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Bulletin Board: A Post From the Community

Lipinski and Bennett Make Case in Washington for Increased Investment in Local Transportation; Focus on Need for Rail Underpasses

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Today, Palos Hills Mayor Jerry Bennett testified at a hearing of the U.S. House Transportation Committee Subcommittee of a d v e r t Highways and Transit about the need for greater federal investment in local transportation infrastructure. He talked about the importance of CREATE – the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency program – and focused specifically on the need for more funding for road underpasses at rail crossing; these projects, critical to easing road congestion, are lagging behind other CREATE projects. Bennett, who is also Chairman of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, was invited to testify by Congressman (IL-3) Dan Lipinski.

“We support a more robust federal role in freight policy,” said Mayor Bennett. “It is time for the federal government to provide the leadership and resources to support a resilient national freight network.”

“CREATE is critical to easing congestion on the roads and rails in northeastern Illinois,” said Rep. Lipinski. “In 2005, I was able to secure \$100 million to get CREATE started and since then another \$1.1 billion has been invested in this public-private partnership. CREATE is reducing costly congestion, saving lives, and leading to more jobs for the struggling middle class. But not enough progress has been made on funding the 25 underpasses that are part of CREATE. This must be the focus as we move forward.”

As of November of last year, 20 of the 70 projects that make up the CREATE program had been completed and 9 more are under construction. “While much has been accomplished, relatively few projects have moved forward to mitigate freight’s negative impacts on local communities,” stated Bennett. “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.”

Bennett says the 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 moves 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, and nearly half of freight in the region is “through traffic,” an indication of our central role in the national freight system.

Rep. Lipinski thanked Bennett for his hard work and testimony, and pledged to continue to work with members of Congress in Illinois and across the country to make the freight network, especially the remaining CREATE projects, an integral part of the reauthorization of our nation’s highway and infrastructure programs. Lipinski is the senior member from the state on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

In serving as Mayor of the City of Palos Hills for over three decades, Jerry 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 and is past President of the Illinois Municipal League. He has also served as Chair of the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus and is currently a member of the Mayors Caucus Executive 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.