



July 20, 2022

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

**Maine Better
Transportation
Association**

146 State Street
Augusta, Maine 04330

PHONE: 207-622-0526
FAX: 207-623-2928
www.mbtaonline.org

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Maine Better Transportation Association (MBTA) enthusiastically supports the application submitted by Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) for its Bridge Investment Program Planning Grant. MaineDOT would use the funding for its planned Off-System Bridge Investment Program.

MBTA is a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals representing both the private and public sector, committed to improving the quality of life of Maine citizens through advocating for funding of a multimodal transportation infrastructure system. Members include design companies, municipalities, contractors, rail, bus and marine entities, and the state's major airports.

As a large state with many miles and few people to support our transportation network, Maine needs any assistance we can get to make strategic investments to our multimodal transportation system. MaineDOT would use these grant funds to replace off-system local bridges. Their efforts will include innovative materials and construction techniques, but perhaps the most important goal is to invest in critical connections to underserved rural communities. Like so many states, rural parts of Maine face transportation challenges that make it even more difficult to support community sustainability, economic development, and basic needs, like accessing health care. With the workforce development crisis seen in both the public and private sectors, rural communities are at a greater disadvantage if their bridge connections are not up to par. Employers' efforts to hire skilled workers is exacerbated by the lack of safe and vital connections, and workers are obviously impacted as well.

Our members believe there is always room for improvement in project delivery, and we understand that one of the goals of this grant application is to establish consistent criteria that can be developed with important stakeholders involved. Collaboration across all sectors is critical in planning for the proposed program and must include state agencies, municipalities, planning entities and private sector design engineers and contractors who will deliver the projects. We are encouraged that there is considerable local and regional support for this program and are excited about the benefits Maine citizens will enjoy if these critical structures in rural areas are brought up to date.

All stakeholders to transportation connections are far better served when there is reliability and predictability in the planning and execution of projects. One of MaineDOT's goals through this program is to create a more reliable process to replace poor and critical structures, thereby improving the safety and mobility for

residents, workers, and businesses. If the proposed bridge replacement program is funded and successful, it will benefit drivers of any class or type of vehicle.

To sum, any improvement to rural bridges in Maine will provide significant benefit toward maintaining essential connections, moving goods, services, and people across safer and more resilient infrastructure.

MBTA strongly supports MaineDOT's initiative to not only create an inclusive planning process for critical bridge replacements, but to also secure the funding to make these vital improvements a reality. Please strongly consider the MaineDOT's application, so that Maine can finally make some of the safety and economic investments that have eluded us for so long. Thank you so much for your work on improving transportation for everyone across our great country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria R. Fuentes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Maria" being the most prominent.

Maria R. Fuentes
Executive Director
(207) 622-0526
maria@mbtaonline.org