



February 24, 2020

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

**Re: Support for the Columbus Crossroads INFRA Application**

Dear Secretary Chao:

The Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) strongly supports the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) INFRA grant application for Phase 4 of the Columbus Crossroads project. I urge your thoughtful consideration of this catalytic project of national, regional, and community importance.

Columbus Crossroads is a community-led \$1.3 billion, multi-phase project to transform the crossroads of Interstates 70 and 71, improving one of the key corridors of the National Primary Highway Freight System. Phase 4 of this project focuses on the physical overlap of I-70 and I-71. The overlap serves commuter traffic from across the state and freight traffic from across the nation, carrying 130,000 vehicles per day – including 17,100 commercial vehicles. The current infrastructure exceeds its design capacity by 50,000 vehicles, resulting in three of Ohio's top ten freeway crash locations.

By replacing obsolete infrastructure, Columbus Crossroads will reconnect, restore, and revitalize Downtown Columbus and surrounding neighborhoods. Downtown Columbus is the largest job center in Central Ohio with more than 100,000 workers, and 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. The C-pass program resulted in 1.2 million passenger trips for more than 15,000 workers in 2019, contributing to COTA's record ridership of 19.2 million rides – the highest since 1988.

Of particular importance to COTA, Phase 4 will rebuild four bridges (Front, High, 3rd, and 4th streets) used by more than 30 transit lines to 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. These investments will improve service reliability and travel times on our high-frequency Line 1 that connects rapidly-growing Northwest Columbus, the Ohio State University, Downtown Columbus, historically disadvantaged East Side communities, and three suburban cities. In addition, 1.5 acres of high-value real estate will become available to be reclaimed for transit-oriented development.

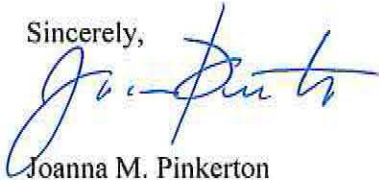


Phase 4 will also transform the current trench separating Downtown Columbus and the neighborhoods to the south by adding caps and gateway features. These improved bike and pedestrian connections to neighborhoods will help to build a transit-oriented, live-work environment. These investments support the 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 is a top priority for the City of Columbus, the Central Ohio region, and the State of Ohio. Last year, the Ohio General Assembly passed a transportation budget that generates more revenue through higher gas user fees and increased registration fees for local governments and electric vehicles. As a result, significant state funding is being invested into Phase 4; however, this \$265 million project cannot be completed without leveraging additional funding from the INFRA program.

COTA respectfully requests that the U.S. Department of Transportation consider the importance of these investments to improve safety for our region's commuters and pedestrians; enhance access to essential services; and renew the resiliency of the national interstate highway system upon which COTA relies.

Sincerely,



Joanna M. Pinkerton  
President/CEO  
Central Ohio Transit Authority

JMP:da

Xc: Emille Williams, Deputy CEO, COTA  
Patrick Harris, AVP, Government Affairs and Corporate Communications, COTA  
Kimberly Sharp, Senior Director, Development, COTA