



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 Columbus Chamber of Commerce, 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.

As a leading voice for businesses in central Ohio, the Columbus Chamber represents over 2,400 member businesses across the 11-county Columbus Region. For our members and business community, by and large, we truly believe this project will immensely contribute Central Ohio's comprehensive mobility initiative to help address growth, affordability, and opportunity gaps in our community.

Central Ohio is one of the fastest growing regions in the country and is on track to increase by 726,000 more residents over the next 25 years. That means we are expected to have 3.15 million residents in Central Ohio by 2050. As we grow, we must learn from our peers and make transportation investments now—before growing traffic leads to gridlock.

The at-grade crossing (513244C) on Hilliard Rome Road is one of the busier and more hazardous at-grade crossings in Ohio. This crossing sees an average of approximately 26,575 motor vehicles and 19 trains per day; and its hazard ranking is currently ranked 384<sup>th</sup> out of more than 5,600 at-grade crossings statewide. The Federal Rail Administration has received multiple reports of stopped trains blocking the crossing for extended periods of time since 2022.

Pedestrians have been observed climbing on, over, or through the train cars during multiple reported incidents—and emergency responders have been observed unable to cross the tracks

during one of the reported incidents. Separating the existing crossing and providing dedicated pedestrian and bicycle facilities will significantly improve safety at the crossing and through the entire corridor.

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 connect these residents and others to 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. USDOT recently awarded a Neighborhood Access and Equity Capital Construction grant to the Central Ohio Transit Authority for the 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. Department of Transportation consider the transportation challenges created by the current crossing, and the need to separate it.

On behalf of the Columbus Chamber of Commerce and our member businesses, we fully support actions to fund and implement the (CRISI) application for the Hilliard Rome Road Grade Separation Project.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Professional regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don DePerro". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Don DePerro  
President & CEO  
Columbus Chamber of Commerce