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July 8, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590-0001

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

I am proud to support the RAISE grant application submitted to you by the City of Oskaloosa, Iowa. The proposed MODES Planning Study project will allow the City of Oskaloosa, Mahaska County and the Mahaska Chamber and Development Group to prepare a plan that will enhance the safety and capacity of the corridor, enhance safe and efficient freight transport avoiding urban areas, improve response times by emergency vehicles to provide essential services, including healthcare providers, a safe route for students from William Penn University and will bolster pedestrian and bicyclist amenities, supporting both increased community vibrancy and better health outcomes. Furthermore, the study will include determining the potential infrastructure necessary for future implementation of a high-speed fiber and broadband network, which will position our community to be a 21st century leader.

This planning study is an important component for developing the transportation infrastructure, connecting the north and south parts of the community while reducing the significant truck traffic that currently has to navigate state highways through the urban and residential parts of Oskaloosa. This not only creates safety concerns for the residents, but also is an impediment to fast and efficient movement of goods and products that are locally produced and exported across the United States and globally. This planning study will evaluate various alternative routes to existing and proposed bypasses that will allow the community to better plan for economic, industrial and residential development impacting areas of persistent poverty (Census Tracts 9505 and 9507). The plan will also evaluate numerous safety, environmental improvements to the area in addition to assessing various pedestrian and bike trails and access improvements.

This study will not just focus on improving the transportation infrastructure, but will also focus on improving the quality of life to residents and business by evaluating the infrastructure necessary for future implementation of a high-speed fiber and broadband network. This plan will position the City of Oskaloosa to plan for economic development and better quality of life for the citizens of Oskaloosa and Mahaska County.

The MODES Planning Study is a necessary and worthwhile investment which will have a profound effect on the future viability of the area. Consistent with the goals of the RAISE grant program, this project will improve safety, environmental justice and social equity, provide good

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a state of repair, foster innovation, and provide a much-needed boost to economic vitality for not only Oskaloosa, but the surrounding region as well. For these reasons I fully support this project.

I would appreciate your thorough and expeditious consideration for this request, in accordance with all rules and regulations. Please forward your response to Emily Gaard in my Des Moines office at 733 Federal Building, 210 Walnut Street, Des Moines, IA 50309 or by phone at (515) 284-4574. Emily may also be reached by email at Emily_Gaard@ernst.senate.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joni". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial "J" and a small dot above the "i".

Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

JE/EG

MAHASKA/OSKALOOSA DRIVING ECONOMIC SUCCESS (MODES) PLANNING STUDY

RAISE GRANT PROJECT BENEFITS



STATE OF GOOD REPAIR

Existing highways built in the 1960s, approaching end of useful life.



25% HIGHER

IMPROVED SAFETY

Crash rates on the truck routes through the City of Oskaloosa are 25% higher than the Statewide average for Urban Areas. Safer access for student of William Penn University, middle, and high school students.

ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Current manufacturing companies in the area deliver goods to over 80 countries worldwide. Additional economic development potential with better access to developable land for both City and County. Smooth movement of freight will benefit. Currently, truck traffic slows down as they traverse through urban neighborhoods.

ECO

QUALITY OF LIFE

Reduced vehicle miles traveled will result in cleaner air. Improved response times to emergency vehicles. Reduction of heavy vehicles through the heart of town will improve multi-modal traffic and all but remove the existing barrier to safe pedestrian movement to promote the vision set within the central business district.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Cleaner air from reduced emissions. Planning study will consider environmental and historical impacts to the community.

INNOVATION

Broadband access to rural areas.

PARTNERSHIP

City and County are joint applicants. Mahaska Chamber and Development Group and Iowa DOT are partners and supporting the study.

PROJECT READINESS

The NW bypass is already under design; the Iowa DOT has done some planning for the SE Connector. City, County, and the Mahaska Chamber are currently funding a certified site and limited access to the local connector between IA 23 and US 63.

SPECIFIC GOALS OF THE STUDY

Route Performance: Reduce heavy vehicular traffic through residential and business districts.

Economic Vitality: There is a current need for existing businesses to grow.

Economic Consequences: Having a plan in a place incentivizes controlled industry growth.

Funding: Prioritize areas to funding schedules that is feasible.

Social Impact: Improve transportation, community connection, and economic opportunity for Census Tracts 9505 and 9507, identified as Areas of Persistent Poverty.

Environmental Impacts: Mitigation disruption of wetlands, historical places, threatened and endangered species, and provide improved surface water quality, cleaner air as well as automated vehicle considerations.



For media info visit
bit.ly/MODES_2021