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SUE SCHERER
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
96th DISTRICT

March 17, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
West Building – 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to express my full support for the Joint Venture of the City of Decatur and Macon County Illinois' 2022 RAISE grant application for construction of a grade separation and interchange at Brush College Road and Faries Parkway in Decatur.

Brush College Road is a critical conduit for freight, light vehicles, and public transportation in Decatur and the Central Illinois region. Every hour of everyday, thousands of people travel to and from work, school, and various appointments on Brush College Road, encountering significant and frequent bottlenecks at the Norfolk Southern grade crossing at Faries Parkway. In fact, the crossing delays amount to 17.2 hours of blockages per week, and those delays are expected to increase to 24 hours of blockages per week by 2035. That is more than just a nuisance!

This crossing is one of the most dangerous in the region with 12 accidents in 10 years, 5 with injuries. Some have involved fatalities. The frequent rail traffic also negatively impacts freight mobility and access to jobs, both of which are integral parts of this area. The Decatur Public Transportation System fixed-route buses have experienced delays, totaling 33.5 hours over a two month period in Decatur, with this crossing being one of the most blocked in the area. This is significant since the crossing lies between much of the population center of Decatur and Richland Community College.

Brush College Road connects with Interstate 72 to the north and serves as the connection between the Midwest Inland Port and the Interstate, making this investment crucial to the continued development of the Port (intermodal facility) and viability and growth of existing businesses in the area. In addition, major regional employers are located on or near Brush College Road and rely heavily on the corridor for the transportation of goods and services as well as employees' commute.

This project will also provide much needed multiuse connectivity between residential areas and the industrial center of Central Illinois and Richland Community College. By offering active transportation options to nearby residents located in areas of persistent poverty, the improvements made possible from this project will help increase access to jobs and advanced educational opportunities.

Originally, this project was fully funded based on the engineer's estimate and went to bid this past January (2022). Unfortunately, inflated costs of materials and labor have resulted in the project being bid \$16 million over the engineer's estimate, bringing the total project cost to \$76 million. This transformation project is literally ready to go once the additional funds can be obtained.

The City of Decatur and Macon County have been strongly committed to upgrading the region's infrastructure in order to increase economic opportunity and create jobs in Central Illinois. To that end, significant local public investments have been made to upgrade the sewer system, revitalize downtown Decatur, and dredge Lake Decatur. In addition, the City has recently enacted a motor fuel tax to invest in local roads and streets. These investments, totaling over \$100 million, will support our area's industry and improve the quality of life for residents. Because of these investments and the bids received on this project, the City of Decatur and I together are requesting this grant to cover the bid gap of \$16 million.

Given the many public benefits associated with this project, I strongly urge you to support this grant. Thank you for your consideration of our request. As the State Representative for the 96th House District, I look forward to working with you on this as well as any future opportunities that address transportation issues across Illinois.

On a personal note, earlier in this letter, I mentioned the fact that some accidents at this crossing have involved fatalities. My sister was one of those fatalities...the victim of a car-truck accident at this very intersection. After suffering from her injuries for an entire year, she died. Watching her slow, steady decline was heart-breaking for our family, especially our mother, and is just one reason I am committed to doing everything I can to improve this roadway to ensure that it is safe for all drivers at all times of the day. I want to stress that these improvements will not only provide a smoother and more efficient drive to and from destinations. These improvements will help to ensure that drivers and passengers arrive at their destinations safely.

If I can be of any assistance in this decision-making process, please reach out to me at any time of the day.

Sincerely,



Sue Scherer
Illinois State Representative, 96th House District