



33 N. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215
614-228-1776



February 27, 2023

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 Multimodal Corridor Planning RAISE Application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA), I am writing this letter to express our strong 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 Multimodal Corridor Planning Project. This project is requesting a 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 at the new Great Southern Metro Park, to its eastern terminus at State Route 317 (Hamilton Road). This project was designated a Project of Merit during the FY 2022 RAISE Round.

As the largest transportation provider in Central Ohio, COTA collaborates with government, industry, and the community to increase access to equitable opportunities and to enhance the quality of life for area residents. We provide fixed-route, on-demand, and paratransit services throughout the Central Ohio region. We are building the Rickenbacker Area Mobility Center, a multi-modal mobility hub that will support increased transportation options, including COTA's fixed-route lines, future area transportation corridors, rural county transit systems, Groveport Rickenbacker Employee Access Transportation (GREAT) shuttle service, and county connections services.

The Center will be a catalyst for additional economic development activity, with commercial office space devoted to providing new ways for area employees and residents to access childcare, health care, and workforce development and training. In addition, it will support food access through a partnership with the Mid-Ohio Food Collective on a 7,500 sq. ft. facility. The current condition of Williams Road is not safe for pedestrians and bicyclists who need to access public transit and nearby industry. COTA enthusiastically supports the vision and plan to add dedicated bicycle and pedestrian facilities to Williams Road. A truly multi-modal roadway will assist the regional economic recovery by eliminating barriers to new jobs and help us continue our mission "To provide solutions that connect people to prosperity through innovation, dedication and teamwork" and our vision to "To move every life forward".

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. It also supports projected household and employment growth within the larger south side region and Rickenbacker Airport and Global Logistics Park, including Foreign Trade Zone 138. MORPC identified

the need for improving the Williams Road corridor as part of its 2018 Rickenbacker Area Study, due to the projected population and employment growth along the corridor. The current roadway is heavily travelled by residents and freight, yet it is only two lanes and lacks any bicycle or pedestrian facilities. This has contributed to multiple traffic fatalities and serious injuries. Significant improvements are required to ensure the roadway can safely support the corridor's projected growth.

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. Addressing these challenges will significantly improve transit opportunities along a corridor that includes opportunity zones, areas of persistent poverty, and historically disadvantaged census tracts.

We respectfully request that you consider the challenges of the corridor, the need to create more transportation opportunities within it, and the potential this project must positively impact our community. We urge your renewed consideration of the application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joanna M. Pinkerton".

Joanna M. Pinkerton
President/CEO
Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA)

JMP: cb/jr

Xc: Andrew Biesterveld, Chief Engineer & Mechanical Officer, COTA
Kimberly Sharp, Sr. Director, Development, COTA
Patrick Harris, VP, External Relations, COTA
Garth Weithman, Chief of Staff