

July 16, 2018

Secretary Elaine L. Chao,
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Ms. Chao:

I am writing this letter in support of the Southeast Ohio Innovative Smart Connection project that is being submitted for the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) funding for this round of funding.

The Gallia County Ohio Engineer's Office and the Ohio Department of Transportation are partnering to develop an east-west "smart" corridor in the Southeast Appalachian Ohio region. The project consists of: 1) adding an interchange along US Route 35 while utilizing an existing overpass bridge and four rest-area ramps and 2) developing a State Route 7 bypass route along Bob Evans Highway/Farm Road to alleviate costly impacts to businesses and residents from flooding. The project provides connectivity to areas along the Ohio River for innovative rural vehicle testing tracks and to the States of West Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio.

State and local funds built the US Route 35 four-lane road that today has heavy truck counts of over 34% which is higher than the truck-traffic-count percentage along I70 that runs through Columbus, Ohio. Even though there has been a decline in residents and jobs in the last 10 years in Gallia County, with the recent upturn in the national economy and the positive reinvestment into the industrial and manufacturing sectors, the Southeast Appalachian region is positioned to expand in job and population growth in the high tech industrial and manufacturing sectors from opportunities like the BUILD grant.

As the Executive Director of the Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission (OVRDC) which serves as the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) for Gallia County and 10 other counties in southern Ohio, I strongly support your consideration of the Southeast Ohio Innovative Smart Connection project for this round of BUILD funding.

Sincerely,



John W. Hemmings III
Executive Director