, all communities between Chicago and Fox Lake. Thus capacity improvements in one place can improve performance on the entire line and the service to the people of all of those communities.

As you may know, Metra owns, operates and maintains the railroad track between Rondout and Chicago, while Canadian Pacific owns, operates and maintains the track between Rondout and Milwaukee. Amtrak operates the Hiawatha service as a contractor for WisDOT and IDOT. Both state transportation agencies seek to add three more roundtrip trains daily. The major issue is the constraints of a two-track railroad and the number of trains thereon.

In order to add these six passenger trains, a series of 10 infrastructure projects have been proposed to improve operating efficiency for all users along the line. Metra supports all but one of them and is seeking one change. Specifically, Metra does not support the Deerfield "holding track" and will only support extending the Rondout third-main track south of Illinois Route 60 to the proposed Lake Forest universal crossover. These decisions are in the interest of operating efficiency and have positive impacts on the communities, as well as the railroads.

If the number of trains is increased beyond these six passenger trains, additional capacity enhancements will be required. That is why Metra has now stated publically that three-main

tracks are needed between Chicago and Rondout to meet the desires for enhanced future service, including express train service.

We understand that several communities along the corridor have expressed concern about holding trains and wish to reiterate that neither Metra, Amtrak or Canadian Pacific have any intention of using the additional proposed capacity to routinely store or hold freight or passenger trains under normal operating conditions. Railroads are in the business of operating trains, not holding trains. Our goal has been and will continue to be to keep all trains moving throughout Rondout and the corridor as a whole.

There are several key reasons why Metra supports this project:

- 1. The infrastructure investments will improve reliability and on-time performance of Metra's Milwaukee District North (MD-N) Line commuter service from Chicago to Fox Lake.** The MD-N's current configuration makes it the most difficult line for Metra to operate, with 95 freight and passenger trains each weekday, 17 miles of single track and three at-grade crossings with other rail lines. The single track segments of this line severely limit our current scheduling options on this line and often impede our ability to recover and resume normal operations when trains are delayed by maintenance activities, operational delays, severe weather or an unforeseen incident. With nearly 12,000 weekday customers, the MD-N Line had a 94.6 percent on-time performance rate in 2016, below our agency's goal of 95 percent. Adding capacity through additional track and enhancing efficiency with crossovers will significantly improve reliability and on-time performance along the line.
- 2. The infrastructure investments are an important first step in Metra's long-term vision to create a three-track corridor on the MD-N Line between Chicago and Rondout.** While the draft Environmental Assessment refers to the proposed added capacity as "holding track", there are third-main tracks to add capacity to move trains, not hold trains. Metra's goal for these investments is to ultimately increase and improve commuter train service along the corridor if and when funding permits. With the population of Lake County alone expected to grow by more than 210,000 people or 31 percent between 2010 and 2040, we expect demand for commuter rail service along this corridor to grow significantly. Our goal is to be in the position to have a three-main track railroad from Chicago to Rondout and additional double track to Fox Lake that can provide improved commuter rail service to meet growing demand.
- 3. The infrastructure investments and the additional capacity they provide is a step forward in terms of implementing reverse-commute service along the MD-N.** At present time, there is no outbound train north of Lake Forest before 8:00am. Conversely, in the afternoon, there is a three-hour gap in inbound (southbound) service between 4:45 and 7:40p.m. at Lake Forest for example. Because of the lack of capacity, we are only in a position to offer one-way service on the Fox Lake Branch during both morning and evening peak travel periods. Ultimately, this impacts our ability to attract and serve both

employees and employers in these communities who would benefit from access to a broader range of commuting options.

4. **The infrastructure investments will also benefit and improve mobility in the surrounding local communities.** The corridor as it exists today carries 95 total trains each weekday and has reached its operational capacity. As a result, vehicular traffic is often at a standstill at rail crossings along this line, waiting for freight trains to pass. The improved crossovers and other proposed investments will reduce this gridlock by helping to keep freight traffic moving. For example, in Northbrook, the proposed new track would extend from Metra's Tower A20 to just short of West Lake Avenue. This would provide enough track room for a freight train – even a lengthy one – to clear both Metra's mainline tracks, as well as Techny Road. This would alleviate the current problem of freight traffic blocking Techny, as well as the Northbrook depot and Shermer Road in downtown Northbrook. The proposed design for the Techny Road area provides for the simultaneous movement of two trains, whereas the present track configuration provides for only a single train movement. Similar traffic movement improvements are expected at additional locations throughout the service area.
5. **The infrastructure investments are expected to cost approximately \$150 million and would qualify for federal funds that Metra is not currently eligible to receive.** Like other transit agencies, Metra has huge funding needs unmet by our existing sources. By the RTA's estimate, we need \$11.7 billion over a 10-year period to achieve and maintain a state of good repair on our system, and, at best, we can expect about a fifth of that amount from traditional federal and state sources. Metra would be extremely pleased to benefit from the federal funding that is available for this project. Metra and its customers and communities will benefit, in a region that is becoming more economically co-dependent, from this bi-state collaboration.
6. **The infrastructure investments proposed as part of this project are in addition to and supplement Metra's own recent and planned investments in the Milwaukee North Line.** Last year, Metra built a new 1,500-foot siding at Libertyville. We are currently installing a new signal system along the line and plan to install new powered switches at Libertyville, Grayslake and Fox Lake as part of our positive train control (PTC) safety system implementation. In all, these investments are expected to cost Metra about \$17 million and are being funded by Metra's own resources.
7. **Increase in the number of freight trains.** Concern has been expressed that providing third-main tracks will result in more freight trains. This effectively is "a build it and they will come" thesis. It is well documented that the fluctuations in freight traffic are driven by fluctuations in economic activity, not by the given capacity of a given rail line.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our perspective on the proposed infrastructure investments to the Hiawatha Milwaukee-Chicago Corridor. Metra remains committed to

working with WisDOT, IDOT, our fellow railroad stakeholders and local communities throughout the corridor to reach consensus on how to move this project forward.

We look forward to our continued collaboration and to the project's implementation.

Sincerely,



Don Orseno
Executive Director/CEO

cc: U.S. Senator Dick Durbin
U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth
U.S. Congressman Brad Schneider
U.S. Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky
Randall S. Blankenhorn, Secretary, IDOT
David M. Simon, Chief, Railroads and Harbors Section, WisDOT
Kirk Dillard, Chairman, RTA
Charles Quandel, CEO, Quandel Consultants, LLC