



July 1, 2021

Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Letter of Support for the 2021 RAISE Discretionary Grant: MidTown-Hough Connector Project (Cleveland, Ohio)

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I am writing in support of the City of Cleveland's application for funding through the United States Department of Transportation's Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program. This project is more than essential infrastructure – it will show the community they have a powerful voice in shaping their future, bring investment to neighborhoods that have been disregarded for a generation, and add vital connectivity between neighborhood assets, jobs, housing, health care, and transit.

MidTown Cleveland, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) community and economic development organization pursuing a vision for a connected community in the center of it all, an inclusive place for people to innovate, create, prosper, and live. The neighborhood we serve sits between two of the largest employment centers in Ohio, Cleveland's downtown and University Circle. For decades MidTown was overlooked and forgotten, suffering from crime, blight, demolition, and disinvestment.

Just over a decade ago our fortunes changed and we saw firsthand the impacts of a transformative infrastructure investment. In 2008 the Euclid Corridor HealthLine bus rapid transit line opened along Euclid Avenue, our central spine, and the results have far exceeded our wildest dreams for the neighborhood. The \$200 million transit investment led to a surge of \$350 million of investment and counting along Euclid Avenue in MidTown, including over one million square feet of commercial space, 300 units of housing, a full service grocery store, health care, a new children's museum, renovated concert venues, and a new home to our community foundation.

Despite this investment, the Hough neighborhood just two blocks north of Euclid continues to suffer from poor community health outcomes, high vacancy and foreclosure rates, and high unemployment, disconnected from the investment along Euclid by Chester Avenue, an urban renewal project which cut a tear in the urban fabric to make it easier for suburban commuters to

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get downtown, currently carrying 33,000 cars a day across six lanes of traffic. MidTown's approach has been to engage residents north of Chester in shaping what takes place in the neighborhood, to ensure those residents can benefit from future development. Collectively we have worked with residents to re-weave this tear in the urban fabric, better connect our two neighborhoods, and shape an inclusive future.

The MidTown-Hough Connector project along East 66th exemplifies that approach. Designed through an innovative and inclusive planning process, the Project will connect Hough residents to assets and jobs in MidTown, improve the quality of life for residents and employees, trigger inclusive development in Hough that longtime residents can benefit from, and address climate change, community health, and sustainability. On the east side of Cleveland where infrastructure investment for generations has been focused on commuters along an east-west axis, this north-south investment places residents first. We couldn't be prouder of how the community's voice is imprinted all over this plan, and wholeheartedly and enthusiastically support the City of Cleveland's application

We are additionally excited about how this project will help create hundreds of new accessible jobs. We have been working with our local universities and hospitals to cultivate an inclusive innovation district in the heart of MidTown along East 66th Street, which sits halfway between our anchors downtown and in University Circle. We have assembled 11 acres of land adjacent to East 66th and Euclid for development of our innovation district with the aspiration and intent of becoming the most equitable innovation district in the country. The connectivity provided by East 66th for cyclists, pedestrians, and other multimodal transportation is a piece of essential infrastructure to help us achieve this vision.

We believe the MidTown-Hough Connector Project aligns perfectly with the current Administration's focus on equity in federal infrastructure investments and the criteria outlined in the RAISE program. We are confident it will have the same kind of generational impact the Euclid Corridor HealthLine project did on the City and neighborhood we work in and love.

I hope you will give this 2021 RAISE Discretionary Grant proposal your full attention and strongest consideration. If you have any questions about this project or our commitment to its success, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Epstein".

Jeff Epstein
Executive Director

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