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The Honorable Raymond H. LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Mercer Corridor Project TIGER Grant Application
Seattle, Washington

Dear Secretary LaHood:

We are owners of numerous commercial properties located in and around the Seattle Central Business District (CBD). The health and vitality of our properties and the City of Seattle in general is highly contingent upon the ability of businesses to move people and products efficiently around the Seattle area. The "Mercer Street Mess" is one area that, in its current condition, creates a serious bottleneck in the movement of commuters and freight. There is a tremendous amount of positive development and job creation currently taking place in the area surrounding Mercer Street. It is time to take serious steps to improve the flow of traffic in and through this area to support the economic engine that continues to take shape.

In my opinion the biggest issue confronting the continued health and vitality of the greater Seattle area (the economic engine for the Pacific Northwest) will be the lack of infrastructure improvements required to keep us competitive. Below are the general thoughts behind the Mercer Street Corridor improvements:

Urgency

- The Mercer Corridor is a critical transportation corridor that carries more than 80,000 people a day. It's known as the Mercer Mess because it is a major traffic bottleneck in the Seattle area, impeding access to I-5 and 520, the growing lower Queen Anne and South Lake Union areas, the Seattle waterfront and freight terminals, and the Seattle Center. The Mercer Corridor project is critical to keeping people, goods and services moving in Seattle and throughout the region. With Federal Recovery Act funding, we have the opportunity to create a livable, walkable community and to improve mobility and access in rapidly developing areas of Seattle's Center City.

Economic Competitiveness

- The Mercer Corridor Project supports growth in four key sectors of Washington's economy: Information Technology, Biotechnology, Travel and Tourism, and International Trade. Major employers served by the project include Seattle Center, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, University of Washington School of Medicine, Amgen and numerous other traditional and high-tech media companies. New headquarters complexes for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Amazon.com are currently under construction and are contributing to the cost of the project.
- If the Mercer Corridor Project isn't completed, thousands of jobs may be at risk. Employers will be unlikely to expand their operations without the infrastructure improvements needed to support growth. Delays to freight and commuter mobility will reduce productivity and add to overhead costs.

Jobs

- The Mercer Corridor Project supports the growth of Seattle's Center City. The project itself creates approximately 600 direct construction jobs that will start up with the award of the grant.

Freight

- The Mercer Corridor is an essential freight corridor, linking the Port to the rest of the region. It serves as the main linkage to Port of Seattle facilities on the north side of Elliott Bay, including international cruise terminals, shipping facilities, and industrial fisheries uses. It also is the key connecting route to the Ballard-Interbay Manufacturing and Industrial Center, a regionally recognized industrial area.

Private Partnership

- The project leverages over \$31 million in private contributions from adjacent property owners and creates synergy with public and private investments in the area including Lake Union Park, Amazon.com headquarters, University of Washington Medical Center, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Group Health Cooperative.

Livability

- The project transforms the public infrastructure within the South Lake Union neighborhood, supporting smart growth and creation of a vibrant and sustainable urban center.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Components

- The project builds or improves more than 30 blocks of sidewalks and installs new bicycle lanes that connect to the urban trail system. It completes key segments of the Lake to Bay Trail and the Cheshiahud Trail around Lake Union.

Sustainability

- The Mercer Corridor project reduces greenhouse gas emissions, includes Intelligent Transportation Systems elements, integrates innovative natural drainage features, and supports bicycle, pedestrian, and transit use.

State of Good Repair

- The project restores some of the worst pavement conditions in the City. Currently, the roadway has a "Very Poor" pavement rating. New concrete reconstruction will support heavy freight traffic for the next 40-60 years. Upgrades to major utility infrastructure including water, sewer, electrical, drainage and illumination will meet growing demands.

Safety

- The Mercer Corridor is a high-accident area. The project will improve safety at seven high accident locations, reducing collisions in the corridor. Overall vehicle and pedestrian safety in the corridor will improve with the proposed direct route to and from I-5 via Mercer Street.

Please give your approval to the TIGER grant application for the repair and upgrading of this tired, heavily traveled central corridor.

Regards,



H. Martin Smith, III
President
Martin Smith Inc

cc: Senator Patty Murray
Representative Jim McDermott
Mayor Greg Nickels

Senator Maria Cantwell
Governor Christine Gregoire
Council President Richard Conlin