



February 20, 2020

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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:

I am writing on behalf of Jewish Family Services 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.

Jewish Family Services is a human service agency established 112 years ago, with a mission of helping individuals and families achieve economic self-sufficiency and emotional stability. We provide a unique combination of counseling, case management and workforce development services, using a person-centered approach to tailor services for the complex needs of the individuals who come through our doors. Our services are not limited to those in the Jewish community, but are available to individuals of all races, ethnicities, and religions and from all economic circumstances.

In 2019, we touched the lives of over 8,900 individuals in Central Ohio, including older adults and their caregivers, families in crisis, and job seekers ranging from entry level to professionals. Last year, Jewish Family Services helped 585 individuals obtain employment, earning \$20 million in wages and paying \$5 million in taxes, on workforce program investments of only \$2 million.

The majority of Jewish Family Services clients are experiencing poverty, and many of them live in the areas surrounding the crossroads of Interstate 70 and 71. Transportation is a frequent barrier to our clients' ability to access available services and to obtain and retain employment. Completion of the Columbus Crossroads Project would enhance local residents' ability to achieve the supports they need and be able to access employment in the community – benefitting them personally and enabling them to contribute positively to the local economy.

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 would remove a major bottleneck for

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interstate commerce on these two important commercial arteries and 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.

ODOT has submitted earlier iterations of this project to the Department for consideration and has received helpful feedback. Since the last application to the INFRA process, the project has been advanced 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, significant funding was dedicated 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Karen B. Mozenter".

Karen B. Mozenter
Chief Executive Officer