



Patrick Losinski, CEO

May 20, 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 Metropolitan Library (CML), I write to express our 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.

CML exists to inspire reading, share resources and connect people. With a staff of over 850 and budget of approximately \$125 million, CML annually welcomes nearly 5 million customers to our Main Library and 22 branches in Franklin County, Ohio. CML is well-known for signature services and programs like School Help, Reading Buddies, Summer Reading Challenge and Ready for Kindergarten.

As a community hub that is open to all, the library's Strategic Plan supports the vision of "a thriving community where wisdom prevails," which positions CML to respond to areas of urgent need: kids unprepared for kindergarten, third grade reading proficiency, high school graduation, college and career readiness and employment resources. The Hilliard Rome Road Grade Separation Project will improve traffic safety for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians travelling to CML's Hilltop Branch, which is located along the LinkUs Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Corridor.

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 384th 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 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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick Losinski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "P".

Patrick Losinski