

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2021

Secretary Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

We write to bring your attention to the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) federal grant application submitted by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) in partnership with the City of Columbus and the Mid-Ohio Regional planning Commission (MORPC). ODOT seeks funding for Phase 4 of the Columbus Crossroads project, which replaces aging infrastructure to improve safety, reduce congestion for commuter and freight traffic, and restore communities.

Columbus Crossroads is a \$1.3 billion project that transforms the crossroads of Interstates 70 and 71, an essential junction which carries commuter and freight traffic across the nation. Phase 4 of the project removes a major bottleneck for interstate traffic on these two key commercial routes, improving one of the National Primary Highway Freight System's key corridors. This \$230 million sub-phase is focused on the freeway mainline in the physical overlap of I-70 and I-71. The freeway mainline in the overlap carries 130,000 vehicles per day, including 17,100 commercial vehicles, and exceeds its design capacity by 50,000 vehicles. As a result, this area contains three of Ohio's top ten freeway crash locations.

By replacing obsolete highway infrastructure, Columbus Crossroads will also help revitalize Downtown Columbus and surrounding neighborhoods. The overlap's trench creates a physical barrier between Downtown Columbus and the neighborhoods south of the overlap. Before I-71 was built in the 1960s, the King-Lincoln District bustled with 63,000 residents and served as a center of culture, commerce, civic, and religious life in the African American community. By 2010, the neighborhood dwindled down to just 6,439 residents. Only 21 percent of King-Lincoln residents own their homes, one in five are out of work, and nearly half live in poverty. The collaboration of ODOT, the City of Columbus, MORPC, and community stakeholders over the last decade has resulted in a comprehensive vision that includes restoring connections across the interstate to Southside neighborhoods and improving the quality of life for area residents and travel for commuters and pedestrians.

Phase 4 includes planting new street trees throughout the project area, supporting new electric vehicle (EV) charging stations along the highway (?), constructing a cap on both sides of the High Street Bridge and the Third Street Bridge, and adding improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities to the Fourth Street Bridge. Furthermore, Phase 4 complements the \$28 million the City is investing in Livingston Avenue to build complete streets, improve safety, and provide better

access to both Southside neighborhoods and Nationwide Children's Hospital, which is one of the top children's health facilities in the nation. Assistance from your agency would allow the Columbus Crossroads partners to restore and reconnect communities that were adversely affected by the construction of I-70 and I-71.

The INFRA grant would benefit the entire Columbus region by improving mobility, supporting economic growth, improving safety, and restoring communities. We encourage the Department of Transportation to give this application full and fair consideration and ask you to keep our offices informed on its status.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Rob Portman
United States Senator