

## (September 18, 2006) Getting freight plan on track

### GETTING AROUND

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Congressional leaders and Illinois transportation officials will meet in Chicago on Monday to announce their strategy to move forward with an underfunded plan to modernize freight railroad infrastructure throughout the Chicago area, which is the Midwest hub of the rail cargo industry.

The plan, called the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program, or CREATE, envisions five revamped rail corridors. It would include one mainly for Amtrak and Metra passenger trains and construction of 25 new railroad grade-crossing separations to improve safety and reduce delays incurred by drivers waiting for trains to pass.

CREATE has gotten off to a slow start since it was unveiled several years ago. Project backers call for investing \$1.5 billion to update the region's antiquated rail network. Congress, however, so far has pledged only \$100 million to the program.

The offers of matching funds--the state, \$100 million; the city of Chicago, \$30 million; and the freight railroads and Metra, \$100 million--don't come close to helping get the job done.

Congress won't be looking to add money to the CREATE program for at least 2 1/2 years, when it begins work on the next multi-year federal transportation funding bill. One goal of Monday's meeting is to expand the coalition of CREATE supporters, said U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-Ill.), who is leading the drive in Congress.