



33 N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215
614-228-1776



May 28, 2024

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 Hilliard Rome Road Grade Separation Project CRISI Application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA), I am writing this letter to express our strong support for the City of Columbus' Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) application for the Hilliard Rome Road Grade Separation Project. The requested CRISI funding (approximately \$26.6 million) will allow Columbus to separate a hazardous at-grade railroad crossing on Hilliard Rome Road, improve transportation insecurity in two census tracts, and extend the impact and benefit of federal and local rapid transit investments.

This is particularly important as two of the census tracts in the project area are identified as disadvantaged and having high transportation insecurity by USDOT's Justice40 Rail Explorer: 39049008165 & 39049008171. The project will help make it safer and more reliable for these residents to walk, bike, and ride transit on Hilliard Rome Road. Of particular interest to COTA is schedule reliability for COTA's Line 21 bus which uses Hilliard Rome Road. Line 21 would directly benefit from separating bus and rail traffic at this location.

Further, the LinkUS West Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Corridor, which is less than a mile south of the at-grade crossing on Hilliard Rome Road would benefit from increased connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods. USDOT recently awarded a Neighborhood Access and Equity Capital Construction grant to the Central Ohio Transit Authority for the West Broad BRT's construction; and the Hilliard Rome Road grade separation project will further extend the federal and local investments in the West Broad BRT Corridor by making it easier and safer to cross the railroad tracks and access the BRT.

The Ohio Rail Development Commission has already awarded this project \$3.3 million from Ohio's Rail Crossing Elimination Program. A CRISI award will continue the momentum to replace a hazardous at-grade crossing that lacks pedestrian or bicycle facilities with a separated crossing that includes pedestrian and bicycle facilities. We respectfully request that the U.S.



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Department of Transportation consider the transportation challenges created by the current crossing, and the need to separate it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Monica Téllez-Fowler".

Monica Téllez-Fowler
President/CEO
Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA)

MTF: City/CB

Xc: Patrick Harris, VP, External Relations
Kim Sharp, Sr. Director, Development
Garth Weithman, Chief of Staff