



MEMORANDUM

To: Transportation Committee
From: CMAP Staff
Date: February 20, 2026
Subject: Proposed priority investments

Purpose

This memorandum presents a focused list of priority investments proposed for inclusion in the 2026 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

Consistent with federal certification feedback calling on the region to clearly identify and prioritize its most critical investments, this list highlights projects and programs that most significantly advance regional goals and deliver broad regional benefits.

These priorities are not intended to represent all important transportation investments. Rather, they elevate investments that most strongly advance the RTP's goals and deliver regionwide benefits. By identifying these investments, the RTP provides a platform for partners to coordinate efforts, communicate shared priorities, and build momentum behind projects with transformative regional impact.

Why identify priorities?

The prioritization of the RTP's fiscally constrained projects and programs was shaped by feedback from federal partners, regional stakeholders, implementers, and CMAP leadership.

- In the [2022 Transportation Management Area \(TMA\) Certification Review](#), federal partners encouraged the region to “clearly identify and prioritize its most critical projects in the region and focus resources on accomplishing them.”
- Business and civic leaders emphasized that a concise list of top regional priorities can help build broad alignment and sustained momentum behind transformative investments.

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- Implementing and advocacy partners expressed interest in having key projects and programs clearly highlighted within the RTP to strengthen communication and coordination.
- Internal CMAP leadership expressed interest in a clearer organizing framework to help inform how various CMAP resources and technical support are deployed.

In response to this feedback, CMAP engaged partners throughout the RTP process to identify a focused set of investments.

Intended role of the priority investments list

This list is intended to elevate investments that provide a broad regional impact and shared reference point for regional partners, stakeholders, and decision-makers.

The priority investments list does not alter the status of other projects included in the RTP's fiscally constrained project list. Regional Capital Projects (RCPs) on the constrained list remain eligible to advance through implementer-led development, funding applications, and programming processes.

Inclusion on this priority list does not represent a commitment or guarantee of funding or CMAP resources, nor does exclusion limit a project's ability to move forward.

Importantly, the list is not:

- A replacement for implementer decision-making or local prioritization.
- A restriction on advancing projects or programs not included in the list.
- A prerequisite for funding eligibility or project advancement.

The intent is to provide clarity around transformational investment opportunities, not to narrow access to the broader pipeline of investment.

Proposed list of priority investments

Through the collaborative RTP process of identifying key transportation project and program benefits, CMAP identified fifteen investment priorities that are proposed to be highlighted in the 2026 RTP. These priorities are listed and described in alphabetical order below.

Chicago Hub Improvement Program (CHIP)

A coordinated program to modernize and expand passenger and freight rail capacity in and around Chicago. Key components include Union Station modernization, the South Branch viaduct, maintenance facilities, and corridor capacity enhancements. CHIP strengthens reliability, improves accessibility, and reinforces Chicago's role as the nation's rail hub. For additional information, including program status, please refer to the CHIP webpage: www.amtraknewera.com/chip

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Connect 290 blue

A corridor investment program that restores the I-290 corridor and Blue Line Forest Park branch (RCPs 13114 and 22185). The program addresses aging infrastructure, restores reliability, improves accessibility, and enhances multimodal connections along a critical corridor. For additional information, including program status, please refer to the Connect 290 blue webpage: www.connect290blue.com

CREATE 75th Street Corridor improvement project

A set of interdependent rail investments (RCPs 12139 and 331148) that reconfigures the 80th Street Belt Junction, where Metra and freight lines intersect. Grade separations and track realignments reduce delays, expand capacity, and improve reliability for both passenger and freight rail. For additional information, including program status, please refer to the East-West Corridor information on the CREATE webpage:

www.createprogram.org/projects/#east-west-corridor

Faster, more reliable bus corridors

This priority is a combination of two programs focused on improving the flow and reliability of bus routes along key corridors throughout the region: [CTA's Better Streets for Buses](#) (RCPs 22201, 22202, 22203, 22204, 22205, 22206) and [Pace Pulse](#) (RCPs 74161, 74163, 74164, 74166, 74213, 74214, 74215, 74216). These corridor-based improvements such as bus lanes, signal priority, and stop enhancements increase transit speed, reliability, and safety across high-ridership routes.

Connected sidewalks, bikeways, and micromobility infrastructure

Targeted investment in closing gaps in the [regional trail and bikeway network](#) and improving first- and last-mile connections to transit. These investments strengthen safety, expand access, and enhance multimodal connectivity.

I-55 improvements (I-355 to Coal City Road)

A set of three RCPs (13111, 13106, 14109) addressing state of good repair needs and operational reliability along a major freight corridor in Will County. Improvements reduce bottlenecks, enhance freight mobility, and improve travel time reliability.

I-90 / I-94 reconstruction (Hubbard Street to 31st Street)

This project (RCP 11175) addresses significant structural and operational deficiencies just north and south of the recently completed Jane Byrne interchange. Reconstruction preserves critical infrastructure, improves safety, and ensures long-term reliability on one of the region's most heavily traveled expressway segments.

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North DuSable Lake Shore Drive (NDLSD) improvements

This project (RCP 12120) reconstructs and modernizes aging infrastructure between Grand Avenue and Hollywood Avenue. The project improves safety, reliability, accessibility, and lakefront connectivity along a corridor originally constructed in the 1930s and now beyond its useful life. For additional information please refer to the project webpage: www.northdusablelsd.org.

Randall Road capacity and safety improvements

A grouping of corridor improvements (RCPs 43211, 43208, 94338) along a 10-mile section of Randall Road. These projects address state of good repair, reliability, and safety needs along this key north-south connection between west suburban communities.

Red and Purple Modernization (RPM) Next Phases

This project (RCP 23188) continues CTA's reconstruction of century-old Red and Purple Line infrastructure. This modernization effort will eliminate slow zones, increase capacity, improve reliability, and expand accessibility along one of the region's highest-ridership transit corridors.

Regional ITS/Transportation Management Center

This program includes upgrades to the region's Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), such as traffic signals and digital highway signs, and the development of a regional Traffic Management Center (TMC). These investments improve incident response, signal coordination, and operational efficiency, enhancing reliability and safety without expanding roadway capacity.

Advancing regional rail

This priority includes investments that remove operational constraints and modernize aging rail infrastructure to support a stronger regional rail network. Key projects include the A2 Crossing Modernization (RCP 33157), the Rock Island Improvements project (RCP 33147), express O'Hare service (RCP 33155), expanded rail yards and critical bridge reconstructions. These investments reconstruct outdated infrastructure, reduce conflicts between commuter and freight traffic, improve reliability, and increase capacity along critical corridors. By addressing foundational infrastructure needs, they support the advancement of a more integrated and high-performing regional rail system.

Transit station accessibility

This priority supports continued implementation of CTA's [All Stations Accessibility Program](#) and Metra's Station Accessibility Initiative to modernize and upgrade rail stations across the region. These investments reconstruct aging station infrastructure, improve safety and reliability, and ensure that transit stations are usable for riders of all ages and abilities. Expanding accessibility strengthens system connectivity, increases ridership potential, and enhances the overall performance of the regional transit network.

Transportation decarbonization

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This priority supports implementation of various decarbonization initiatives including [IDOT's National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure program](#), [CTA's Charging Forward plan](#), [Pace's Zero Emissions Commitment](#), [Metra's Zero-Emissions Trainset program](#), and others. These investments reduce emissions, improve range confidence for electric vehicle users, modernize transit fleets, support long-term environmental sustainability, and position the region for continued technological advancement.

US 45 (Lake Avenue) from Rollins Road to IL 120

This project (RCP 13135) improves reliability and reduces delays on a key corridor with significant truck traffic in central Lake County. Targeted operational and capacity improvements address recurring delays and enhance regional connectivity.

Note on committed projects

In addition to forward-looking priorities, the priority investments chapter of the RTP will highlight committed projects that deliver significant regional benefits and have already secured full funding. These projects will be recognized separately and will not compete with or displace priority projects and programs.

Examples of such committed projects include:

- Red Line Extension
- I-294 Central Tri-State
- Elgin-O'Hare Western Access (I-490)
- State/Lake Station (Loop elevated structure)
- Pulse Halsted Street and Pulse 95th Street
- Calumet River Bridge projects

This distinction is intended to celebrate near-term delivery while maintaining a clear focus on strategic priorities that require continued coordination, advocacy, or alignment.