

April 28, 2020

Attn: Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE  
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor BUILD Application

Secretary Chao:

We are writing to you in support of the *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor* BUILD application submitted by the Cities of Eugene and Springfield. As United Front partners from the Eugene-Springfield Oregon area, Lane County and Willamalane Park & Recreation District join Eugene and Springfield in coming together to support this project as a key regional priority. United Front partner agencies share a common understanding of our mutually supportive missions to improve the economic, environmental, and physical health of our community and visitors, upon which our livelihoods all depend.

This project clearly meets the goals of the BUILD 2020 application criteria. In particular, the *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor* investment will greatly improve safety, leverage private investment, increase economic competitiveness, and contribute to a much better quality of life.

Currently, Franklin Boulevard lacks accessible and continuous sidewalks, bike facilities, and a functional storm water system. The current configuration is also problematic for our metro area bus rapid transit system, EmX. Delays in the corridor impact the movement for cars, freight, and increased wait times for pedestrians and cyclists crossing the street. The results are congested roadways, backed up traffic, and unsafe travel conditions.

A priority of Lane County's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan is a safe, healthy county that provides robust, efficient infrastructure. The transformation of Franklin Boulevard will also greatly aid in implementing Eugene and Springfield's goals for safe roadways, which support the goals of Lane County's Transportation Safety Action Plan. Lane County has unfortunately led Oregon in traffic fatalities, but we are actively working to remedy this through investments such as this project that improve safety along our major roadways while still providing efficient movement of goods and people.

Improvements to the Franklin Boulevard corridor are vital to supporting redevelopment of the blighted urban renewal districts along the corridor and are, located in two identified Opportunity Zones. They will generate construction jobs in the short-term and will create sustaining economic opportunity, made possible by both public and private investment. The *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor* calls attention to the groundwork the cities of Eugene and Springfield have laid to give businesses a lead on preliminary site planning with completed design and construction for greater certainty in timing their investments, identifying compatible employment sites, and reducing development timelines.

Franklin Boulevard presents a key economic opportunity for the Lane County region as it is centrally located between downtown Eugene and downtown Springfield. It is positioned in the heart of Lane County between our beaches and the Oregon Cascade Mountains. Our rural and metro areas greatly

benefit from the highly visible access to and from Interstate 5 from Franklin Blvd. Though the roadway is an unattractive, outdated former State highway, redevelopment of private commercial property is emerging along the corridor led by property owners and developers who are investing in our vision for the future of the corridor.

Lane County, Eugene, and Springfield actively collaborate to support our target industries. We share interests and leverage resources in growing technology, food and beverage, advanced wood manufacturing, medical, and tourism industries. Significant economic impacts to our rural and urban communities depend on our success. Many of Lane County's rural residents come to the Eugene-Springfield area and travel along Franklin Boulevard to access employment, services, and recreational opportunities. The development sites within the *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor* play a critical role in strengthening the supply chain of our industries to support the region's economy, provide a good quality of life, and support the livelihoods of residents throughout Lane County.

This project will act as a catalyst for and complement future amenities and recreation along the corridor. Alongside the Franklin project, Willamalane is eager to continue implementation of Willamalane's parks and open space vision for the area, which will greatly improve people's quality of life. This national award-winning vision includes public park blocks amidst 35% of Springfield's much-needed high-density housing development sites to the north of Franklin Boulevard along the Willamette River. The vision also includes the continuation of our region's iconic riverbank path system with a riverfront path, which—like Franklin Boulevard—serves as a critical connection between Eugene and Springfield.

Our partners' request for BUILD funding to construct the critical link along the *Franklin Boulevard Opportunity Zone Corridor* is a regional priority. Eugene and Springfield are clearly positioned to deliver the roadway project on time and on budget, demonstrated by the already completed segment of the project on the east end of the corridor. We are committed to continuing our strong support for the much-needed re-investment in this central part of our region. Please consider our shared vision for this important and collaborative transportation project and award this BUILD grant to our community.

Sincerely,



Heather Buch, Chair

Lane County Board of Commissioners



Greg James, Chair

Willamalane Park and Recreation District Board

