

July 13, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Re: Bridge Investment Program (BIP) for Interstate 35 Bridge Replacement Project in Oklahoma County

Dear Secretary,

On behalf of the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber, one of the largest economic development organizations in the United States, I am contacting you to share our organization's emphatic support for securing Federal grant funding to replace two nationally significant I-35 bridges located in the heart of our community. The I-35 bridges are situated at the strategic confluence of two major interstate highways (I-35/I-44) and, therefore, have key impact on interstate commerce and the traveling public. Specifically, we are strongly supportive of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's (ODOT's) application to the Bridge Investment Program (BIP) for the I-35 Bridge Replacement Project.

We believe this project is a once in a multi-generation opportunity to build an iconic bridge showcasing Oklahoma City and facilitating increased sports and tourism opportunities. The Chamber, the City of Oklahoma City, and community partners have invested tremendous resources and vision in transforming what was once an area that was mown twice a year by city personnel to a thriving Oklahoma River/River Sports area featuring world-class rowing, urban whitewater rapids, and tourism opportunities. We believe this area, dammed since these bridges were constructed three decades ago, is globally unique as it is home to U.S. Olympic Team Training and is adjacent to the First Americans Museum, a tremendous cultural asset showcasing the priceless Native American history of Oklahoma.

The award of grant funding would address a critical challenge inhibiting further growth in this area, as the current I-35 bridges have 10 piers in the Oklahoma River which limits boat racing from being classified at the highest level. A primary goal of the Chamber and other stakeholders in this project is to see that the new I-35 bridge be clear span in design and have no piers in the water while spanning the entire Oklahoma River. This would remove a man-made barrier to hosting further competitions and continued economic development in this area. While it will cost more than re-building a traditional bridge, we emphatically believe the community benefits justify this expense. Furthermore, the I-35 bridge would ideally accommodate bicycle and pedestrians on the bridge and provide access to paved trails on both sides of the river. Significantly, this would also provide unique and needed access to the largely Hispanic Capitol Hill district and historically disadvantaged community on the south side of the Oklahoma River.

In conclusion, the Chamber lends its voice and strong support to ODOT's efforts to secure BIP funding to further our community's mission in replacing existing I-35 bridges with an iconic, landmark bridge.

Respectfully,



Roy Williams
President and CEO