

512 Kilmer Street
Chattanooga, TN 37404
emholmes@epbfi.com
423-622-0974

April 8, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary, United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20509

RE: City of Chattanooga Wilcox Boulevard Bridge – River-to-Ridge Mobility Project 2022 RAISE Grant Application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I am a retired Dean of Health Sciences, a community advocate, a leader in the Glenwood Neighborhood and serve on the Historic River- to- Ridge Advisory Committee.

I am writing this letter to you on behalf of the residents, neighborhood leaders and business partners in the Historic River-to-Ridge communities in support of the grant application to replace the Wilcox Bridge. This bridge is essential to the residents in the Historic River-to-Ridge area, who are primarily African American-- many of whom are low and moderate income.

The Historic River-to-Ridge neighborhoods are close to downtown Chattanooga. However, transportation to the downtown areas as well as to businesses located on Riverside Drive, Amnicola Highway, Chattanooga State Community College and North Chattanooga remains a challenge. Therefore, the Wilcox Bridge is essential to residents in the Historic River-to-Ridge neighborhoods in accessing these areas. In addition, the Wilcox Bridge serves as a vital means of connecting residents to other needed resources.

As the neighborhoods in the Historic River-to-Ridge area continue to develop, transportation will be a vital part of this planning effort. This is true not only for the residents and businesses in the Historic River-to-Ridge area, but for those driving to and from this area. An excellent example is for those using the Wilcox Tunnel to get to the resources downtown frequently use the Wilcox Bridge. Another reason the Wilcox Bridge is vital is because it provides access to the Riverwalk in Chattanooga.

Unfortunately, there are no bike lanes or safe pedestrian walkways that allow people to cross the rail yard to get to the Riverwalk or take a bike to work at businesses nearby. Many people think the Wilcox Bridge isn't safe. However, it is the only option for many residents in the area to get across the rail yard. It would help my neighbors, who don't own a car, to be able to travel to places without having to hire a cab. Although our transit service does a good job, there can be long waits for the next bus or multiple transfers to get where people want to go.

I've seen firsthand many of the inequities and challenges faced by people in these neighborhoods. This project would definitely be a great step in the right direction. Building a long bridge over a huge freight rail yard is a complex and very expensive operation. This is why we need your help.

I appreciate you considering my letter and request for help through the RAISE grant program. I've talked with many people in the Historic River-to-Ridge area and haven't met anyone yet who doesn't support this project. I also emailed several of my neighbors to ask them what they thought about this project and got answers back regarding their concern for pedestrians' safety in crossing the Wilcox Bridge. We talked a lot about this in our Historic River-to-Ridge Planning process and how devastating it would be if the Wilcox Bridge was closed due to its poor condition.

Your support for a new Wilcox Bridge would mean a great deal to us and we appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Everlena M. Holmes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "H".

Dr. Everlena M. Holmes, Community Advocate