

January 31, 2018



The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of the Secretary
West Building – 1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

On behalf of the 100+ members of the I-49 International Coalition (cities, counties, Chambers of Commerce, associations, businesses and individuals throughout Mid-America), we are writing to express support for the INFRA grant application by the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC) to complete a 19-mile section of Interstate 49 that will cross the Arkansas-Missouri border and connect two already completed sections of I-49 in Arkansas and Missouri.

We call this project The Arkansas-Missouri Connector, and it will improve safety, reduce travel time and relieve the intense traffic congestion in Northwest Arkansas, while facilitating the expansion of that area's explosive growth into the rural counties of Southwest Missouri.

Funding this grant application will also complete the I-49 connection from Fort Smith, Arkansas to Kansas City, Missouri, some 290 miles, and will connect this section of the north-south I-49 with existing east-west Interstates I-40 at Fort Smith, I-44 at Joplin, MO and I-70 at Kansas City.

I-49 from Shreveport, Louisiana to Kansas City, Missouri was designated High Priority Corridor #1 as part of ISTEA in 1991. The I-49 International Coalition has been collaborating since 2002 with highway and government officials in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri, and with FHWA, and much progress has been made in spite of highway funding challenges at the state and federal levels. With the completion

of the Arkansas-Missouri Connector through funding of this INFRA grant application from NWARPC, two-thirds of the miles in this High Priority Corridor #1 will be complete. We will then be able to focus on the last remaining link, from Texarkana to Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Funding this INFRA grant for the NWARPC will also serve as a splendid example of Regional cooperation, as the Arkansas DOT is agreeing to fund the five miles of this Arkansas-Missouri project that lies in Missouri.

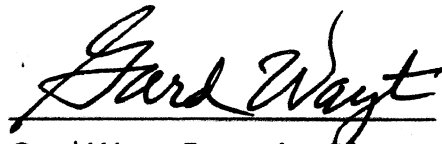
In the bigger picture, completion of the entire I-49 will serve our nation through international connections. As the enclosed map shows, the completion of I-49 will create a 1,700-mile **International Trade Corridor** from Manitoba, Canada through the heartland of America to New Orleans and other ports of the Gulf Coast – and, through the expanded Panama Canal, to points throughout the world. Along the way, this north-south route will intersect nine existing east-west Interstates, thus creating a comprehensive transportation grid that will enhance the movement of food, goods, energy and people to and from anywhere in Mid-America and the rest of the world.

Thank you for your consideration of this grant application that is important to the future of Interstate 49. The Arkansas-Missouri Connector is shovel-ready on both sides of the border, and we hope to see you at that border in the near future to participate in a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Very truly yours,



Curt Green, President



Gard Wayt, Executive Director

Enclosure: "Y" Map