

May 1, 2019

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

The Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) supports the City of Columbus' grant application for Phase 4 of the Columbus Crossroads project.

Columbus Crossroads casts an ambitious vision for the freeways and urban avenues that move through and connect the Columbus region by improving the I-70/I-71 Innerbelt corridor through Downtown Columbus. Leveraging this major investment to replace obsolete highway infrastructure, Columbus Crossroads also seeks to reconnect, restore, and revitalize Downtown Columbus and surrounding neighborhoods. The city, along with partners at COTA, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), Columbus 2020 and a diverse group of community stakeholders and business entities, have collaborated to develop and implement this vision over the last decade.

Specifically, Phase 4 includes rebuilding four bridges (Front, High, 3rd, and 4th streets) across the interstate trench with caps and gateway features that connect Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. These bridges are used by more than 30 transit lines that provide more than 30,000 daily trips. This phase also includes a new eastbound ramp into Downtown and construction of retaining walls that will allow Livingston Avenue to be converted back to two-way traffic and 1.5 acres of high-value real estate to be reclaimed for transit-oriented development.

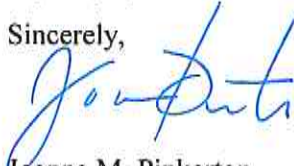
As the largest job center in Central Ohio with more than 100,000 workers, Downtown Columbus is a major economic generator with significant growth potential. Improving commuter access to Downtown is essential to ensuring that jobs remain in the center of the city and leverage existing infrastructure and COTA's transit assets. This investment will support the attractiveness of the C-pass program, an innovative initiative that launched in May 2018 that provides transit passes to Downtown workers through a partnership between downtown property owners, MORPC and COTA.

Additionally, improved bike and pedestrian connections to neighborhoods will help to build a transit-oriented, live-work environment. These investments support the economic vitality of our region, as demonstrated by the return on investment of similar projects at the I-670/US-23 and I-71/I-670 interchanges. These projects have fueled millions of dollars of commercial and community-serving development along North High Street and Long and Spring streets since their completion in 2003 and 2014.

Completion of the Columbus Crossroads project has been identified as a top priority for the City of Columbus, the Central Ohio region, and the State of Ohio. The state recently passed a transportation budget that generates more revenue through higher gas user fees and increased registration fees for local governments and electric vehicles. However, this project cannot be completed without leveraging additional funding from the INFRA grants program.

COTA respectfully requests that the U.S. Department of Transportation consider the importance of these improvements to the prosperity of our region and the resiliency of the national interstate highway system upon which COTA relies.

Sincerely,



Joanna M. Pinkerton
President/CEO
Central Ohio Transit Authority