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February 20, 2019

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Elaine L. Chao:

I am writing in strong support of the joint Nevada County Transportation Commission (NCTC) and Caltrans District 3, Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) discretionary grant program application submittal for the Nevada 49 Corridor Improvement Project. Located in Nevada County, California, this rural project submittal addresses the four key objectives of the grant program, focusing on economic vitality, leveraging of federal funds, safety, and accountability.

The State Route (SR) 49 Corridor Improvement Project is the next phase of several planned long-term capital improvements that are focused on improving safety, operations, connectivity, and mobility within the corridor. This project will address the section of SR 49 that, due to funding limitations, was not able to be built as part of the previously constructed (April 2014) SR 49/La Barr Meadows Road signalization, widening, and frontage road system project.

The SR 49 Corridor Improvement Project begins at the limits of the previous project (Post Mile 10.8) and ends just south of the McKnight Way Interchange (Post Mile 13.3), connecting to the four lane Golden Center Freeway. This portion of SR 49 serves and functions as the gateway to the cities of Grass Valley and Nevada City. The areas adjacent to SR 49 within the project limits, as well as the cities of Grass Valley and Nevada City meet the criteria of disadvantaged communities and have been identified as below 80% of the statewide median income.

The planned project will widen this two-lane segment of SR 49 to a four-lane conventional access control highway. This project will address safety concerns through the installation of a continuous median barrier, eight foot shoulders with rumble strips, Enhanced Wet Night Visibility (EWNV) striping, and pavement edge treatments. Additionally, it will address the removal of numerous ingress/egress to the highway and construct a frontage road system to direct traffic to two at-grade intersections controlled with roundabouts. The project will reduce peak hour congestion by increasing capacity, eliminating the merges that currently exist to the north and south of the project connecting to the existing four-lane sections, and providing a section of northbound truck climbing lane. Upgrading the highway will improve safety, traffic operations, peak period level of service, accommodate future traffic increases, and enhance goods movement.

Completion of this project is the top regional priority of the NCTC and there is strong local support for improvements that will increase safety and operations on SR 49. There is also a strong local desire to have the highway improved to four lanes in order for it to be able to facilitate and handle the traffic capacity associated with a mass evacuation in the event of a major forest fire. SR 49 is a significant interregional connector for commuter traffic, goods movement, and for travelers seeking tourist and recreational destinations. The corridor serves as a vital link to regional employment centers in Placer County, and provides the connection to I-80 and regional employment centers in Sacramento County.

The SR 49 corridor is important to the national economy, both SR 49 and SR 20 are the only routes that can be utilized as Emergency Detour Routes when Interstate 80 between Emigrant Gap and Colfax is closed due to major accidents, wildfires, and construction; and both are designated to for STAA oversize and CA Legal Trucks. When Interstate 80 is closed east of Colfax, truck traffic and passenger vehicles are detoured to SR 20 leading to SR 49 before arriving back onto I-80. When I-80 is closed west of Colfax truck traffic and passenger vehicles are detoured to SR 174 connecting them to SR 20/SR 49 and back onto I-80. The amount of commerce that travels over I-80 is immense: estimates show that on average between \$4 to \$8 million worth of commerce travels over the Donner Pass on I-80 every hour throughout the year.

With both truck and passenger volumes forecasted to increase on I-80, SR 20, and SR 49 it is critical that improvements are constructed that improve safety and mobility on SR 49 and ensure it has the capacity to handle forecasted growth and future I-80 detour events.

Sincerely,



Brian Dahle
1st Assembly District

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