

March 30, 2020

The Honorable Elaine Chao, Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

I am writing in support of the City of Pendleton and Oregon Department of Transportation's application to the U.S. Department of Transportation's FY2020 Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) program. This grant request would support reconstruction of the Southgate Interchange to address significant safety concerns along two major freight corridors, while enabling economic development and access for Pendleton's rural community divided by the federal interstate. As a freight hauler who utilizes this route to carry timber products and other goods, I appreciate the importance of efficient interchanges, the US 395 corridor and the communities it serves.

The Southgate Interchange is located at the confluence of Interstate 84 and U.S. Highway 395 in the rural eastern Oregon community of Pendleton. Currently, the Interchange fails to meet its purpose of safely and efficiently facilitating traffic between I-84 and US 395. The close proximity of the interchange to the ramp terminals of Exit 209 on I-84 coupled with high traffic flow along Southgate (US 395) creates consistent traffic backups onto I-84 from off-ramps that place Interstate traffic at risk and prevent safe passage off the highway through Pendleton. Since Pendleton is divided by I-84, the majority of a trips come through this interchange area. Residents routinely face congestion and dangerous intersection failures that delay trips or require traveling significant distances to the east or west to avoid the interchange. Freight haulers are constrained to using this interchange as there is no other freight connection to US 395.

BUILD grant funds will be used to reconstruct the Interchange by extending access ramps off the Interstate, expanding Southgate capacity, and improving intersections that facilitate traffic flow from Interstate access ramps, Southgate (US395), and connecting roads throughout Pendleton. Completion of this project will turn this failing interchange into an asset for the region by reducing congestion, spurring economic development with enhanced transportation access, and ensuring safe travel of freight, passenger vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic.

We strongly support the State and City's request and appreciate your consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Craig Willis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "W".

Craig Willis, Owner