

August 2, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Project Support for Bigelow-Forker Corridor Freight Mobility & Safety Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I am writing to express our support of Spokane County's application to the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) 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 2024.

As the Executive Director of the Northeast Public Development Authority (NEPDA), a municipal corporation created and managed by the City and County of Spokane, I support this application which improves freight movements through the greater Spokane region and fixes the safety hazards along a dangerous, busy, narrow, rural connector between two growing industrial, urban areas. The NEPDA is focused on redevelopment and job growth in northeast Spokane, a historically disadvantaged area. The focus area includes over 1,600 acres of primarily heavy and light industrial zoned property. Freight mobility is critical to the success of the NEPDA. Notably, the Bigelow-Forker Corridor Freight Mobility & Safety Project generally bisects the NEPDA. Heavy freight mobility is critical to the success of our mission. In May of 2015, the City of Spokane approved a Heavy Freight User Analysis for the NEPDA. This was prepared by ECONorthwest and funded by an Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant. I would like to highlight some of the details of the project that are most significant to my organization:

The above referenced analysis identified four broad industry categories defined as heavy freight users. Those industry categories are:

1. Heavy Industrial manufacturing / general manufacturing
2. Food processing
3. High-tech manufacturing
4. Regional (multi-state) distribution center and warehouse/distribution

The NEPDA area has strong assets with access to the US-395 NAFTA corridor, BNSF rail, an existing T-1 classification freight route, and access to utilities and available sites. However, the lack of critical commercial infrastructure has been identified as a key challenge to overcome.

Economic Competitiveness

- Promotes efficient freight mobility via road and rail networks.
- Enhance the access and reliability to buildable industrial properties in northeast Spokane or east Spokane Valley
- Supports development within a Community Empowerment Zone, Historically Underutilized Business Zone, and Federal Opportunity Zone

Mobility

- The project adds Intelligent Transportation Systems for the length of the corridor, alerting drivers to road conditions or hazards and notifying users of travel time delays or suggested alternate routes.
- The project adds additional travel lanes, turn lanes, truck climbing lanes and shoulder space to an established freight and commuter corridor.
- The realignment and widening of the Bigelow Gulch Corridor increase capacity providing for efficient and reliable movement of freight and goods.

Safety / Quality of Life/Environmental

- This project drastically improves the safety of a narrow, undersized rural collector and commuter route that has a history of fatal and serious crashes.
- Improves ADA-accessible pedestrian facilities to current standards.
- Improves network redundancy, important for emergency vehicles, travel reliability and transit operations.
- Reduces congestion, fuel consumption and tailpipe emissions for vehicles idling in delayed traffic using Spokane's arterial system and Interstate 90.

Regional Strategy

- The corridor improvement an integral piece of the region's long range transportation plan.
- Provides traffic communication infrastructure across the entire length of the project, linking the project's traffic signals to the region's traffic control center.
- The corridor is funded by multiple federal, state, regional, and local funding programs. Funding from the highest level can be the last dollars in and deliver an impactful project that benefits the region.

While the land in the NEPDA represents a viable development opportunity for future commercial and industrial users seeking new sites with both highway and rail adjacency, economic modeling indicates very little capacity for private development to pay for much beyond the cost of land. For this reason, in order to attract the scale of development possible within the NEPDA focus area, and to attract quality employers and jobs, major public infrastructure investment is required to support this growth.

This project is key to the growth and prosperity of the Spokane region and its manufacturing and industrial businesses. If our transportation network cannot safely and efficiently support commerce in the region, we cannot succeed. In order to help northeast businesses thrive, ensuring economic prosperity for all, we urge you to provide funding crucial to the construction of the Bigelow-Forker Corridor Freight Mobility & Safety project.

Sincerely,



David Guthrie
Executive Director
Northeast Public Development Authority