

Thursday, February 22, 2024

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

RE: Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant opportunity for the **Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project**.

Honorable Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the Oklahoma Forestry Association, I am writing to voice our organization's strong support of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's (ODOT) application for the RAISE Grant for Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project. This critical project will upgrade a six-mile section of US-259 in the newly formed City of Hochatown in rural, southeast Oklahoma. The Hochatown region has boomed in recent years, drawing visitors, tourists, and new businesses to the area, which is adjacent to Broken Bow Lake and Beavers Bend State Park. Recreational visitors from across Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas stream into the community, especially during weekends and holidays, drawn to the rustic setting and the countless restaurants, recreational opportunities, and tourist attractions that line US-259. The area is also home to multiple industries, including agriculture and logging, which contribute to the traffic on US-259 through Hochatown.

Unfortunately, with so much growth and economic development, traffic congestion and safety challenges have increased. The current, two-lane roadway lacks shoulders or turn lanes, making vehicle movements challenging across the corridor. Particularly as large recreational vehicles and others towing trailers operate in the corridor, delays and rear-end collisions have become frequent. Pedestrians or those traveling on bicycle also struggle to safely cross US-259 or travel along the corridor.

The Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project would alleviate these challenges by expanding the roadway capacity, along with improved access management. ODOT will achieve ADA access by providing sidewalks and a potential multiuse pathway. Other project improvements include intersection safety improvements, new curbs and gutters, new shoulders, and speed reduction signage.

The Oklahoma Forestry Association strongly supports the Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project in McCurtain County for its vital contribution to the region, state, and nation. 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,

Randy Holeman, President
Oklahoma Forestry Association