Project overview
Amtrak, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) are partnering to invest in the Chicago Hub Improvement Program (CHIP), which aims to transform high-speed regional and intercity passenger rail service, connect job centers, reduce our carbon footprint and more. The $418 million program is supported by a broad coalition of regional government and industry leaders including labor, business, and environmental groups.

The project is divided into three major components:
- Chicago Union Station Improvements
- Chicago Area Infrastructure Improvements
- Chicago-Detroit Infrastructure Improvements

Once-in-a-generation investment opportunity
The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides a tremendous opportunity to secure National Infrastructure Project Assistance (also known as “Megaprojects” or “MEGA”) funds for this project. Amtrak, IDOT, MDOT, Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT), Metra, and Cook County, in partnership with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), have jointly submitted a grant application for this MEGA Project. Partners are working closely with local, state, and federal stakeholders to bring attention to this important project and its benefits, as well as facilitate conversations and foster support.

Opportunity for Growth
Today, over 90% of Amtrak’s State Supported service outside of the East and West coasts, and more than 50% of Long-Distance customers ride trains that begin or end at Chicago Union Station. This is due, in part, to the success of Amtrak in the Midwest, and the resulting growth in ridership.

In the past fifteen years, frequencies in the state of Illinois have doubled, two Higher Speed Rail lines have been built, and 33 new locomotives, as well as 88 new coaches and dinettes, have been acquired. However, this growth was not accompanied by investments in capacity and reliability around CUS, which is significantly constraining further growth. The problem will be compounded by the upcoming service expansions to Minneapolis/St. Paul, the Quad Cities, and Rockford, IL, as well as additional frequencies on several existing routes. The MEGA program has created a unique opportunity to allow Amtrak and its partners to submit a thoughtful plan of investment to expand capacity and break bottlenecks in the network.

Project need
Since the creation of Amtrak operations in 1971, the City of Chicago has continued its evolution to become the most important rail hub in the United States, not only for Amtrak, but also for freight and commuter railroads. The City of Chicago has more trackage radiating in more directions than any other city in North America. Chicago’s success as the paramount railroad hub has created growing congestion and delays, as well as a need for additional investments to increase capacity and make traffic flow more efficient.

Combined investments will address current transportation challenges and create a strong foundation for improving reliability, expanding service, and meeting the current and future needs of the customers of both Amtrak and its partners.
Chicago Union Station (CUS) Enhancements
Projects at Chicago Union Station will significantly improve the passenger experience within the station. During peak periods CUS and its components operate at or above capacity, making it potentially unsafe for current ridership levels and unable to accommodate increased ridership. The improvements at CUS will remove barriers, improve access, increase efficiencies, and enhance the customer experience by adding and modifying platforms, upgrading the concourse, improving ventilation and air quality in the train sheds, and removing obsolete structures to improve safety. Amtrak will activate tracks for passenger use that were first built for the post office, further realizing the vision under the CREATE Program goal to increase capacity for Amtrak and Metra service at CUS.

Chicago Area Infrastructure Improvements
Creating a direct connection between CUS and the St. Charles Air Line bridge over the south branch of the Chicago River near 18th St, combined with adjustments to track configurations east of the bridge will reduce travel time and improve the reliability of existing service as well as, afford Amtrak greater control over operations. Perhaps even more importantly, the CHIP family of projects will make possible additional service to downstate Illinois and St. Louis, as well as to Michigan and Indiana. These endeavors will also enable the long-held vision of connecting O'Hare Airport, through CUS, to McCormick Place.

Chicago-Detroit Infrastructure Improvements
This project will continue to enhance the rail system's ability to encourage economic development, promote environmental sustainability, and improve service in a region that has been historically underserved by intercity rail. This investment will build on previous years' investments to bring this crucial corridor up to its full potential, as well as reduce travel time, by building even more infrastructure improvements all along the important corridor between Chicago and points in Michigan.
It’s time for a new and transformational vision that will improve and expand passenger rail. The $418 million program will significantly enhance the passenger rail experience in and out of Chicago and provide a range of improvements to passenger rail service in Illinois and throughout our region. I’m glad to join Mayor Lightfoot and regional leaders in pushing to get this essential project across the finish line.”

— U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL)