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April 4, 2022

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 Williams Road Corridor Plan RAISE Application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of City of Obetz, I am writing this letter to express our strong support and to reinforce the regional commitment for the joint City of Columbus, Franklin County, and Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) RAISE planning grant application for the Williams Road Corridor Plan project. This project is seeking to use the RAISE planning grant to develop a consistent corridor concept plan for the entire 6.5 mile Williams Road corridor, from the road's western terminus near the Scioto River, to its eastern terminus at State Route 317 (Hamilton Road).

The City of Obetz operates multiple departments from City owned property along Williams Road. The inefficient traffic flow has caused us to relocate staff to other parts of the city so we can operate those departments more efficiently. The impassability of Williams Road due to a train crossing happens multiple times a day. The train blockages are frequently over an hour in duration. The businesses in this area have expressed their concerns. Some are looking to move out of this area because they continue to lose business due to these traffic concerns.

Williams Road is an important east-west roadway and is identified on the Central Ohio Greenway's Trail Vision Plan as a future corridor for a significant bikeway and pedestrian connection on Columbus' south side. It also supports projected household and employment growth within the larger south side region and Rickenbacker Airport and Global Logistics Park, including Foreign Trade Zone 138. MORPC identified the need for improving the Williams Road corridor as part of its 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study, due to the projected population and employment growth along the corridor. The current roadway is heavily travelled by residents and freight, yet it is only two lanes and lacks any bicycle or pedestrian facilities. This has contributed to multiple traffic fatalities and serious injuries. Significant improvements are required to ensure the roadway can safely support the corridor's projected growth.

However, the large scale of the corridor and its required significant multi-jurisdictional, multi-use, and multi-modal improvements are far too difficult for any single, local jurisdiction to implement on its own. The project area involves the coordination of three cities (Columbus, Obetz, and Groveport), two townships (Hamilton and Madison), Franklin County, the Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks, and numerous stakeholders. The corridor serves a wide variety of land uses, including regional parkland, residential, commercial, logistics, and two rail yards (CSX and Norfolk Southern). The corridor's two at-grade crossings and one separated crossing have a significant impact on traffic moving through the corridor. There are utility challenges, the majority of the corridor lacks bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and the existing roadway and intersections are inadequate to safely support the variety of users who currently use the corridor (personal and commercial vehicles) or want to use the corridor (bicyclists and pedestrians). Addressing these challenges will significantly improve freight and transportation opportunities along a corridor that includes opportunity zones, areas of persistent poverty, and a historically disadvantaged census tract.

A RAISE planning grant is necessary to help create a unified concept for this very complicated corridor that is in such great need of safety, mobility, congestion, and capacity improvements. We respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Transportation consider the challenges of the corridor, the need to create more transportation opportunities within it, and the potential this project has to positively impact our community. We urge your consideration of the application.

Sincerely,
Michael F. Corbitt, P.E.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael F. Corbitt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Michael Corbitt, PE., LEED AP
City of Obetz
Deputy Administrator / City Engineering