



June 28, 2021

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary of Transportation
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Support for the City of Oskaloosa's **Oskaloosa Bypass Planning Study** RAISE Grant Application

Dear Secretary Chao:

The Mahaska Chamber and Development Group enthusiastically supports the City of Oskaloosa's application for funding through the US Department of Transportation's RAISE Transportation Discretionary Grant Program.

The Mahaska Chamber's mission is to provide vision and coordination in growing the economy to promote, improve and enhance the diverse business environment and quality of life in the Mahaska Community. We are a member of the East Central Iowa Transportation Coalition and have been actively supporting and investing in transportation infrastructure planning and development through that partnership since 2008.

A strong transportation network is imperative to our success. Currently, crash rates for the City of Oskaloosa are 20% higher than the statewide average for urban areas. Our member industries and businesses, who export to more than 180 countries worldwide and rely heavily on truck traffic to ship and receive goods, support development of a system of bypasses along the east and west of the City of Oskaloosa to ensure the safe, efficient movement of people and goods for decades to come.

The RAISE-supported planning study will allow the City of Oskaloosa, Mahaska County and the Mahaska Chamber and Development Group to prepare a plan that will:

- a. evaluate the safety and capacity of the corridor;
- b. enhance safe and efficient freight transport avoiding urban areas;
- c. diminish congestion in the downtown increasing community vibrancy;
- d. improve response times for emergency vehicles to essential services, including healthcare providers;
- e. provide a safe pedestrian route for William Penn University students crossing US 63; and,
- f. bolster pedestrian and bicyclist amenities including the 15-mile trail that encircles the Oskaloosa community.

The Mahaska Community economy is driven by advanced manufacturing. In fact, **we rank second in the state in terms of percentage of workforce employed in manufacturing.** Further, the majority of our industries are hometown headquarter industries who export to 180 countries on 6 continents worldwide. We have a high rate of patent development and our product lifecycles continue to be emerging and growing which contributes to the stability of the area.

For the Mahaska Chamber and our businesses, the RAISE-supported reconstruction project will address safety concerns by redirecting truck traffic from the residential area on 15th Street which heavy truck traffic from our Industrial Park area are using to receive deliveries and ship product.

The current situation is hazardous for vehicle, bike, and pedestrian traffic in the residential area. It is also an inefficient route for businesses who could access the Industrial Park using a Southeast Connector to access markets to the east and north of Oskaloosa. In addition, the data collected highlights that this area is also defined as an area of persistent poverty.

Removing freight traffic from within the city will reduce physical barriers between neighborhoods, increase equity of populations negatively impacted by the existing traffic, and improve connection with areas of persistent poverty in the southern one half of our community.

This planning study will evaluate potential additional bypass routes in addition to the existing and proposed bypasses that can allow the community to better plan for economic, industrial, and residential development. The plan will also evaluate numerous safety and environmental improvements to the area in addition to evaluating various pedestrian and bike trails and access improvements.

We are pleased to support the City of Oskaloosa's RAISE Grant application for the **Oskaloosa Bypass Planning Study**. This project is important to the economic vitality of the region; it will improve the quality of life and allow the City and Mahaska County to improve the condition of key infrastructure.

Sincerely,



Andy McGuire, Board President
Mahaska Chamber & Development Group



Deann De Groot, Executive Director
Mahaska Chamber & Development Group