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April 20, 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,

This letter is to express support for the Sports & Exhibition Authority of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County's (SEA) TIGER application for the I-579 "Cap" Urban Connector. The grant would help fund construction costs of the I-579 "Cap" structure, which will span the Interstate 579 Crosstown Boulevard highway, creating a new urban public connector that will simplify pedestrian movement and create an inviting, accessible route for walking and biking between the Hill District and Downtown Pittsburgh. The I-579 "Cap" Urban Connector will be an independent, standalone structure with surface improvements consisting of ADA-accessible pedestrian and bicycle pathways, stormwater management features and other sustainable strategies, landscaping and site components that will create approximately three acres of working public urban open space as part of the transportation project.

As part of urban renewal in the 1950s, the Hill District, a predominantly African American community, was declared blighted; 95 acres were demolished and 8,000 people and 413 businesses were displaced. During the same time period, the I-579 Crosstown Boulevard highway was constructed between the Lower Hill District and Downtown Pittsburgh, further severing the link between the two neighborhoods and creating the impression of a significant physical and symbolic barrier to opportunities in the downtown for Hill District residents, many of whom depend heavily on physical proximity to jobs. It remains a barrier to this day with 4 lanes of interstate highway, 4 additional lanes of on-off ramps and steep slopes that create a concrete canyon separating work force from jobs.

The Hill District is one of Pittsburgh's oldest residential neighborhoods that has lost more than 80% of its population since its separation from Downtown Pittsburgh. 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 help to reconnect the underserved and disadvantaged Lower Hill District with Downtown Pittsburgh via a safe, direct pedestrian transportation link over a very high-volume interstate highway.

The I-579 "Cap" structure is a critical active transportation piece to support the new, mixed-use redevelopment of the 28-acre site of the former Civic Arena, as well as access to jobs for Hill District residents. Important job-creating redevelopment is already taking place in this area. The SEA expects \$379 million in private investment in adjacent development once the "Cap" and other infrastructure elements are established. The "Cap" Urban Connector project will help keep that momentum going and increase its impact in the City and the Hill District.

The I-579 "Cap" will advance regional goals by improving safe pedestrian and bicycle access and alternative transportation, and it will also provide a practical and highly-effective direct

connection to jobs in both neighborhoods. It will be a demonstration that modern transportation planning understands and supports effective multiple modes of transportation for people of all means, including active transportation. Millennials, as well, of all income levels who travel in this important corridor, prefer transportation beyond moving cars on an interstate highway.

The I-579 “Cap” Urban Connector 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 of a cohesive multimodal corridor between Downtown Pittsburgh and Oakland—two large centers of employment, education and essential services—for people who live between these areas that need better alternative transportation connections that will enable them to take advantage of Pittsburgh’s assets.

The I-579 “Cap” Urban Connector project strongly aligns with US DOT’s TIGER priorities and “ladders of opportunity” by creating i) new and safe connections 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.

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization for Southwestern Pennsylvania, we would like to point out that The I-579 “Cap” Urban Connector is included in and consistent with our region’s long range transportation plan, specifically attaining the following policy goals:

- Revitalization and redevelopment of the region’s existing communities is a priority.
- Investment in infrastructure improvements will be coordinated and targeted at the corridor level to optimize the impact of the investment.
- The region’s infrastructure system will be designed to protect and enhance public health and the environment.
- Transportation and development choices will reflect a priority on safe and secure multimodal and intermodal networks for both people and goods.

As such, I respectfully request your consideration and support for this very important, highly visible and high-priority multimodal transportation and development project for the Southwestern Pennsylvania region.

Sincerely,



James R. Hassinger, Ph.D., AICP
Executive Director