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April 14, 2014

The Honorable Anthony R. Foxx
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Foxx:

I am writing to express my strong support for the TIGER 2014 grant application for $25 million submitted jointly by the states of Maine and New Hampshire for construction of the rail portion of a larger project to replace the Sarah Mildred Long (SML) Bridge.

The SML Bridge carries the Route 1 bypass over the Piscataqua River between Kittery, Maine and Portsmouth, New Hampshire. It also carries the Pan-Am Railways line over the river and connects to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNSY), which is responsible for the overhaul, repair and modernization of the Los Angeles class and Virginia class nuclear – powered submarines. The rail portion of the bridge is the only means to service the PNSY with mission-critical materials. The PNSY has over 5100 employees, a $361 million payroll and $67 million in contracted facility services. A June 2012 economic impact analysis noted the base has a $1.6 billion/year overall economic impact for the region. The SML Bridge plays an integral role for the base.

The SML Bridge is currently 74 years old, having been built in 1940. An inspection in 2009 found the bridge to be structurally deficient and functionally obsolete, which caused it to be posted at 20 tons for small pickups and cars only. The truss spans on the bridge are Fracture Critical, meaning that failure of certain steel tension members could result in failure of the entire structure. The bridge has been closed multiple times in recent years due to malfunctions and for unplanned major repairs. It was last closed this past winter (2013) for many hours due to a lift span failure and also last year on April 1, 2013 for emergency repairs due to a tanker allission with the structure. It needs to be replaced, it is unreliable.

Formla funding from FHWA and FRA are not available for the rail portion of this project. Without replacement, we expect the bridge could no longer be maintained in a safe condition, even with major maintenance funding. TIGER 2014 funding cannot be obtained for the rail portion of the bridge, it will likely close by year 2020. This would have dramatic negative effects on the capacity of the I-95 High Level Bridge, which would experience sustained traffic delays on summer weekends and other high traffic volume days. The SML Bridge is the #1 red listed bridge in the state of New Hampshire.

The SML Bridge is important to the economies of Maine and New Hampshire. It plays a critical role for Maine and New Hampshire, being the back-up bridge for the I-95 High Level Bridge. The I-95 HL Bridge and the SML Bridge combined provide over $8.4 billion in economic impacts to Maine annually. With the SML Bridge posted for just cars and light trucks, any temporary closure of the I-95 HL Bridge would result in a 21 mile detour. It also plays an important national security role for the PNSY. This investment will enhance quality of life for the resident of both states, promote economic development, and is one of the only sources of funding to replace the deck that carries rail across the bridge to the PNSY. I respectfully urge your strong consideration of the SML Bridge application for TIGER 2014 funding.

Respectfully,

Christopher D. Holt

Capt. Christopher D. Holt, President
Portsmouth Pilots, Inc.