



Far South Columbus Area Commission
Neighborhood Pride Center
The Reeb Center
280 Reeb Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43207
www.farsouthcolumbus.com

March 2, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
United States 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 Far South Columbus Area Commission and the approximately 25 square mile territory we serve, 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.

The Far South Columbus Area Commission is the most grassroots and accessible form of governmental body available to the citizens of our area. Our commissioners, who all serve on a volunteer basis, are all community minded leaders who dedicate themselves to dealing with issues ranging from economic development, the environment, parks and recreation, zoning and building/development, community outreach, health and human services, education, and public safety. Our mission is to solicit active cooperation among all segments of the area and city, including organizations, institutions, and government. The Far South Columbus Area Commission is an advisory body committed to the preservation, development, and enhancement of our area, including, but not limited to, parks, recreational areas, sidewalks, streets, and traffic. Regular meetings are held monthly to provide an opportunity for area residents, businesses, and organizations to share their problems, concerns, ideas, and solutions.

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 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.

However, the large scale of the corridor and its 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 other 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 (commercial and personal vehicles) or want to use the corridor (bicyclists and pedestrians). In addition, public safety services (police, fire and EMS) face daily challenges along this corridor due to congestion and at grade crossing restrictions and residents often are blocked from accessing a free-standing emergency room facility located just east of the Williams Road corridor in a timely fashion. 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.

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. The project's potential impact was recognized during the FY 2022 RAISE Round, when the U.S. Department of Transportation recognized it as a project of merit. 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 has to positively impact our community. We urge your renewed consideration of the application.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Walcott
Chairperson
Far South Columbus Area Commission