

July     , 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary of Transportation  
United States Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program (WCPP) Grant Application Support for the “Oregon's I-5 Wildlife Overcrossing Project: Reconnecting the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument”

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Please accept this letter on behalf of the City of Ashland, Oregon, stating our support for the Oregon Department of Transportation’s (ODOT) Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program (WCPP) grant application for the project entitled "Oregon's I-5 Wildlife Overcrossing Project: Reconnecting the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument.”

ODOT has partnered with the Southern Oregon Wildlife Crossing Coalition, a local group of 17 organizations and state and federal agencies to plan for this Interstate 5 overpass to improve both wildlife and driver safety. The Coalition raised funds in 2021 and finalized a Conceptual Design Study that identified the Mariposa Preserve, inside the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, as the best site for an overpass. With funnel fencing, this site will help wildlife cross the 4-lane freeway and decrease wildlife-vehicle collisions on this steep, windy stretch of highway. This overpass will be the first wildlife overpass on Interstate 5 in Oregon.

This project supports our local rural economy that traditionally has higher unemployment than both the state of Oregon and nation. We have just over 16,000 residents and have been hard hit in the past several years with wildfire and pervasive smoke for weeks during summer months. Ashland is home to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival which had to shut for two seasons because of COVID and smoke impacts, leading to two abysmal tourist seasons. The impact to our tourist economy has been severe both financially and emotionally. Our community is renown for our outdoor lifestyle, proximity to the Pacific Crest Trail, love of fish and wildlife, and increasing concern for climate change impacts on habitat and animal movement. The Oregon I-5 Wildlife Overcrossing Project supports both the culture and economy of our Ashland community.

Thank you for your fair consideration of this ODOT Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program grant. The City of Ashland fully supports the grant request and looks forward to working with ODOT and the Southern Oregon Wildlife Crossing Coalition to assure the planning and design are right-sized and meet the needs of our southern Oregon community and wildlife neighbors.

Sincerely,

Tonya Graham  
Mayor