

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

April 7, 2020

Dear Madam Secretary:

I am writing to express support for the Joint Venture of Macon County and the City of Decatur Illinois' INFRA grant application. The application provides for replacing the Reas Bridges just outside of Decatur as part of the larger East Beltway project. As the primary workforce development training entity, we believe this project is essential to continued economic prosperity in the region.

Decatur is home to production facilities for 2 Fortune 500 companies, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) and Caterpillar, in addition to another major agricultural products producer, Tate and Lyle. Decatur also hosts 2 Class 1 railroads through the community including the CN and Norfolk Southern, and 2 short line railroads Decatur Central Railroad and Decatur and Eastern Railroad (Watco). Decatur is also home to the largest biennial farm show, Farm Progress, which is located just minutes from Reas Bridges.

The Beltway will provide better access to the industrial base of the region including our institution, Richland Community College and the ADM intermodal ramp, a key component of the Midwest Inland Port. The result will be more reliable supply chains for manufacturers and enhanced freight mobility through the region, particularly for farm-to-market suppliers from the rural areas to the east. Given the projected growth in freight movements in the U.S. over the next 20 years, it is important to support mid-market intermodal capabilities to meet the demand. Decatur can and will play a critical role in relieving pressure in the Chicago-area and provide more reliable freight distribution with easy access to large metropolitan areas including Chicago, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Kansas City, Louisville and Columbus among others.

Reas Bridges are structurally deficient and were nearly closed on two occasions in the last 6 years. As a result of the structural issues the Bridges have been weight restricted forcing grain trucks and other heavy vehicles traveling from the rural areas to the east to re-route approximately 11 miles through the downtown Decatur area. Because of the significant presence of railroads in the Decatur area, there are often lengthy delays at grade crossings and increased interactions with light vehicle motorists, pedestrians and cyclists posing a greater safety risk for all users. This project will address a critical state of good repair issue, provide better access for rural populations to the services they need, help expand fiber in Decatur and more rural areas, and provide a more efficient supply chain for area farmers and businesses.

Given the many public benefits associated with this project, I strongly urge you to support this grant. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Cristobal Valdez, Ed. D.  
President

