

Testimony to the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit

February 27, 2014

Mayor Gerald R. Bennett
City of Palos Hills, IL
Chairman, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)

Thank you, Chairman Shuster, for this opportunity to testify. I would like to commend you, Congressman Lipinski, and the committee for your efforts in support of transportation in general and freight in particular.

My agency, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), elevated freight as a high priority within the region's award-winning GO TO 2040 comprehensive plan. Our region is an unparalleled hub not only for domestic but also for international freight.

- *Over a billion tons of freight worth more than \$3 trillion move through the Chicago region each year.*
- *A quarter of all U.S. freight and nearly half of all U.S. intermodal freight originates, terminates, or passes through metropolitan Chicago.*
- *Nearly half of freight in the region is "through traffic," an indication of our central role in the national freight system.*

CREATE Program

To address freight congestion, the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) program was established in 2003. This is a public-private partnership of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Illinois Department of Transportation, the Chicago Department of Transportation, Amtrak, the region's Metra transit system, and private railroads. CREATE is dedicated to implementing specific rail improvements in and around Chicago. Its 70 projects include new flyovers, grade separations, improved signaling, and equipment modernization. As of November 2013, 20 projects had been completed and 9 more are under construction.

Most of the completed projects are railroad improvements, many of which are on the Belt Corridor that circles Chicago to the west and south, with connections to multiple railroads. Eight of the 11 Belt Corridor projects have been completed, and another is under construction.

In contrast, relatively few projects have moved forward to mitigate freight's negative impacts on local communities. Only 3 of CREATE's 25 highway-rail grade separation projects have been completed, and only 3 are under construction. In fact, due to a lack of funding, 13 grade separations have not started at all and not one of the program's 7 passenger corridor projects was completed in the past ten years. This is also highly problematic because, in a truly



intermodal economy, grade separations facilitate the movement of truck traffic through the region. We need more federal investments to help complete these projects.

CREATE affects the global economic competitiveness not just of our state but the U.S. as a whole. The entire program is estimated to cost \$3.8 billion, but there is a \$2.5 billion funding gap. Through the efforts of Congressman Lipinski, CREATE received initial federal funding of \$100 million through the SAFETEA-LU Projects of National and Regional Significance (PNRS) program. About one-third of CREATE funding to date has come from federal sources, including PNRS, TIGER, and ARRA High Speed Rail programs. These federal investments have also been leveraged by more than \$400 million through State of Illinois capital programs. But without a dedicated source such as PNRS, CREATE and other vitally important freight partnerships cannot make adequate progress.

National Freight Policy

Due to CREATE's national importance, continued federal assistance is critical. In some respects, the two-year MAP-21 reauthorization does more to recognize the vital role of freight in the U.S. economy. However, CMAP's position is that MAP-21 missed an opportunity to address freight needs comprehensively with adequate funding that treats all modes strategically. Furthermore, MAP-21 should have formalized the role of metropolitan regions in the development of recommended state freight plans.

CMAP is not alone in this position. With some of the largest metropolitan regions in the country, we have developed three principles for freight in the next transportation reauthorization bill:

- Integrate metropolitan regions into the freight investment decision-making process.
- Dedicate a range of funding sources and authorize a minimum of \$2 billion funding per year for freight investments, consistent with proposals from national freight advocacy organizations.
- Redefine the national freight network to comprise a multimodal transportation system.

We support a robust federal role in freight policy. It is time for the federal government to provide the leadership and resources to support a resilient national freight network.



Biosketch

Gerald R. Bennett

Mayor, City of Palos Hills

Chairman, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

In serving as Mayor of the City of Palos Hills for over three decades, Gerald Bennett has been an outspoken advocate for uniting cities and villages. He founded and continues to serve as the President of the Southwest Conference of Mayors. He was a co-founder and serves as Chairman of the Board of the Southwest Central Dispatch (an intergovernmental police and fire 911 service). Bennett has served as past Chair of the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus and is currently a member of the Mayors Caucus Executive Committee. He is also the President of the Illinois Municipal League and was named co-chair of the Mayors Caucus 2016 Olympic Regional Coordinating Committee. As the representative from Southwest Cook County, Bennett holds the position of Chair of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and its Executive Committee. A businessman for 40 years, Bennett is President of Bennett Dental Labs, Inc., in Palos Hills. Bennett attended Lewis University and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

