



April 13, 2022

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

Re: Support for the Williams Road Corridor Plan RAISE Application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to express our support and to reinforce the regional commitment for the joint City of Columbus, Franklin County, and Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) RAISE planning grant application for the Williams Road Corridor Plan project. This project is seeking to use the RAISE planning grant to develop a consistent corridor concept plan for the entire 6.5-mile Williams Road corridor, from the road's western terminus near the Scioto River, to its eastern terminus at State Route 317.

As a leading voice for businesses in central Ohio, the Columbus Chamber represents over 2,100 member businesses across the 11-county Columbus Region. For our member and business community, by and large, we believe road infrastructure plays a crucial role by providing mobility for the efficient movements of people and goods, as well as providing accessibility to a wide variety of commercial and social activities.

Williams Road is an important east-west roadway and is identified on the Central Ohio Greenway's Trail Vision Plan as a future corridor for a significant bikeway and pedestrian connection on Columbus' south side. The current roadway is heavily traveled by residents and freight, yet it is only two lanes. Significant improvements are required to ensure the roadway can safely support the corridor's projected growth. As congestion increases, so does delay, which is bad for the economy and frustrating to our citizens.

This transportation project is especially important when it comes to the economy in the central Ohio region. A large number of our businesses rely on the expedience of delivery of their goods and/or services over the road in order to compete in the fast-paced business world. Since time equals money, the shortest, most direct route will prove to be the most lucrative.

Moreover, the large scale of the corridor and it's required significant multi-jurisdictional, multi-use, and multi-modal improvements are far too difficult for any single, local jurisdiction to implement on its own. The project area involves the coordination of three cities (Columbus,

Obetz, and Groveport), two townships (Hamilton and Madison), Franklin County, the Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks, and numerous stakeholders. The corridor serves a wide variety of land uses, including regional parkland, residential, commercial, logistics, and two rail yards (CSX and Norfolk Southern). The corridor's two at-grade crossings and one separated crossing have a significant impact on traffic moving through the corridor. There are utility challenges, the majority of the corridor lacks bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and the existing roadway and intersections are inadequate to safely support the variety of users who currently use the corridor (personal and commercial vehicles) or want to use the corridor (bicyclists and pedestrians).

Addressing these challenges will significantly improve freight and transportation opportunities along a corridor that includes opportunity zones, areas of persistent poverty, and a historically disadvantaged census tract. Benefits from the Williams Road corridor project will create improved access for rural residents and businesses, reduced transportation costs and travel time for motorists, decreased vehicle operating costs, safety, and environmental gains, and cost savings for local consumers as goods and services become more competitively available.

Furthermore, a RAISE planning grant is necessary to help create a unified concept for this very complicated corridor that is in such great need of safety, mobility, congestion, and capacity improvements. We respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Transportation consider the challenges of the corridor, the need to create more transportation opportunities within it, and the potential this project has to positively impact our community. We urge your consideration of the application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don DePerro". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Don DePerro, President and CEO