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May 11, 2020

Attn: Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao

U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Re: *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor* BUILD Application

Dear Secretary Chao:

Better Eugene-Springfield Transportation urges USDOT to approve the BUILD grant application by the cities of Eugene and Springfield, Oregon for the *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor*.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, BEST formed in 2012 to support the innovative EmX bus rapid transit segment in west Eugene, which with the support of a \$75-million FTA Small Starts grant opened in 2017. Today BEST is building a successful community by bringing people together to promote transportation options, safe streets, and walkable neighborhoods. We are a broad coalition of community leaders representing business, social services, the environment, education, neighborhoods, and communities of faith.

In brief, the *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor* project will transform an automobile-oriented state highway designed for the past into a main street to serve the needs of the present and future, providing safe opportunities for people to walk, bicycle or ride public transit and supporting local land use plans for economic development.

Almost a century ago, Franklin was designated as part of the Pacific Highway U.S. 99 running from California to Washington. In the 1960s after the completion of Interstate-5 and Interstate-105 / Oregon 126, Franklin was redesignated as Oregon 126 Business. In 2006 and 2014, the Oregon Department of Transportation transferred the facility to the cities of Eugene and Springfield, respectively.

Today Franklin is the “front porch” for the University of Oregon, providing access to education, research, student housing, and the new Hayward Field that will be the site of both the 2021 U.S. Olympic Track and Field Team Trials and the 2022 World Track and Field Championships. It runs through the Glenwood district of Springfield, a “jewel in the rough” with redevelopment potential along the scenic Willamette River. It is also the route of the first and most heavily used segment of EmX bus rapid transit operated by Lane Transit District, linking together the downtowns of Eugene and Springfield.

*Building a successful community by bringing people together
to promote transportation options, safe streets, and walkable neighborhoods.*

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BEST is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent the law allows. Tax ID #42-1661720.

But in Eugene, conflicts between different road users result in frequent delays and occasional tragedies. Last year at the end of a school day, I personally had to wait for three traffic signals before I could cross Franklin safely on my bicycle. More recently, a young woman getting off EmX ran across the same intersection and was hit and killed. The road is unsafe for the tens of thousands of students, faculty and staff at the University of Oregon, most of whom walk, bicycle or ride the bus daily to and from an urban campus with limited parking.¹

In the Glenwood district of Springfield, successful redevelopment requires converting the old state highway lacking in urban standards into a welcoming main street.

Moreover, Lane Transit District's ability to provide frequent EmX service through the corridor is limited by one-way bottlenecks, a constraint that could hinder getting visitors from around the world to and from the track event in 2022.

Of all the major transportation projects planned for the Eugene-Springfield area, BEST views the Franklin corridor as the highest priority and most critical for the future of the area.

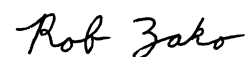
The project meets all of the primary criteria for a BUILD grant: It will improve **safety** for all roadway users. It will improve the **state of good repair** for a road little changed since Interstate-5 opened in the 1960s. It will advance **economic competitiveness** by supporting land use plans for (re)development. It will improve **environmental sustainability** by increasing the number of people walking, bicycling or riding public transit, thereby reducing motor vehicle emissions. And it will improve **quality of life** by transforming a state highway designed primarily for motor vehicle traffic into a main street designed for people.

Moreover, as a joint effort by the cities of Eugene and Springfield with the support of Lane Transit District, the project meets the secondary criteria of **partnership**. Finally, the project is **innovative** in combining roundabouts with bus rapid transit and multimodal features, reducing conflicts and increasing safety while allowing for efficient traffic flow.

For all these reasons, BEST recommends awarding a BUILD grant for the *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor*.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

For BEST,



Rob Zako
Executive Director
541-343-5201
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¹ The University of Oregon is renowned for its research prowess and commitment to teaching. It has nine schools and colleges and is one of just two schools in the Pacific Northwest selected for membership in the prestigious Association of American Universities, a consortium of 62 leading public and private research institutions in the United States and Canada. It has 22,615 students from all fifty states and more than a hundred countries. See <https://www.uoregon.edu/about>.