



April 8, 2016

The Honorable Anthony R. Foxx
Secretary of Transportation
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, DC 20590

**RE: FY2016 TIGER Discretionary Grant
I-579 “Cap” Urban Connector Project**

Dear Secretary Foxx,

The Hill House Association (HHA) and the Hill House Economic Development Corporation (HHECD) have served residents of the Hill District for over 50 years. We have been heavily engaged in work that we believe has catalyzed the commercial district and has been instrumental in seeding business development in our community. This work is of high priority to us and it is with this perspective that we support the Sports & Exhibition Authority of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County (SEA) in its bid to obtain a TIGER Discretionary Grant.

The project that this grant will support begins a process of reconnecting the Hill District to downtown Pittsburgh. This is historically important in that misguided urban redevelopment of the 1950s plunged the area into decay. Working with the SEA and other stakeholders, the HHA and the HHECD strongly support this application and plan to work with the SEA on workforce development initiatives that support the city and county’s efforts to improve the financial viability of the whole corridor.

Project Overview

- The Sports & Exhibition Authority of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County (SEA) is submitting an application for a FY2016 TIGER Discretionary Grant (“TIGER VIII”).
- The SEA is requesting TIGER VIII funds to help pay for construction costs of I-579 “Cap” Urban Connector (I-579 “Cap”).
- The “Cap” structure will span over the Interstate 579 Crosstown Boulevard highway creating a new urban public connector that will simplify pedestrian movement and will create an inviting, accessible route for walking and biking between the Hill District and Downtown.



- The I-570 “Cap” will be an independent, standalone structure with surface improvements consisting of ADA pedestrian and bicycle pathways, stormwater management and other sustainable strategies, landscaping and other fixed site components that will create a public urban open space of approximately 3 acres.

Project History and Goals

- As part of urban renewal in the 1950s, the Hill District, then a predominantly African American community was declared blighted; 95 acres were demolished and 8,000 people and 413 businesses were displaced.
- Also during the 1950s, the I-579 Crosstown Boulevard highway was constructed between the Lower Hill District and Downtown, further severing the link between the two neighborhoods. It remains a physical and psychological barrier to this day.
- The Hill District is one of Pittsburgh’s oldest residential neighborhoods, but since the 1950s it has lost more than 80% of its population. The Greater Hill District remains a distressed neighborhood with 17.2% unemployment and 39.2% of residents living below the poverty line.
- This project will reconnect the underserved and disadvantaged Lower Hill District with downtown Pittsburgh, and it’s a critical piece to support the new, mixed-use redevelopment of the 28-acre site of the former civic arena.
- Important redevelopment is taking place in the vicinity, including the Energy Innovation Center and other projects. We expect \$379 million in private investment in adjacent development as the “Cap” and the other infrastructure is in place. The “Cap” project will help keep that momentum going and increase its impact in the City and the Hill District.
- The I-579 “Cap” will utilize green infrastructure strategies, including capturing the majority of stormwater on the site. Plants and trees will be native or adapted, and this new open space will add to the city’s urban forest cover. This new greenspace will contribute to the reduction of urban heat island effects, and will mitigate noise.
- The “Cap” project will be an important part in a cohesive corridor between Downtown and Oakland, two large centers of employment, education and essential services.

TIGER Priorities

- The project strongly aligns with US DOT’s priorities and “ladders of opportunity” by creating i) new and safe connections needed to reconnect people from a historically distressed neighborhood (Hill District) to centers of employment, education and essential services (downtown central business district), ii) promote workforce development, and iii) contribute to community revitalization.



- This project will be transformative for the underserved Hill District community and downtown. The I-579 “Cap” will extend the economic strengths of downtown to the east.
- The project will open a new avenue for the community to grow and prosper by establishing a connector between a high economic generator (Downtown) and a disadvantaged neighborhood (Hill District).
- The I-579 “Cap” project is top regional project with multi-agency partnerships, and related stakeholders.

This may prove to be the best opportunity the community has had in decades to rebuild the financial and infrastructure ladder of the Hill District. We are hopeful that this grant is approved in its entirety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cheryl Hall - Russell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cheryl Hall-Russell
President & CEO
Hill House Association
Hill House Economic Development Corporation