

Good morning. My name is Dr. Sandra Bury. I am the mayor of the Village of Oak Lawn and a practicing optometrist. It is an incredible honor to be asked to present you with the perspective of a local mayor and describe the impact rail service and rail infrastructure has on our residents. Thank you Congressman Lipinski for the invitation and I would like to thank the members of this Subcommittee for their kind attention.

In our area, the rail line was laid around 1880 when we were just farmland. By 1909, a small community of 287 had formed around a station on that line and the Village of Oak Lawn was incorporated. One hundred and eleven years later, we are a bustling first-tier suburb of about 58,000 and that rail line continues to be an economic engine of growth and opportunity. As our community has evolved, our rail service has evolved.

We still have freight traffic, but these days commuter traffic is the majority. Thirty trains move thousands of commuters through Oak Lawn every day. Our residents enjoy affordable access to high-paying jobs and the service helps reduce traffic, pollution, improve area home values, and enhance quality of life. Our train station is the heart of our community.

We have a strategic plan to develop the area further. By adding a traffic signal near the train station, we could bring commuter traffic onto our main streets away from our neighborhood streets. It has taken more than a decade but I am happy to say Illinois DOT (IDOT) approvals are in place and construction is finally proceeding. The one last hurdle we face is from our rail line.

You see our commuter rail, Metra, must upgrade all signals on the line before our new traffic signal can be turned on and they don't have the funding for it. They have said it would be 2020, then 2021 and now are asking for 2022. We have a building in the center of our town waiting to be built, a traffic nightmare for our residents that could be eliminated, and the public safety problem of antiquated signals that should not exist at all. This is a very specific and telling instance of how lack of rail funding has impacted our local economy, public safety, and quality of life.

The Illinois State Legislature passed a capital bill in 2019 that has helped, and municipalities have invested their own funds, but federal help is needed for us to address the enormous backlog of critical needs. Metra spends millions of dollars maintaining obsolete equipment. The signals that must be upgraded on our line are so antiquated that you can no longer get parts for repairs. They receive steady funding for operations but they have no steady, reliable capital funding and this has created a precarious situation from a safety and operational standpoint.

The towns our train line services have the highest rate of growth and increase in population in Illinois, but we have seen no increases to the minimal Saturday service Congressman Lipinski worked so hard to get us in 2009, and we have no Sunday service. Everyone wants to take a train into the city on the weekend to take advantage of Chicago's amazing events, but the present service doesn't make that possible.

It's not only about funding. More weekend service or additional weekday service requires the cooperation of the freight railroads. It has been a frustrating and drawn-out process to get them to agree to more service. There must be a better way to add the commuter rail service that our communities need and I hope that Congress can address this issue. Freight railroads must also commit to being community partners and maintain their crossings, bridges and property to acceptable standards, which is not currently done.

Please fund the infrastructure that supports commuter rail. An additional parking tower in our downtown would spur investment from business and add vibrancy while encouraging more riders. We also need funding to train our first responders in dealing with rail disasters and the hazardous materials moving through our community.

Better rail infrastructure is urgently needed to expand service. The CREATE program, which Congressman Lipinski supports and has gotten funding for, is a perfect example

of a public-private partnership which benefits everyone. Please use additional funding for rail to invest in programs like CREATE.

In summary, adequate funding of our passenger and freight rail infrastructure is critical for improving safety, livability and in growing our economy. In addition to additional and improved rail service, please fund infrastructure, training, and require all parties to work together. Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify.