



The Future of Smart Mobility

March 12, 2021

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

**Re: Support for the Columbus Crossroads INFRA Application**

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of DriveOhio, I am writing this letter to express our strong support and to reinforce the strong regional collaboration for the joint City of Columbus and Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) INFRA grant application for Phase 4 of the Columbus Crossroads project.

DriveOhio is the state's center for smart mobility, and we have worked closely with SmartColumbus to develop connected vehicle infrastructure. The Columbus Crossroads project lies in the heart of SmartColumbus, one of the most ambitious demonstrations of advanced mobility in the nation. With more than \$40 million in public and private investment, SmartColumbus has hundreds of connected and electric vehicles on the road in the area, and the Columbus Crossroads project will be equipped with the most advanced transportation technology to improve safety and congestion.

In previous roles with ODOT, I helped lead planning for this \$1.3 billion, multi-phase project to transform the crossroads of Interstates 70 and 71. The Columbus Crossroads will transform this key link in the National Primary Highway Freight System, while reconnecting communities that were cut off by the original highway construction. Current and future phases of work, including Phase 4 of this multi-phase project, are now integrated within ODOT's Downtown Ramp Up construction project.

Phase 4 is a \$230 million construction sub-phase focused on the freeway mainline in the physical overlap of I-70 and I-71; as well as the surface streets surrounding it, and the bridges spanning it. The freeway mainline in the overlap serves commuter traffic from across the state and freight traffic from across the nation. 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. The overlap's trench also creates a physical barrier between Downtown Columbus and the neighborhoods south of the overlap. While this major investment will replace obsolete highway infrastructure, Columbus Crossroads will also restore connections, build ladders of opportunity, transform communities, and revitalize Downtown Columbus and surrounding neighborhoods.

ODOT, the City of Columbus, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), and a diverse group of community stakeholders and business entities have collaborated over the last decade to develop and implement this comprehensive vision. Before I-71 was built in the 1960s, the King-Lincoln District bustled with 63,000 people and was the center of culture, commerce, civic life,



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and church in the African American community. By 2000, the neighborhood had dwindled down to just 16,000 residents, only 21 percent of the people in this area owned their homes, one in 5 were out of work, and nearly half lived in poverty. In 2014, Phase 1 of the Columbus Crossroads project restored the connection to the King-Lincoln District with the Long Street Bridge and Cultural Wall – one of the most revered pieces of infrastructure in all of the City. In 2016, USDOT believed that the Columbus Crossroads Project was of such national significance that the Long Street Bridge and Cultural Wall was featured on the cover of the FY2017 USDOT Budget. Then Secretary Anthony Foxx wrote, “This effort to reconnect and revitalize a community divided by past transportation policies is a compelling example of how transportation can create or eliminate opportunity gaps in our Nation.”

Phase 4’s bridge and surface street components continue this tradition, as the sub-phase is focused on restoring connections across the interstate to Southside neighborhoods as well as improving the built environment surrounding the project area. This phase will include planting new street trees throughout the project area; supporting new EV charging stations along the NHS; 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. The City and ODOT will also do extensive engagement and provide locations within the project limits for public art that are meaningful to the community. 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.

We respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Transportation consider the importance of these improvements to the restoration of our communities, the prosperity of our region and state, and the resiliency of the national interstate highway system; and we urge your consideration of the application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Howard Wood", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Howard Wood  
Executive Director