

April 30, 2026

The Honorable Members of the Illinois Congressional Delegation
United States Senate and House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Dear Members of the Illinois Congressional Delegation:

As local leaders from across Illinois, we urge you to support policies in the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization that recognize freight rail's vital role in powering our state's economy, reducing consumer costs, and keeping goods moving safely and efficiently.

Illinois is the nation's rail crossroads. Our freight network spans thousands of miles, supports tens of thousands of jobs, and anchors the largest rail hub in North America in the Chicago region. With all Class I railroads and dozens of short line and regional carriers operating here, Illinois connects Midwest manufacturers, farmers, and energy producers to domestic and global markets. Each year, hundreds of millions of tons of freight move through our state—cargo that would otherwise require millions of additional truck trips on already congested highways.

Illinois families and businesses continue to face economic pressures, and freight rail plays a key role in keeping goods affordable. From food and fuel to construction materials and consumer products, rail offers reliable, cost-effective transportation that stabilizes supply chains and helps keep prices in check. Its ability to move large volumes over long distances at lower cost also makes it essential to Illinois's continued economic growth.

As Congress considers freight-related legislation, we respectfully urge you to:

Sustain and Expand Federal Rail Grant Programs: Illinois communities have leveraged federal rail grants to improve safety and mobility. Recent awards include a Rail Crossing Elimination (RCE) grant for the City of Decatur, a \$43 million grant to IDOT for high-risk crossing upgrades in southwest Chicago and nearby suburbs, and a Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) grant for the Springfield Rail Improvements Project. These investments reduce congestion, enhance safety, and strengthen our economy.

Protect Freight Rail’s Role in Reducing Costs: Freight rail helps keep transportation costs in check and Illinois businesses competitive. Proposals for rigid federal mandates—such as fixed crew sizes or train length limits—would reduce flexibility, increase costs, and push more freight onto trucks. That shift would strain our highways and raise prices for consumers. Railroads already operate under strict federal oversight and invest billions annually in safety and technology—helping drive a 43% drop in train accident rates since 2005. Congress should reject one-size-fits-all mandates and preserve performance-based policies that protect both safety and affordability.

Advance Rail Safety Through Innovation: Rail is the safest way to move goods over land—and it’s getting safer. New technologies like automated track inspection and advanced sensors help detect issues earlier and prevent incidents. Congress should support this innovation and ensure federal policy allows continued safety improvements, rather than locking in outdated methods.

Illinois has long been at the center of our national rail network. Our communities benefit daily from the jobs, economic activity, reduced congestion, lower emissions, and cost savings that rail provides. We urge you to ensure freight rail remains a strong foundation of Illinois’s economy and transportation system.

Sincerely,

David Boelk
Mayor
City of Mendota

John Curran
Republican Leader
Illinois Senate

Chris Brown
Mayor
City of Morris

Anthony DeLuca
State Representative
Illinois House of Representatives

Tim Brown
Board Member
Shelby County

Josh Downs
Mayor
City of Du Quoin

Mark Burton
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City of Hillsboro

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Illinois Chamber of Commerce

Illinois Manufacturers' Association

Larry Jogerst
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Stephenson County

Elizabeth Johnston
Board Chair
McLean County

Daniel Kelch
Board Member
Peoria County

Skip Kenney
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Sergio Rodriguez
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Rick Shook
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John Sweeney
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