



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Transit  
Administration**

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September 6, 2011

Ms. Lynette Ciavarella  
Senior Division Director  
Strategic Capital Planning/Grants Development  
Metra  
547 West Jackson Boulevard  
Chicago, IL 60661

Re: Environmental Review for the Union Pacific North Line Bridge Project, Chicago, Illinois

Dear Ms. Ciavarella:

The Federal Transit Administration has reviewed the environmental documentation for the Union Pacific North Line Bridge project dated June 30, 2011 and the Environmental Review Summary submitted on August 31, 2011. The project involves replacement of eleven 100-year-old bridges located between Grace Street and Balmoral Avenue on the North side of Chicago. The bridges are in poor condition and can no longer be adequately repaired and maintained for continued safe operations. In addition to the bridge replacements, both existing railroad tracks will be reconstructed and shifted about 21 feet to the west on the existing right of way and a retaining wall will be constructed along portions of the western edge of the right of way.

Metra originally submitted environmental review documentation for the project on February 4, 2011. However, the review documentation identified a potential adverse impact for the four bridges between Lawrence and Balmoral Avenues, and it was determined that additional study was required. FTA determined there were no significant adverse impacts for the seven bridges between Grace Street and Leland Avenue, and a documented categorical exclusion was issued on March 2, 2011, to allow Metra to begin construction on these bridges immediately because of the bridges' poor condition. The remaining four bridges were to be addressed at a later date.

Accordingly, we find that the proposed project (i.e. the remaining four bridges between Lawrence and Balmoral Avenues) is an action which meets the criteria for a National Environmental Policy Act categorical exclusion in accordance with 23 CFR Part 771.117(d)(3) bridge rehabilitation. In support of this determination, FTA reviewed Metra's environmental review documentation for the Union Pacific North Line Bridge project, which included the environmental reviews submitted on February 4, 2011 and June 30, 2011, and the environmental review summary submitted on August 31, 2011. In addition, Metra has held several meetings with residents along the corridor and local elected officials regarding the impacts of the project on the surrounding residents. FTA finds that the project will not result in any increased impacts on vibration along the project corridor, with the

exception of one sensitive property. However, if Metra train speeds do not exceed 60 mph past that property, there are no vibration impacts on that property. Accordingly, Metra has agreed not to operate trains in excess of 60 mph when passing this property.

Metra also studied whether the project would result in an increase in noise from current levels for a group of townhomes located between Winnemac Avenue and Argyle Street west of the tracks (referred to as "Ravenswood townhomes"). Three townhome buildings within the Ravenswood townhomes will be affected by an increase in noise. The townhomes are located between Winnemac Avenue and Argyle Street west of the tracks. The proposed noise level for the unit closest to the tracks is projected to increase by 4 Ldn, from 62 Ldn to 66 Ldn. This increase results in a severe impact under FTA guidelines. In order to mitigate the increased noise impacts, Metra has proposed to install an 8 foot high noise wall (measured from the top of rail) along the western right-of-way line starting just south of the Winnemac Avenue Bridge and continuing south for a distance of 350 feet. This noise wall will provide mitigation for the affected units, reducing noise levels at or below current Ldn levels. Metra has been in discussions with the Ravenswood townhome residents regarding the design and materials for the noise wall, and will continue to work with the residents on a final design of the noise wall.

This action applies only to the project as described in the environmental review documentation. Any changes to the proposed action which would result in significant environmental impacts not identified in the environmental review documentation, including the disclosure of new information or environmental concerns not previously identified, will require re-evaluation of this action.

This confirmation of categorical exclusion does not provide FTA commitment that future federal funds will be approved for this project. Any costs incurred under FTA pre-award authority must meet all federal requirements prior to those costs being incurred in order to retain eligibility of those costs for future FTA grant assistance.

If you have further questions regarding this determination, please contact David Werner at (312) 353-3879.

Sincerely,



Marisol R. Simón  
Regional Administrator