

April 30, 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

Secretary Chao:

On behalf of the Cities of Cottage Grove, Oakridge, Veneta, and Florence in rural Lane County, Oregon, we urge you to fund the BUILD application from the Cities of Eugene and Springfield to reconstruct Franklin Boulevard. Investing in the *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor* will help support the economic vitality of smaller cities throughout Lane County, Oregon. All of the small cities throughout our region from the Oregon Coast to the Cascade Mountains are accessible to and from the Franklin Boulevard corridor by way of Oregon Highway Route 126 and U.S. Interstate 5.

We eagerly await the benefits our surrounding rural areas will see from the economic prosperity made possible by the needed public investment in the *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor*. Many smaller cities throughout Lane County have a strong history grounded in the timber industry. Residents commute to Springfield and Eugene to work for Weyerhaeuser, Rosboro, Swanson, and other mills and wood product manufacturing companies. Our residents are also contractors on infrastructure projects, which include privately and publicly funded developments underway and envisioned along Franklin Boulevard.

As the timber industry has evolved and harvesting decreased, smaller cities throughout rural Lane County are investing in tourism as a leading economic strategy. Veneta is home to the Oregon Country Fair, which draws 45,000 attendees. Florence, Oregon's Coastal Playground, hosts the Rhododendron Festival and sees bicycle tourists from around the globe pedaling the Pacific Coast.

Improvements to Franklin Boulevard will further enhance access to Hayward Field and the Matt Knight Arena and build upon the region's ability to host ever increasing nationally and internationally significant events, including the ten-day U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials that will draw 50,000 visitors daily. Tourists will have the opportunity to visit smaller cities and explore our recreational offerings within an hour's drive while enjoying local shops, breweries, wineries, and lodging. Oakridge is a year-round recreational paradise located in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains and is home to internationally renowned mountain bike trails. Oakridge is located at the start of the West Cascade National Scenic Byway. Cottage Grove is home to

the Covered Bridges Scenic Bikeway, which features historic bridges along a 36-mile family-friendly bike route. The iconic Willamette River that runs along Franklin Boulevard connects many of our rural Lane County communities with our shared interest in enhancing recreation and tourism while protecting our natural scenic resources.

Our cities have already supported the initial phase of reconstructing Franklin Boulevard, which was completed in 2018, by prioritizing \$6,000,000 in ODOT Enhance Program state funds and \$625,000 in ODOT ConnectOregon lottery revenue funds through our roles on the Lane Area Commission on Transportation. Rural communities throughout the surrounding areas in Oregon will benefit from federal investments in the *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor*. Please consider our recommendation to support this transformative project and award a BUILD grant to the Eugene-Springfield, Oregon region.

Sincerely,



Jeff Gowing, Mayor
City of Cottage Grove



Kathy Holston, Mayor
City of Oakridge



Keith Weiss, Mayor
City of Veneta



Joe Henry, Mayor
City of Florence

