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August 22, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I am writing in support of the City of Pendleton's request for federal funding to complete the Southgate Interchange Improvements Project. A longstanding priority for our region, this project will connect areas of the community currently divided by a federal interstate and state highway, while addressing significant safety concerns stemming from the current design of the interchange.

Converging at the Southgate Interchange in Pendleton, Interstate 84 (I-84) is the most important east-west freight route in Oregon and US 395 (Southgate) is a major regional north-south freight route serving eastern Oregon. However, the construction of I-84 in the 1960s created a major barrier for access between downtown Pendleton and the residential and commercial areas of the city. While the Southgate Interchange is responsible for facilitating freight and local traffic through each of these corridors, its current design has long failed to meet traffic demands and provide safe access for the community. Options for bike and pedestrian traffic are limited and high traffic flow and topographical challenges create hazardous vehicle backups onto the interstate and along the highway.

Grant funding will address these issues by reconstructing the interchange on the north side of I-84 between Southgate (US 395) and connecting roadways that provide access to and from highly used westbound lanes of the interstate. Improvements will include a separate bike and pedestrian path, as well as ADA-compliant sidewalks and sidewalk ramps and bike lanes in areas that currently have none. The project would also extend an existing local street southeast of the Southgate Interchange for local users that can only cross the barriers of US 395 and I-84 by traveling inefficiently through the intersections of the interchange. The extension of roadway, bike lanes, and sidewalks on this street will also enable the construction of severely needed housing by creating access to approximately 100 acres of undeveloped residential zoned land.

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Federal investment in this project will transform the Southgate Interchange from an obsolete facility into an asset that will provide for the safe, efficient access of all users in the community while enhancing the movement of freight through rural eastern Oregon. We strongly support the City's request and appreciate your consideration of the benefits these improvements would bring to our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. Mark Browning".

Dr. J. Mark Browning, President
Blue Mountain Community College