



March 12, 2021

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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:

**Board of Directors**

Rev. Tim Ahrens

John Bloch

Rachel Bloomekatz

Abdi Farah

Lori Ann Feibel

Cheri Friedman

Stephen Keyes

Ben Kozberg

Sherri Lazear

Gelena Libin

Doug McCollough

Ginny Schlonsky

Jason Wells

Rabbi Tali Zerkowicz

I am writing on behalf of Jewish Family Services to (1) express our strong support and to reinforce the strong regional support for the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) INFRA grant application for Phase 4 of the Columbus Crossroads project; and (2) to urge your thoughtful consideration of this catalytic project of national, regional, and community importance.

Jewish Family Services is a human service agency established in 1908, with a mission of helping individuals and families achieve economic self-sufficiency and emotional stability. We provide a unique combination of counseling, case management and workforce development services, using a person-centered approach to tailor services for the complex needs of the individuals who come through our doors. Our services are not limited to those in the Jewish community, but are available to individuals of all races, ethnicities, and religions and from all economic circumstances.

In 2020, we touched the lives of over 1100 individuals in Central Ohio, including older adults and their caregivers, families in crisis, and job seekers ranging from entry level to professionals. In addition to providing human services, our agency is an economic driver for Central Ohio. Last year, Jewish Family Services helped 703 individuals obtain employment, earning \$23 million in wages and paying \$5.7 million in taxes, on workforce program investments of only \$2.9 million.

The majority of Jewish Family Services clients are experiencing poverty, and many of them live in the areas surrounding the crossroads of Interstate 70 and 71. Transportation is a frequent barrier to our clients' ability to access available services and to obtain and retain employment. Completion of the Columbus Crossroads Project would enhance local residents' ability to achieve the supports they need and be able to access employment in the community – benefitting

them personally and enabling them to contribute positively to the local economy.

Columbus Crossroads is a community-led \$1.3 billion, multi-phase project to transform the crossroads of Interstates 70 and 71. The project improves one of the key corridors of the National Primary Highway Freight System; while at the same time leveraging this infrastructure investment to help restore and reconnect communities that were adversely impacted, first by redlining and second by constructing I-70 and I-71. Current and future phases of work, including Phase 4, from this multi-phase project are now integrated within ODOT's Downtown Ramp Up construction project.

Phase 4 is a \$230 million 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, 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 black ink, appearing to read "Karen B. Mozenter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Karen B. Mozenter  
Chief Executive Officer