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*Bringing Together
State Leaders from
Across the Region
to Advocate
for Passenger Rail
Improvements*

The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission is a nine-state interstate compact commission that promotes, coordinates and supports regional improvements to passenger rail service. Our member states include Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wisconsin.

November 13, 2017

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
West Building – 1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

We are writing to express the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission's (MIPRC) support of the Public-Private Partnership Joint Venture of the Missouri Department of Transportation, Bi-State Development Agency and the Terminal Railroad Association of St Louis (TRRA) in their 2017 U.S. DOT INFRA grant application for the replacement of the Merchants Bridge. The project includes replacing the main spans, reconstructing the east approach and seismically retrofitting the river piers. The Merchants Bridge, a 127-year-old bridge spanning the Mississippi River between Venice, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri, is a critical asset of the nation's freight network that supports:

- Six Class I railroads operating in the United States, the TRRA and Amtrak
- The nation's third largest inland port
- Two international cargo airports: St. Louis – Lambert International Airport and MidAmerica St. Louis Airport
- Four Interstate Highways: I-44, I-55, I-64 and I-70

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With the USDOT estimating a 2 ½ times increase in the demand for freight and passenger rail transportation, it is essential that the Chicago - St Louis corridor operate at the highest level of efficiency possible. Merchants Bridge is a key asset in this endeavor. In addition, by seismically retrofitting the supporting piers, the project will significantly increase the resiliency of the nation's rail network.

Although efforts have been made to strengthen the bridge over time, engineers cannot provide certainty as to the amount of time the main spans will be further restricted or if and when the bridge must be taken out of service completely. They do agree, however, that the safe remaining service life for the current loads is measured in years, not decades. Neglecting to address the bridge's structural problems now will cause large disruptions in the nation's multi-modal freight network and passenger travel options and could pose a significant safety hazard for trains crossing the bridge.

A reconstructed Merchants Bridge would also improve the efficiency of Mississippi River crossings for Amtrak's *Lincoln Service* and *Texas Eagle* service, and, according to TRRA, reduce Mississippi River crossing times by five minutes per crossing.

MIPRC Support for Merchants Bridge INFRA Application 11/13/17 (cont.)

Lincoln Service connects Chicago and St. Louis, while *Texas Eagle* service connects Chicago with San Antonio via St. Louis. Based on data from the National Association of Railroad Passengers, there was an annual average of approximately 190,000 boardings and arrivals in St. Louis for passengers using *Lincoln Service* from 2014 to 2016 (station-specific data for *Texas Eagle* is not available).

This project was selected as the St. Louis Regional Freightway's number one infrastructure project by members that represent manufacturing, logistics, industrial real estate and all modes of transportation. East – West Gateway Council of Governments, the St. Louis region Metropolitan Planning Organization Board of Directors unanimously supported this project as the number one regional project priority. Both the State of Missouri and the State of Illinois have recognized the importance of this project.

The application for this project demonstrates significant leveraging of private sector resources and requests the necessary funds to move quickly to construction. This project will leverage \$1.67 for every federal dollar invested and is a national model for a public private partnership. In addition, this project has received environmental clearances, is 100% engineered and will be ready to construct in 2018. It is a prime example of how USDOT financing programs, in this instance the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing or RRIF, can be coupled with the INFRA program to address the nation's most critical infrastructure needs.

Given the many public benefits and economic opportunities associated with this project, MIPRC urges you to support this grant. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you on this and other opportunities to identify and address transportation needs in the St. Louis region, the Midwest and beyond.

Sincerely,



Beth McCluskey
MIPRC Chair



Tim Hoeffner
MIPRC Vice Chair



Rep. Sharon Negele
MIPRC Financial Officer



Laura Kliewer
MIPRC Director