



RIVERSPORT™

Friday, July 15, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

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RE: Bridge Investment Program (BIP) for the I-35 Bridge Replacement Project in Oklahoma County

Honorable Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the RIVERSPORT Foundation, I am writing to voice our organization's strong support of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's (ODOT) application for the Bridge Investment Program (BIP) Grant to assist with the I-35 Bridge Replacement Project. This project is a marquis project in the downtown core of Oklahoma City. The I-35 bridges are perilously close to becoming structurally deficient at any future bridge inspection as three of the key inspection criteria currently carry a rating of 5 and if any of them drop to a rating of 4 then the bridges will be structurally deficient.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of this I-35 bridge replacement project is the tremendous community impacts that the bridge replacement will offer the Oklahoma City community. Since these bridges were built over three decades ago, the Oklahoma River has been dammed and is now host to elite national and international rowing and canoe/kayak races. In addition, near the edge of the river is the new RIVERSPORT complex which is home to a US Olympic and Paralympic Training Site.

The current I-35 bridges have 10 piers in the Oklahoma River which limits the boat racing from being classified at the highest level. A primary goal of major stakeholders in this project is that the new I-35 bridge have no piers in the water and span the entire Oklahoma River. This brings additional cost to the project but it is paramount that this is the design to support the tremendous investment the community stakeholders have made in and along the Oklahoma River. It is very unique to have an urban, Olympic-class river race course in the United States. With a clear-span bridge, the Oklahoma River can make a significant local economic impact upon Central Oklahoma at this unique "Crossroads of America" location.

The I-35 bridges cross the Oklahoma River at the gateway to Downtown Oklahoma City, in between two world class, differentiating attractions for Oklahoma City – RIVERSPORT and the First Americans Museum. Over \$300 million has already been invested in these two iconic internationally-known destinations for the State of Oklahoma, and have become a source of pride for the citizens of the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, making significant impacts upon quality of life and the local economy.



U.S. OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC
TRAINING SITE
RIVERSPORT OKLAHOMA CITY



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Based on the Interchange Capacity Study and Long Span Bridge Study, there is local momentum and support to construct a long span bridge over the Oklahoma River. The current I-35 NB and SB bridges are 803 feet in length, with eight approximate 100' spans. The new long span bridges would be 820 feet in length, with one 520 foot signature span and three 100 foot conventional back spans. The new long span bridges would provide six 12 foot lanes in each direction, 12 foot inside shoulders, and outside shoulders varying between 12'-0" and 18'-10". Currently, the I-35 bridges have four 10 foot lanes in each direction, but the travel lanes and shoulder widths are inadequate and both bridges are functionally obsolete.

Along the edge of downtown Oklahoma City runs the scenic Oklahoma River, a 7-mile-long waterway and 13 miles of paved trails that has reinvented outdoor recreation in the capital city. The new I-35 bridge would accommodate bicycle and pedestrians on the bridge and separated from traffic with a concrete barrier. Access to the paved trails on both the sides of the river will be provided off of the new I-35 bridge. This will improve the access to the recreational trails and provide direct bicycle and pedestrian access in and out of downtown Oklahoma City. The new bridge and multimodal connections would also provide unique and needed access to the largely Hispanic Capitol Hill district and Historically Disadvantaged Community located on the south side of the Oklahoma River.

The RIVERSPORT Foundation strongly supports the I-35 Bridge Replacement Project in Oklahoma County for its vital contribution to the region, state and nation. It will also support the International Olympic Movement by providing a major new water sports venue in the middle of America. We strongly urge your support of full funding for the project. Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to call on us should you have questions or if you require additional information.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Knopp
Executive Director



U.S. OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC
TRAINING SITE
RIVERSPORT OKLAHOMA CITY

800 RIVERSPORT Dr.

Oklahoma City, OK 73129

P 405.552.4040