May 29, 2013

The Honorable Raymond H. LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: University of Washington Burke-Gilman Trail TIGER V Application

Dear Secretary LaHood:

The Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board (SBAB) strongly supports the application submitted by the University of Washington (UW) for funding through the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Discretionary Grant program to finance construction of the Burke-Gilman Trail Multi-Modal Connector.

Seattle is a city that increasingly prioritizes walking, cycling, and transit mode choices in addition to the use of individual automobiles. The Burke-Gilman Trail is a key component of the city’s transportation infrastructure connecting bicyclists and pedestrians to routes and destinations both north and south of the UW, including downtown and many of Seattle’s neighborhood centers. It is the most heavily used multi-use trail in the state, both for recreation and for daily transportation. Trail volumes are extremely high and expected to triple over the next two decades as several other major infrastructure projects are completed, including a new light rail station adjacent to the trail and the university. Given this future link to the regional light rail system, adjacency to a number of bus routes, and heavy pedestrian and bicycle commuter use, the Burke-Gilman is essential to the Seattle region.

Currently, the section of the trail owned by the UW experiences overcrowding at peak times of day and presents challenging conditions including busy and unclear intersections, mixing of user types and speeds, and poor pavement conditions. The trail is also too narrow to effectively handle the volume and diversity of users that frequent it on a daily basis. These characteristics compromise both the trail’s efficiency and its safety. In fact, in a 2010 evaluation of the trail’s level of service under FHWA’s Shared-Use Path Level of Service Calculator, this segment was graded as Failing. The proposed UW project will address all of these issues.

SBAB has reviewed the proposed design and believes that this project will be highly valued by the region’s bike commuters and recreational cyclists as well as the UW community of students, staff and faculty. The project will greatly improve the capacity and conditions of this trail segment, ensuring it can be used safely and efficiently.
The Burke-Gilman Trail is a cornerstone of our city’s transportation infrastructure that is used on a daily basis for biking and walking to a variety of destinations including important transit hubs. In a city that has stated goals of significantly increasing the level of bicycle use and increasing both safety and efficiency for bikers of all ages and abilities, reconstructing this critical infrastructure will greatly enhance an important piece of Seattle’s multi-modal transportation system.

For these reasons, SBAB strongly urges your consideration of the University of Washington’s application for TIGER funding.

Sincerely,

Allegra Calder
Chair, Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board

Jessica Szelag
Vice Chair, Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board

Cc: Senator Patty Murray
Senator Maria Cantwell
Governor Jay Inslee
Congressman Jim McDermott
Members of the Seattle City Council
Mayor Mike McGinn, City of Seattle