

March 17, 2021

The Honorable Peter Buttigieg
Secretary, US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

As the MPO for the Twin Cities, the Metropolitan Council, is jointly applying for INFRA funding with the Minnesota Department of Transportation for the I-494 Project (US 169 to Airport, Projects 1 and 2). This joint application is being submitted in this manner to demonstrate both the regional and statewide need for this project. The Metropolitan Council considers the I-494 application the highest priority application coming out of the Minneapolis-St. Paul region because it provides widespread benefits to the region, state, and Upper Midwest. It also has widespread support from local levels of government, the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC), and private sector businesses who are all calling for major improvements to one of the most congested segments of roadway in the entire state of Minnesota.

The Metropolitan Council's long-range transportation plan has identified this corridor's importance in the following ways:

- Tier 1 Truck Freight Corridors for both I-494 and I-35W in the project area (the highest priority for planning and funding in the region)
- Tier 1 MnPASS lane (HOT lane) corridor
- Tier 1 Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN) alignments for the Portland Ave and 12th Avenue overpasses/interchanges with I-494 will be improved with the project

The I-494 project is listed in both the region's long-range transportation plan and the TIP. As the region's MPO, the Metropolitan Council is committed to amending the long-range transportation plan and TIP, as needed, depending on the award and final project.

The Metropolitan Council is also the region's primary transit operator, providing 95% of the transit trips in the Twin Cities. As the transit operator, we are currently building two transitways that directly interact with I-494. The Orange Line Highway BRT, a federal small starts project, will open in late 2021. The D Line arterial BRT, also federally funded, is currently under construction. Both of these transitways will directly benefit from the I-494 project.

Lastly, the project directly aligns with the two new focus areas of INFRA: climate change and environmental justice, and racial equity and barriers to opportunity. This is evidenced both by the planning activities and outreach completed for the I-494 project, but also the types of investments being proposed. As an example, the D-Line arterial BRT (the state's busiest bus route) will cross over I-494 at Portland Avenue.

The enhanced pedestrian elements included on the Portland Avenue interchange, frontage roads, and separate pedestrian overpass are all part of the I-494 project. These substantial multimodal investments will greatly improve the D-Line by making it easier to get to the D-Line stations just north and south of I-494. The D-Line will connect many of the environmental justice populations surrounding the corridor to major job centers, Mall of America, downtown Minneapolis, and regional medical facilities. The culmination of these various I-494 project investments and in-progress transitways have the opportunity to be transformational for the communities in the surrounding area.

On behalf of Metropolitan Council, I would encourage your support for the I-494 project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles A. Zelle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles A. Zelle, Chair
Metropolitan Council