

August 27, 2009

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

Subject: Mercer Corridor Project TIGER grant application

Dear Secretary LaHood:

I am writing to request the favorable consideration of the City of Seattle's request for a TIGER grant to assist in the funding of the critical Mercer Corridor project. I write as a transportation consultant, as an owner of an engineering firm in a region with critical mobility challenges, as a leader and National Director of the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC), and as a native of the Seattle area. In my capacity as an ACEC director, I had the opportunity to hear your remarks at our Annual Convention at the Grand Hyatt in Washington DC. I was impressed by the administration's focus on multimodal solutions to transportation problems, and the recognition of the need to invest in critical infrastructure, such as our transportation system, to not only facilitate our mobility, but to preserve our economic competitiveness in a global marketplace.

The Problem

The Mercer Corridor has been a recognized problem since the construction of the Interstate 5 (I-5) freeway. The freeway cut a wide north-south swath through the City, disconnected neighborhoods, and ultimately left the connection between I-5 and key destinations to the west (Seattle Center, Waterfront/Port of Seattle, downtown, and other neighborhoods) served by a dysfunctional, circuitous set of street connections that have challenged drivers and added to congestion for over 40 years now. The Mercer Corridor has been the subject of studies literally since the 1960's. Past improvement proposals fell short due to engineering challenges, cost, politics, and limited right of way in key areas. None of the previous concepts made as much sense from a multimodal perspective as the current proposal.

The Solution

The current proposal is a multimodal solution that takes advantage of unique adjacent property circumstances with a single, cooperative owner of many of the key parcels needed to facilitate the improvement. It is the result of a comprehensive outreach process with key stakeholders. The proposed project represents a concept for improvement to all modes of travel, including freight and pedestrians, as well as autos. It integrates the recent investment in a Streetcar crossing, which connects the downtown with the South Lake Union neighborhood and South Lake Union Park. It is a key part of facilitating the reclamation of South Lake Union as a live, work and play neighborhood, creating an urban demonstration of smart growth.

The proposed Mercer Corridor project is more than the sum of its transportation benefits. It will clearly improve safety, enhance pedestrian and bicycle travel through a more vibrant urban grid system, and enhance vehicular and freight accessibility to the west from I-5. More importantly, it will help our region manage growth by enhancing access and mobility to an emerging urban neighborhood with opportunities to live, work and play.

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This project is a prime example of good transportation planning integrated with good land use planning. It directly supports lifestyles that minimize vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and the continued proliferation of green house gases.

The Request for Support – Timing is Critical

The request for funding of this outstanding project comes at a time that reflects the urgency of maintaining the momentum of this project moving forward. Consider:

- The need is urgent, as much of the development that has already occurred in South Lake Union has relied on, and partially funded its share of this critical project.
- The Alaskan way Viaduct replacement project will also depend on an improved, functioning Mercer Corridor to facilitate traffic mitigation during the construction phase of the project, as well as provide a long-term connection between SR 99 and I-5.
- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Campus and Amazon urban campuses are under construction is directly dependent on Mercer Street for access and has substantially contributed to the project funding. Together they represent 1000's of new jobs coming to South Lake Union. Effective regional access, as well as an enhanced pedestrian environment are critical elements of the successful location of these key businesses supporting economic development in our region.
- Other key regional employers also depend on this corridor, including the Port of Seattle, Amgen, Fred Hutchinson Cancer research Center, and the University of Washington Medical Center, to name a few.

In reiterating a request for your funding support of this key project, I would simply summarize by saying that:

- it is the right solution for this location, no question;
- it is well vetted in the public process;
- it facilitates sustainable development and smart growth
- it addresses and enhances all modes of travel in the neighborhood and regionally;
- the timing and need to act now and fund this project is urgent, and relates to the continued economic health of our region.

I believe as you weigh the priorities for the use of our limited resources to meet the needs of our nation, this project will compare favorably to any project under consideration. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Transpo Group, Inc.



Kurt G. Gahnberg
Principal

CC Senator Patty Murray
Senator Maria Cantwell
Representative Jim McDermott
Governor Christine Gregoire