

February 21, 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:

We are writing in 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, CA, completion of this project is the top regional priority of the NCTC and there is strong local support for improvements, such as median barriers, 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 wildfire.

In 2005, the stretch of SR 49 between Wolf/Combie Road and the McKnight Way Interchange in Grass Valley experienced nine collision related fatalities. In 2006, another five lives were lost due to fatal collisions. In December of 2005, my husband and I formed the group Citizens for Highway 49 Safety along with Chet Krage and held a community meeting "Save Lives Now" at the Bear River High School on January 18, 2006. Approximately 300 concerned citizens and public officials attended this event. After the meeting, NCTC formed the SR 49 Stakeholder Committee which includes local and state officials that continue to work together to improve operations and reduce the number of accidents and fatalities on SR 49.

In June 2006, as a result of input from the SR 49 Stakeholder Committee the Caltrans Office of Traffic Operations designated SR 49 from Dry Creek Road to near McKnight Way in Grass Valley as a Safety Corridor and a daylight/headlight section. A Safety Corridor is a segment of highway with a history of high fatal collisions (McKnight Way Interchange to Combie Road) or a segment of highway with potential for fatal and severe collisions (Combie Road to Dry Creek Road) that is identified and focused on by state and local officials with increased enforcement, public awareness measures, short-term improvements and long-term improvements to reduce and prevent fatal and severe collisions.

Between 2007 and 2015 there were another five fatalities in the corridor. More recently on March 22, 2017, in response to five fatalities in the SR 49 corridor that occurred between mid-December 2016 and mid-February 2017, the Citizens for Highway 49 Safety organized another community meeting to re-address safety concerns with state and local officials and determine what could be done to reduce fatalities.

In 2014, Caltrans in coordination with NCTC completed construction a project to address safety and operational issues in the 1.5 mile segment of SR 49 centered around the La Barr Meadows Road intersection with the highway. The intersection of La Barr Meadows Road and SR 49 was realigned to the south and signalized. The numerous driveways and private road accesses to the

highway were consolidated by a system of frontage roads that provided access to the highway at the new signalized intersection. The highway was widened from two to four lanes to the north and south of the new intersection and turn pockets were constructed to provide adequate storage for left turn movements.

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

The planned project will widen this two-lane segment of State Route (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, pavement edge treatments, the removal of numerous ingress/egress to the highway and construction of a frontage road system to direct traffic to two at-grade intersections that will either be controlled with roundabouts or signalized.

This project is needed now to reduce accidents and fatalities in the SR 49 corridor and without the INFRA grant funding it will not be able to completed in the foreseeable future. Additionally, the recent devastating wildfire in Paradise California and the tragic loss of life due to the inability of residents to safely evacuate in a timely manner served as a horrible lesson learned, making the proposed improvements to this segment of SR 49 critical to providing the capacity needed in order to be able to handle a mass evacuation in event of a major wildfire. Citizens of Nevada County are concerned that without these improvements they may suffer the same tragic consequences as those in the community of Paradise.

Sincerely,



Bruce Jones, Deborah Kerr-Jones, and Chet Krage
Leadership: Citizens for Highway 49 Safety

Cc:

Daniel B. Landon, Executive Director
Nevada County Transportation Commission
101 Providence Mine Road, Ste. 102
Nevada City, CA 95959

Amarjeet S. Benipal, Director
California Department of Transportation, District 3
703 B Street
Marysville, CA 95901-0911