



*Board of Directors: Robert Dompier
Pam McLeod
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May 14, 2020

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Bigelow Gulch Corridor Safety and Mobility Improvement Project

Dear Secretary Chao:

I am writing to express my support of Spokane County's application to the Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development (BUILD) Discretionary Grant Program. Through infrastructure improvements along the Bigelow Gulch/Forker Corridor, Spokane County seeks to support regional economic development with a freight corridor link to various and numerous industrial and commercial locations in the Greater Spokane Region with an anticipated build-out date of 2023.

As the West Valley School District Superintendent in the Spokane Valley, I support this application which improves freight movements through the greater Spokane region and fixes safety hazards along a dangerous, busy, narrow, rural connector between two growing industrial, urban areas. The West Valley School District employs over 500 people and has an average student enrollment of 3,500 and many of these employees and students travel the Bigelow Gulch/Forker corridor on a daily basis. Improving the infrastructure along this corridor will greatly help to improve the travel time and safety of our bus routes along with the safety of all who travel this corridor.

I'd like to highlight some of the details of the project that are most significant to West Valley School District: Adding additional travel and turn lanes and shoulder space will be a great benefit and safety improvement for our students, families, employees and busses. We also believe the enhanced access and safer travel lanes will allow for increased capacity which provides for more efficient and reliable movement of traffic.

The project provides for an established freight and commuter corridor and if awarded funds, will complete the necessary improvements. The project will increase economic competitiveness in the region by promoting efficient freight mobility via road and rail networks and enhance the access and reliability to new and established industrial properties in northeast Spokane and east Spokane Valley. The realignment and widening adds additional travel lanes, turn lanes, truck climbing lanes and shoulder space thereby increasing capacity and providing for efficient and reliable movement of freight and goods. The project will incorporate Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) for the length of the corridor, alerting drivers to road conditions, delays, and strengthen communication with emergency services.

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Improvement to the corridor will have substantial impacts on safety, the environment, regional business opportunities, and overall quality of life for commuters. This project drastically improves the safety of a narrow, undersized rural collector and commuter route that has a history of fatal and serious crashes.

An improved route will reduce congestion, fuel consumption and tailpipe emissions for vehicles idling in delayed traffic using Spokane's arterial system and Interstate 90. Reduced network redundancy, improvements to important emergency services routes, travel reliability and transit operations are also added benefits to the Bigelow Gulch roadway improvement project. Additional benefits include the improvement of ADA-accessible pedestrian facilities.

Significant project investment has been secured from state and regional partners through the collaborative leadership effort demonstrated by Spokane County, but more capital is needed to allow this project to reach its full potential. The funding partners for this project include Spokane County, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC), County Road Administration Board (CRAB), Transportation Improvement Board (TIB), Washington State Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board (FMSIB) and National Highway Freight Programs (NHFP). This fully represents the current funding partnerships for the project, and represents over 65% of the current total cost. If awarded, the federal BUILD funds will facilitate a timely completion and deliver an impactful project that substantially benefits the region.

The corridor improvement is an integral piece of the region's long-range transportation plan, providing traffic communication infrastructure across the entire length of the project and linking the project's traffic signals to the region's traffic control center. This project is key to the growth and prosperity of the Spokane region and its booming manufacturing and industrial businesses. If our transportation network cannot safely and efficiently support commerce in the region, we cannot succeed. In order to help our business and community thrive, we urge you to provide funding that is crucial to the construction of the Bigelow Gulch Corridor Safety and Mobility Improvement Project.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gene Sementi
Superintendent
West Valley School District