



City of Chattanooga

Mayor Tim Kelly

Secretary Pete Buttigieg
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

04/05/2023

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

I am writing to communicate my support for the City of Chattanooga's response to the U.S. Department of Transportation Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) discretionary grant funding. These funds, made possible by President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, are unlocking enormous opportunities for addressing aging infrastructure across the country, particularly for underserved communities.

The City is pursuing this grant to replace the 70-year old Wilcox Boulevard Bridge over the DeButts Railyard, owned and operated by Norfolk Southern Railway, and over additional tracks operated by CSX Railway. The existing structure can no longer support the weight of freight trucks or emergency vehicles, does not offer a safe passageway for pedestrians or bicyclists to cross this large rail facility, and continues to rapidly deteriorate, resulting in potentially large risk from rail freight-related incidents to already vulnerable nearby communities.

Beyond structural integrity and safety, this bridge replacement is vital to the health of communities in this location for a number of reasons, and thus supports the White House's *Justice40* initiative. Specifically, a number of prominent lower income and underserved neighborhoods, including Avondale, East Chattanooga, East Dale and others, are largely separated by the DeButts Railyard and railroad alignments from natural resource and recreational amenities (e.g., Tennessee Riverpark, South Chickamauga Greenway), vocational training and education (Chattanooga State Community College), light industrial and commercial employment opportunities, and emergency response and health services (Erlanger Hospital), all of which are located on Amnicola Highway, parallel to the railyard. The Wilcox Bridge affords access to and from these communities and assets that are otherwise provided at much greater distance, through



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denser, traffic-congested areas, resulting in undue burden of both travel time and cost to residents of these communities, as well as reduced air quality.

In the spring of 2021, the City of Chattanooga, in partnership with the Electric Power Board (EPB), commenced construction of an electric microgrid to provide continuous power supply to the City's Police, Fire and 911 communications headquarters in order to better serve communities in times of natural and man-made disruptions. Without the Wilcox Bridge, these public safety resources and Erlanger Hospital, the region's largest trauma hospital, both located less than two miles each from the Amnicola Highway intersection with Wilcox Boulevard, are otherwise separated from the communities named above by an approximately four-mile length of railway and the railyard, and would require many more miles of re-routing to access them. It is for this reason that the Wilcox bridge replacement is included in the City's Bridge Management Program, as recommended for full implementation in the City of Chattanooga Community Resilience Report.

Once complete with adequate facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists and Americans with disabilities, the Wilcox Bridge will not only provide everyday access for community residents to enjoy the health benefits of parks and greenways located along the Tennessee River, but access to potentially life-saving services in the most extreme cases.

It is with the above in mind that I thank you for your careful consideration of this critical project for allocation of RAISE grant funds, and for investing in America's infrastructure. I look forward to seeing the realized benefits to all of our communities in the decades to come.

Sincerely,

Erik Schmidt
Director of Sustainability
City of Chattanooga