

COLUMBUS STATE

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

September 12, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Re: West Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit Corridor Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Capital Construction and Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants Application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

On behalf of Columbus State Community College, I am writing in support of the Central Ohio Transit Authority's (COTA) request for funding from Capital Construction and Regional Partnership Challenge Grants within the USDOT NAE Grant Program for the West Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor.

The West Broad Street BRT Corridor, the first rapid transit corridor project of the regional LinkUS initiative, would benefit the region's workforce, including the Columbus State community. Columbus State is our region's most diverse higher education institution, serving more than 40,000 students annually. The college is also the anchor instruction for the Columbus Workforce Hub, as designated by the White House in May 2023. We recognize the importance of affordable transportation to our students, enabling them to access education and job opportunities. The West Broad Street BRT Corridor would serve our campus, with a station at Long Street and Washington Avenue, as well as other nearby destinations.

The West Broad Street BRT corridor will be constructed as part of the regional LinkUS partnership of COTA, City of Columbus, Franklin County, and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission. LinkUS is Central Ohio's comprehensive mobility initiative to help address growth, affordability and opportunity gaps in our community. Central Ohio is one of the fastest growing regions in the country and is on track to increase by 726,000 more residents over the next 25 years. The average Central Ohio household spends more than \$12,000 on transportation and the median home sale price is up 68% since 2020. More than 40,000 Franklin County households lack access to a personal vehicle and 1/3 of Franklin County residents live in areas of low opportunity. To address these challenges, LinkUS will build faster and more reliable public transportation, create safer and expanded bike and pedestrian paths, and enable truly walkable communities with more affordable access to work, meaningful workforce training opportunities, home, and entertainment. By 2050, LinkUS plans to construct: 5 rapid transit corridors and increase

DAVID T. HARRISON Ph.D. **PRESIDENT**

transit service hours by 45%; 500 new miles of sidewalks, bikeways, and trails; and \$250 million in complete streets roadway improvements.

Implementing LinkUS will advance numerous federal, state and local existing initiatives that are working to improve housing, poverty, safety, and climate action in our community. Federal initiatives include two projects that Columbus State is deeply involved with: the Columbus Workforce Hub that we anchor and the National Information Technology Innovation Center, which Columbus State leads through a National Science Foundation/ Advanced Technological Education grant awarded in August 2023. State initiatives include creating a state climate action plan with funding from the U.S. EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Program. Local initiatives include Equitable Transit Oriented Development, Vision Zero, and the Columbus Climate Action Plan. LinkUS will move our region forward, together, starting with the West Broad BRT corridor.

The West Broad Street BRT Corridor includes 17 stations and will run approximately 9.3 miles along West Broad Street connecting Prairie Township, Franklin Township, Hilltop, and Franklinton to Downtown Columbus. Where possible, it will have dedicated lanes for transit with premium stations in the center lane. It will also run on 15 minutes or less intervals and have many of the same amenities as light rail such as off board fare collection and level and multidoor boarding.

This investment will greatly improve the opportunity gaps along the corridor, which stem from significant socio-economic disparities: approximately 76% of residents live within an area of persistent poverty; 36% of residents are Black, Indigenous, or persons of color; 30% of residents live below the federal poverty level; and 19% of households lack access to a personal vehicle. The West Broad Street BRT will expand access, increase safety and enhance mobility for corridor residents as well as the thousands of people working within the corridor.

The West Broad BRT corridor is projected to support the addition of 40,000 more residents along the corridor by 2040; and connect nearly 100,000 jobs along the corridor by 2040. The corridor will also connect the regional workforce to Columbus State, a federally designated anchor institution for the Columbus Workforce Hub and the lead institution for the National Information Technology Innovation Center.

LinkUS will use the spaces surrounding the BRT stations to invest in trails, bikeways, accessible pedestrian paths and sidewalks, making it safer and more convenient for people to walk, bike and ride public transit. These spaces also offer an opportunity for equitable transit-oriented development to ensure that everyone in our communities' benefits from this generational investment. Our community is also seeking a USDOT Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Planning Grant for the West Broad BRT to help us complete a capacity, economic, and market analysis for transit stops on the corridor. In addition, in 2022, COTA was awarded a Regional Infrastructure Accelerator Grant from the Build America Bureau. The West Broad Street BRT Corridor is also in the CIG pipeline in project development.

These milestones were only possible due to the strong partnership and commitment of COTA, the City of Columbus, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, and Franklin County. We believe that the transformational impact that the West Broad BRT will make in our community perfectly aligns with both the Capital Construction and Regional Partnership Challenge Grant components of the NAE Grant. Our organization wholeheartedly encourages USDOT to fund this application and thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David T. Harrison". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David T. Harrison
President

DTH:bcj