



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 Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Planning

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

On behalf of Catholic Social Services, I am writing in support of the Central Ohio Transit Authority's (COTA) request for funding under the Pilot Program for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) to conduct comprehensive capacity, economic, and market analysis as well as resource and policy recommendations for the remaining transit stations along the West Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor.

Catholic Social Services (CSS) is a multi-service agency that has been serving families and seniors in central and southern Ohio for more than 77 years. Catholic Social Services helps working-poor families stabilize and become self-sufficient through case management, trainings, and emergency assistance. We help low-income seniors age with grace and independence through supportive services and community-impact opportunities.

Catholic Social Services has responded to the rapidly growing senior population, doubling the number of seniors in eight years through innovation, more effective technology solutions, volunteer engagement, and partnerships. Similarly, CSS has renewed its focus on responding to the unmet needs of families who are trying to build better lives for themselves, but who are balancing the complicated and interrelated challenges of poverty. CSS helps clients use their own strengths and leverage the support of the entire community to reach their goals. Our thirteen programs help 14,000 people annually in our 23-county region. We partner with hundreds of corporations, public entities, nonprofits, and human service providers to help more CSS clients reach their full potential.

Catholic Social Services is accredited by the Council on Accreditation and the Better Business Bureau to illustrate our commitment to best-practice social services and sound business management. We are a research partner with the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities at the University of Notre Dame because we are committed to evidence-based practice. We are a member agency of Catholic Charities USA and the Human Service Chamber of Franklin County.

Catholic Social Services is in full support of this project to help address growth, affordability and opportunity gaps in our community. To address these challenges, the BRT corridor 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, home, and entertainment. Thank you for your consideration of this important application.

The West Broad Street BRT corridor is the first rapid transit corridor that will be constructed as part of the regional LinkUS partnership. LinkUS is Central Ohio's comprehensive mobility initiative to help address growth, affordability and opportunity gaps in our community. In 2022, LinkUS was awarded a Regional Infrastructure Accelerator Grant from the Build America Bureau and the West Broad Street BRT was accepted into the Small Starts FTA CIG program.

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, home, and entertainment. Implementing LinkUS will also advance numerous existing initiatives that are working to improve housing, poverty, safety, and climate action in our community. By 2050, LinkUS plans to construct: 5 rapid transit corridors and increase transit service hours by 45%; 500 new miles of sidewalks, bikeways, and trails; and \$250 million in complete streets roadway improvements. LinkUS will move our region forward, together.

The three LinkUS corridors in design will utilize bus rapid transit (BRT) and have dedicated lanes for transit with premium stations in the center lane where possible. 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.

COTA's 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. This investment will greatly improve the opportunity gaps in our community. One-third of the residents along the corridor live below the poverty level, 16% of households lack access to a personal vehicle, 36% are Black, Indigenous, or persons of color, and 76% of residents live within an area of persistent poverty. Concurrently, the West Broad BRT is projected to connect residents to 100,000 jobs while adding 40,000 more residents by 2040. The corridor will also connect the workforce to Columbus State Community College, a federally designated anchor institution for one of the nation's five regional Workforce Hubs announced this year.

The Pilot Program for TOD is essential to implementing the LinkUS Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Action Plan that will build connected, walkable, and bikeable communities where the existing residents benefit from new residential and commercial development and are not displaced by it. The LinkUS ETOD strategy aims to preserve existing housing affordability, existing jobs and businesses, and valued community resources and amenities. It will create new housing with an emphasis on affordability, attracting new business investment, and job creation, and encourage new or enhanced community resources and amenities. At the same time, ETOD will be inclusive in ensuring diversity in housing options and price points, ensuring access to jobs, services and amenities for all residents.

The West Broad Street BRT is the first fixed guideway BRT project in Central Ohio and the additional resources that the grant could provide would be a large step toward helping our community address the

challenges noted above. Columbus is concurrently seeking Capital Construction and Regional Partnership Challenge Grants within the USDOT Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Program for the West Broad BRT.

The strong partnership of COTA, the City of Columbus, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, and Franklin County and the major impact that the West Broad BRT will make in our community perfectly aligns with Pilot Program for TOD. Our organization wholeheartedly encourages USDOT to fund this application and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nick D. Borchers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nick" and last name "Borchers" clearly distinguishable.

Nicholas D. Borchers

Interim President and CEO

Catholic Social Services