

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

May 3, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary of Transportation  
United States Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

RE: Port of Hood River/Klickitat County RAISE grant application for the Hood River-White Salmon Interstate Bridge Replacement Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We write to express our support for the Port of Hood River / Klickitat County joint application to the United States Department of Transportation's Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) discretionary grant program. Requested funding will support planning and design associated with bicycle, pedestrian, and transit access on a replacement bridge to be constructed across the Columbia River linking the communities of Hood River, Oregon, and White Salmon, Washington.

The existing bridge was built in 1924, is functionally obsolete, and is nearing the end of its usable life. Despite its designation as a National Highway System highway, the bridge is weight restricted and has a posted speed limit of just 15 miles per hour. Its two lanes are just over nine feet wide, hardly leaving two large vehicles sufficient space to pass. There is no permissible passage for pedestrian or bike traffic, and the bridge is seismically vulnerable. The bridge's sufficiency rating is a 6.0 on a scale of 100, and the Port of Hood River estimates maintenance costs will exceed \$50 million over the next fifteen years.

With a local economy dependent on interstate travel, the bridge is a critical link for residents and visitors, recreation and industry on both sides of the river. An estimated 30 percent of the area's workforce commutes across the bridge, making car ownership a necessity due to the lack of pedestrian or bike access. Local industries dependent on freight transport, such as tree fruit and timber, have two limiting options: cross the bridge with less than full loads, requiring more trips to move the same amount of product, or divert to another non-weight-restricted bridge adding 40 miles to their trips. Commercial barge traffic on the Columbia River is forced to pass between the existing bridge's narrow supports, built before modern safety standards.

While early efforts to replace the bridge date back to 1999, the project has enjoyed recent momentum. Over the past five years, nearly \$100 million has been awarded or secured for this \$520 million project. In 2020, the U.S. Department of Transportation awarded the project a \$5 million Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant that funded 15 percent of design and engineering. Since that award, the States of Oregon and Washington each contributed \$5 million to design and engineering, and in their 2021 session, the Washington State legislature included \$75 million to complete design and initiate construction funding. Currently both state legislatures are considering tens of

millions in additional funding for this project. A Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published in 2020, and the Final EIS and Record of Decision on a new bridge are expected to be issued by the Federal Highway Administration this year.

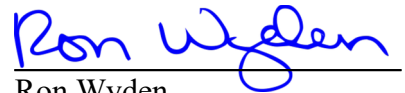
This project enjoys strong investment and support from communities and stakeholders in both Oregon and Washington. A Bi-State Bridge Working Group made up of elected leaders from six member agencies has been directing the project over the last two years. Governed under a memorandum of understanding, the group cooperatively oversees, manages, and conducts project development for the bridge replacement project. A new Bi-State Bridge Authority, authorized by both legislatures, will be stood up by July of this year.

We believe this request aligns with the goals of the RAISE program and ask that you give this application your full and fair consideration. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Dan Mahr in Senator Merkley's office at 503-326-3386; Breanna Irish in Senator Wyden's office at 503-326-7542; Bree Rabourn in Senator Murray's office at 206-724-6694; Naseem Meyhar in Senator Cantwell's office at 202-579-6003; Jason Little in Rep. Blumenauer's office at 202-805-4912, Ben Savercool in Rep. Newhouse's office at 202-225-5816, or Jason Edwards in Rep. Glusenkamp Perez's office at 202-650-7773.

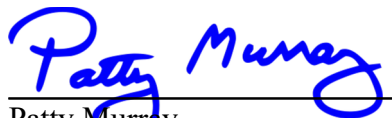
Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse  
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MGP', written over a horizontal line.

Marie Gluesenkamp Perez  
Member of Congress