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April 11, 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 Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy is the non-profit partner to the City of Pittsburgh, focused on improving the quality of life for the people of Pittsburgh by restoring the park system to excellence in partnership with government and the community. Projects and programs are conducted with respect for the environment, historic design, and the needs of our diverse region. To date, the Parks Conservancy has raised nearly \$92 million for Pittsburgh’s parks, with 14 capital projects completed.

**The Parks Conservancy enthusiastically supports the Sports & Exhibition Authority of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County’s (SEA) application for a FY2016 TIGER Discretionary Grant (“TIGER VIII”).**

We participated in a number of the stakeholder processes that led to the conceptual design for the 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 neighborhood and Downtown. The I-579 “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.

Increasing parks and open space, creating better connections between the neighborhood and downtown, and ensuring that this public space minimizes impacts to stormwater runoff are critical benefits of the project from the Parks Conservancy’s perspective. But in a broader context, this project means a great deal more. The physical, psychological and metaphorical barriers of the existing I-579 Crosstown Boulevard highway are critical barriers for Pittsburgh as a whole. 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. 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 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) promoting workforce development; and iii) contributing to community revitalization.

In addition to the "Cap" meeting US DOT priorities, it furthers the fundamental goals embodied in the *Find the Rivers! Greenprint for the Hill District* community plan, which was adopted as part of the 2011 Hill District Master Plan. The *Greenprint* is a plan to reconnect the Hill District to its unique landscape and community members to the greater Pittsburgh area. The plan aims to: establish a healthy place with urban development that works in concert with the natural ecology; identify projects and opportunities for leadership and innovation in the local economy; and to reframe the identity of the Hill District as "A Village in the Woods," an example of urban beauty. We are happy to supply your office with a copy of this plan upon request.

Thank you for your full consideration of the SEA Tiger VIII application for the "Cap." It is a transformative project that the Parks Conservancy looks forward to coming to fruition.

Sincerely,



Heather Sage  
Director of Community Projects