

April 21, 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,

I respectfully urge you to approve the FY2016 TIGER application in support of the I-579 "Cap" Urban Connector Project ("the Cap Project") submitted by the Sports & Exhibition Authority of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County ("SEA"). As you have seen firsthand, the Cap Project is a transformational keystone of the highest priority project in the Pittsburgh region.

The Cap Project is a multi-agency investment initiative to reconnect the disinvested Hill District community with the heart of the region's economic and commercial epicenter via a pedestrian and bicycle "Cap" structure that would span the I-579 Crosstown Boulevard trench that currently cuts across the project area acting as a barrier to opportunity.

Pittsburgh's intervention legacy in the Lower Hill extends back many decades when my predecessors at URA undertook a massive project that entailed eminent domain, relocation, and widespread demolition of homes and businesses. The front-page headline from the October 26, 1955 edition of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette proclaimed ominously, "Stage Set for Hill 'Evacuation' – 1,350 Families to be Moved to Other Homes."

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- *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.*
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I am proud to be involved in an ambitious endeavor that seeks to undo and reverse the dislocation of the Urban Renewal era, leverage our transit assets, and incorporate affordability for the benefit of an exciting and diverse economic development strategy. Our endeavors today come full-circle and the project team is undertaking a comprehensive strategy of reconnecting the Hill District community with Downtown and the broader opportunities that our central business district represents.

The improvements proposed in the Cap Project strongly align with USDOT's priorities and will result in quantifiable transportation and economic development outcomes by creating multi-modal choices. New pedestrian and bicycle connections and improved access to current and future transit facilities will result from this investment. By reestablishing this connection, the Cap Project will serve both the needs of residents of a historically distressed neighborhood who will benefit from the opportunities available in the regional center of employment, education and essential services as well as new residents and tenants on dozens of acres of soon-to-be developed property in the Lower Hill.

The SEA's request would help pay for construction costs of the I-579 "Cap." The Cap Project structure will span over the Interstate 579 Crosstown Boulevard highway creating a new urban public connector that will dramatically enhance pedestrian movement and will create an inviting, accessible route for walking and biking between the Hill District and Downtown. The I-579 Cap will be an independent, standalone structure with surface improvements consisting of accessible 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 allowing for greatly improved pedestrian and bicycle movement.

It is important to note that the first phase of roadway construction is underway east of the Cap Project site on a vacant 28-acre site with the first development also planned for adjacent parcels. Several prospective office tenants and hundreds of community members are anxiously awaiting the start of development. Future residential units on the eastern portion of the adjacent site are already in early stages of development. Overall, we expect \$379 million in future private investment and other infrastructure on the 28-acre development site adjacent to the Cap Project.

We regard a TIGER investment in the I-579 Cap Urban Connector Project as building critical infrastructure that will leverage further development, create jobs and provide added opportunities to the greater Hill District community.

If you have questions or would like to discuss this project further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Robert Rubinstein
Acting Executive Director