



March 12, 2021

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

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I write to express the strong support of The Ohio State University, and to reinforce the substantial regional support, for the joint City of Columbus and Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) INFRA Grant application for Phase 4 of the Columbus Crossroads Project.

The Ohio State University and The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center East Hospital in the King-Lincoln District are anchor institutions where there has been significant investment in the neighborhood since Phase 1 of the Capital Crossroads project was built and developed. The bridge spanning the U.S. highways 70 and 71, which connects the near east side PACT neighborhood and King Lincoln District to downtown Columbus, has brought a half billion dollars of investment to the area in multifamily housing, commercial and residential redevelopment, new businesses, continued infrastructure improvements, increased housing ownership, improved public schools and increased cultural activities. Phase 1 of the INFRA funding had a tremendous impact in a neighborhood where Ohio State East Hospital resides. As an urban land-grant institution, we believe INFRA funding for Phase 4 of the Capital Crossroads project will lead to the same, if not greater, investment for neighborhoods and families on Columbus' south side.

Columbus Crossroads is a community-led \$1.3 billion, multi-phase project to transform the intersection of interstates 70 and 71. The project improves one of the key corridors of the National Primary Highway Freight System while at the same time leveraging this infrastructure investment to help restore and reconnect communities that were adversely impacted, first by redlining and second by the construction of these highways. Current and future phases of the work, including Phase 4, are now integrated within ODOT's Downtown Ramp Up construction project.

Phase 4 is a \$230 million sub-phase focused on the freeway mainline in the physical overlap of I-70 and I-71 as well as surrounding surface streets and the bridges spanning the routes. The freeway mainline in 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-10 freeway crash locations. The overlap’s trench also creates a physical barrier between Downtown Columbus and the neighborhoods to the south. In addition to replacing obsolete highway infrastructure, the major investment via Columbus Crossroads will also restore connections, build ladders of opportunity, transform communities 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. Before I-71 was built in the 1960s, the King-Lincoln District bustled with 63,000 people and was the center of cultural, commercial, civic and religious life in the African American community. By 2000, the neighborhood had dwindled to just 16,000 residents. Only 21% of residents in this area owned their homes, one in five were out of work and nearly half lived in poverty. In 2014, Phase 1 of the Columbus Crossroads Project restored connections to the King-Lincoln District with the Long Street Bridge and Cultural Wall — one of the most revered pieces of infrastructure in the entire city. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) believed that this initiative was of such national significance that the Long Street Bridge and Cultural Wall was featured on the cover of the FY2017 USDOT Budget. Then Secretary Anthony Foxx wrote, “This effort to reconnect and revitalize a community divided by past transportation policies is a compelling example of how transportation can create or eliminate opportunity gaps in our nation.”

The bridge and surface street components of Phase 4 continue this tradition, as the sub-phase is focused on restoring connections across the interstate to south-side neighborhoods as well as improving the built environment surrounding the project area. This phase will include planting new street trees; supporting new electric vehicle charging stations along the national highway system; constructing a cap on both sides of the High Street bridge and the Third Street bridge; and adding improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities to the Fourth Street bridge. The city and ODOT will also conduct extensive engagement and provide locations within the project limits for public art that are meaningful to the community. Furthermore, Phase 4 complements the city’s \$28 million investment in Livingston Avenue to build complete streets, improve safety and provide better access to both south-side neighborhoods and Nationwide Children’s Hospital — one of the top children’s health care providers in the nation.

We respectfully request that USDOT consider the importance of these improvements to the restoration of our communities, the prosperity of our region and state, and the resiliency of the national interstate highway system. We urge your consideration of the application.

Sincerely yours,



Kristina M. Johnson, PhD  
President