May 28, 2013

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

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to you in support of the University of Washington’s TIGER V grant funding application for improvements to the Burke-Gilman Trail Multi-Modal Connector in Seattle, Washington.

The 27-mile Burke-Gilman Trail is the most heavily traveled multi-use trail in the State of Washington and interconnects with a county-wide system of trails totaling over 175 miles and planned for over 300 miles. Its apex is at its passing through the University of Washington campus, where a significant density of bike, pedestrian, transit, and other vehicular modes intersect. The University is seeking to make safety, handicap accessibility, and capacity improvement to a 1.7-mile segment of the trail passing through campus.

With several planned improvements in the area immediately around the UW campus recently completed or soon to be completed, the use of the trail by bicyclists and pedestrians alike is expected to increase dramatically. These include the recent and current completion of 1,200 new on-campus student housing units by UW in the immediate vicinity of the trail, the opening of a light rail extension by Sound Transit from Downtown to the University in 2016, and a pipeline of new apartment development by the private sector under construction, permitted, or planned totaling 2,100 units between now and 2017 in the University District alone.

Over the last 10 years, pedestrian trips at UW have grown by 25%, and bike trips by 200%. Over the next 10 years, this trend is expected to continue at an accelerated rate, with a projected increase of 92% in pedestrian trips and 238% in bike trips. The Federal Highway Administration’s level of service ranking of E (very poor) or F (failing) to various points on this segment of the trail in 2010, it underscores the urgency of the need for the planned improvements.
Public investment in this type of multi-modal project pays off. Safe pedestrian and bike corridors such as the Burke Gilman provide low-cost transportation options for students and economically disadvantaged populations to connect to jobs, education, and other basic services. Its recreational use enhances the local quality of life and nurtures a healthier population. And most importantly, having a meaningful role as a major multi-modal commuting corridor reduces carbon emissions and eases the burden on an already over-burdened road system.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to support the University of Washington’s application, and I urge the Department of Transportation to approve TIGER V funding for this critically important project.

Sincerely,

Ada M. Healey
Vice President

cc: Senator Patty Murray
    Senator Maria Cantwell
    Governor Jay Inslee
    Congressman Jim McDermott
    President Michael K. Young, University of Washington
    Todd Timberlake, University of Washington