

February 20, 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:

On behalf of Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI), I am writing this letter to (1) express our strong support and to reinforce the strong regional support for the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) INFRA grant application for Phase 4 of the Columbus Crossroads project; and (2) to urge your thoughtful consideration of this catalytic project of national, regional, and community importance.

Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit economic development organization headquartered in Columbus, Ohio with offices in Cleveland, Akron, Canton, and Cincinnati; and field operations in Toledo. ECDI is also a certified Community Development Corporation (CDC) and a U.S. Treasury-designated Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). ECDI's mission is *to invest in people to create measurable and enduring social and economic change*. As one of the top SBA microloan intermediaries in the United States, with a service footprint in all of Ohio's 88 counties, ECDI fills a gap in the credit industry by offering loans ranging from \$750 to \$350,000 to underserved entrepreneurs through more than 40 revolving loan funds. Its loan programs include culturally and linguistically appropriate financial literacy and microenterprise training, one-on-one technical assistance (TA), and access to markets through business incubation, making ECDI a one-stop-shop business development center. Since 2004, ECDI has provided small business owners with over \$56 million in startup or expansion capital, disbursed over 2,500 small business loans, served over 16,900 individuals, and created or retained over 8,300 jobs in the state of Ohio.

Columbus Crossroads is a community-led \$1.3 billion, multi-phase project to transform the crossroads of Interstates 70 and 71, and improve one of the key corridors of the National Primary Highway Freight System. These changes not only remove a major bottleneck for interstate commerce on these two important commercial arteries, the ongoing effort to improve the connection brings strong local and state support. Phase 4 of the Project, which costs approximately \$265 million, is essential for improving safety for commuters and pedestrians; reducing congestion; and enhancing access to essential services and more than 100,000 jobs in the region.

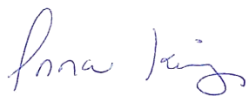
Phase 4 of this project focuses on the physical overlap of I-70 and I-71. The overlap serves commuter traffic from across the state and freight traffic from across the nation. The overlap carries 130,000 vehicles per day – including 17,100 commercial vehicles – and exceeds its design capacity by 50,000 vehicles. As a result, this area contains three of Ohio’s top ten freeway crash locations. The overlap’s trench also creates a physical barrier between Downtown Columbus and the neighborhoods south of the overlap. Leveraging this major investment to replace obsolete highway infrastructure, Columbus Crossroads will also reconnect, restore, and revitalize Downtown Columbus and surrounding neighborhoods. ODOT, the City of Columbus, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), and a diverse group of community stakeholders and business entities have collaborated over the last decade to develop and implement this comprehensive vision.

We have submitted earlier iterations of this project to the Department for consideration and have been grateful for the feedback and consideration received. Since our last application to the INFRA process, we have continued to advance this project with state dollars. Last year, the state 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, we were able to dedicate significant funding for that work; however, this project cannot be completed without leveraging additional funding from the INFRA program.

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. Importantly, it resolves major safety, congestion, and capacity issues for the two major interstates in the state.

We respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Transportation consider the importance of these improvements to the prosperity of our region and state, and the resiliency of the national interstate highway system; and we urge your consideration of the application.

Sincerely,



Inna Kinney  
Founder and CEO