

September 15, 2021

Metra Board of Directors
547 W. Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60661

Dear Metra Board,

Thank you for your hard work and service during these difficult times. We recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented extraordinary challenges for Metra and you have been working tirelessly to ensure that Metra continues to serve communities across the region.

As civic and environmental advocates, we enthusiastically support Metra's pursuit of zero emissions train sets to replace the current fleet powered by diesel locomotives. As your staff asserted and several directors concurred during your August meeting, the future is zero emissions. Metra has the potential to be a global leader in the transition to cleaner, greener passenger train service.

This is why we're so disappointed in your decision to delay the release of an RFP to purchase zero emissions train sets until at least later this fall. We encourage you to reconsider this decision and release the RFP as soon as practical.

Diesel is a leading contributor to poor air quality and increasing carbon emissions in communities across the region. Black and Brown communities, which already face health disparities exacerbated by air pollution, are hit the hardest, including several with freight and passenger rail lines running right through them and yards located nearby. Passengers and Metra employees are exposed to high levels of particulate pollution in Union Station as well. By testing zero emissions train sets in these areas, Metra could set the example for how to make our transportation network fairer, safer, and more sustainable.

As discussed during the meeting, the benefits of zero emissions train sets extend beyond the environment and fuel cost savings. They also bring schedule enhancements, increased efficiency and greater reliability. The upfront capital costs are significant but our federal and state governments are poised to further grow the pots of available funding to help agencies transition.

During the meeting, directors asked reasonable questions about reliability of the technology and the environmental impact of battery and hydrogen powered train sets across their full lifecycle. These are valid questions, and the technology is rapidly improving. As written, the RFP provides flexibility for Metra to adjust its approach and find the best fit for our region. But you need to start the process now.

We recognize that public transit is fundamentally a net positive for the environment. To meet our climate goals, we need more people riding Metra, Pace, and CTA. All transit vehicles must be as clean as possible to limit further harm to the air quality and health of our communities, particularly in the most polluted, highest-need areas. Transit needs to lead by example and transition to zero emissions as quickly as possible to strengthen its case as the core of a more sustainable transportation network in the Chicago region.

As Director Orseno said during the meeting, for decades Metra failed to innovate and change with the times. Under your leadership, the agency is taking a refreshingly honest and thoughtful approach to many difficult issues. Please follow through, release the RFP for zero emission train sets, and launch a pilot as soon as possible.

Active Transportation Alliance
Bike Walk Wilmette
Center for Neighborhood Technology
The Climate Reality Project: Chicago Metro Chapter
Citizens' Greener Evanston
DuPage Clean Energy Coalition
Elmhurst Cool Cities Coalition
Environmental Law & Policy Center
Fox Valley Electric Auto Association
Go Green Highland Park
Go Green Illinois
Go Green Morton Grove
Go Green Northbrook
Go Green Park Ridge
Go Green Wilmette
Go Green Winnetka
Go Green Deerfield
Go Green Vernon Hills & Lincolnshire
Green Minds Lake Forest Lake Bluff
High Speed Rail Alliance
Illinois Clinicians for Climate Action
Illinois Environmental Council
Metropolitan Planning Council
Naperville Environmental and Sustainability Task Force
Physicians for Social Responsibility, Chicago chapter
Respiratory Health Association
Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter
Union of Concerned Scientists
Warehouse Workers for Justice