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September 7, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of strong support for the Maine Department of Transportation's (MaineDOT) grant application *U.S. Route 202/Interstate 95 Interchange Bridge Replacement and Pedestrian Safety Improvements Project* ("Project"), requesting U.S. Department of Transportation 2022 Bridge Investment Program (BIP) funding. The application outlines MaineDOT's important plans to replace the Western Avenue Overpass in Augusta that conveys U.S. 202/State Route 17 over Interstate 95. The 67-year-old, 6-lane span carries more than 28,000 vehicles daily over more than 34,000 vehicles daily traveling the interstate below.

The bridge is approaching the end of its useful life and was rated fair/poor condition during the last inspection and will likely be rated in poor condition during the 2023 inspection. Additionally, there is insufficient vertical clearance for safe freight passage on I-95, which makes it vulnerable to being struck which could significantly disrupt traffic at this busy crossing. Furthermore, there are narrow shoulders and functionally-obsolete sidewalks that exist on the current bridge.

The project would include a new bridge with a higher clearance and a number of improvements to the interstate ramps and the adjacent intersection with Whitten Road. The project will also incorporate wider sidewalks and modern, FHWA-compliant crosswalks so vulnerable roadway users can move safely through the project area and will be connected to the adjacent existing sidewalk system.

Currently there is no sidewalk on the south side of Western Avenue from Senator Way to the Whitten Road. Pedestrians who live on the east side of the Western Avenue on-ramp bridge have "beaten a path" on the south side of Western Avenue to get to the supermarket or medical facilities in the Turnpike Mall which is on the corner of Whitten Road and Western Avenue. There is also a restaurant located in this mall and plans are underway for the revitalization of many of the vacant stores in that mall. Pedestrians on the south side of Western Avenue also have to try and cross the eastbound on- and off-ramps with no pedestrian facilities and which, due to its current configuration, provides vehicles with enough space to speed up to access the on-ramp. On the north side of Western Avenue there is an older style "sidewalk" and again no modern pedestrian facilities to cross that westbound ramp. A partially abled person would

have to travel in the Western Avenue shoulder or in the travel way during the winter months due to snow storage needs.

The Project is a MaineDOT priority consistent with BIP goals to: reduce the number of bridges in fair/poor condition that will fall into poor condition in the next three years, decrease the number of bridges that do not meet current geometric design standards and restore a bridge to a state of good repair within its existing right-of-way.

We are pleased that MaineDOT is seeking assistance from USDOT to help fund this critical regional Project and we respectfully request that you fully fund this Project under the BIP discretionary grant program. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark S. O'Brien". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark S. O'Brien
Mayor