

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY BOARD OF PLANNING

PLANNING DIVISION
2825 3RD AVENUE NORTH, 4TH FLOOR

BILLINGS, MONTANA 59101

PHONE: (406)247-8676 FAX: (406) 657-8327



May 7, 2020

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

RE: Letter of Support for the 2020 BUILD Discretionary Grant: Northwest Billings Connector and Marathon Trail, Billings Montana

Dear Secretary Chao:

I am writing this letter to express our support for the City of Billings Montana Northwest Billings Connector and Marathon Trail request for 2020 DOT BUILD Discretionary grant funds. The Planning Board is an integral part of the Billings Metropolitan Planning Organization, representing the City and County in reviewing and recommending transportation planning and project programming for Billings and the surrounding areas to our elected officials.

The Northwest Billings Connector and Marathon Trail project is a multimodal system of roadway and separated non-motorized parkways located in northwest Billings. The Northwest Connector is a future roadway link to/from the Billings Heights to Billings West End. The two non-motorized parkway segments, located at the terminus of the Northwest Connector, are vital connections to the citywide non-motorized system.

The Planning Board has reviewed and approved multiple studies that identify this program of projects, including the Rims to Valley Bike/Ped Feasibility Study. The Planning Board also approved the 2017 Billings Area Bikeway and Trail Master Plan Update to improve mobility and recreation opportunities in the Billings Community.

Our beautiful Rimrocks create a challenging obstacle to providing safe and connected routes for our community. The Connector will provide the motorized and non-motorized route for a safe connection between the Heights and West End, and the Stagecoach segment will provide the needed route from the top of the Rimrocks to the Valley below. The Skyline segment will feature stunning vistas of the Billings skyline and mountains in the distance. The project is intended to provide the following benefits:

- Vehicle and non-motorized alternatives to the congested artery of 6th Avenue N./4th Avenue N./3rd Avenue N./1st Avenue N. that currently provides the primary connectivity between areas of Billings and Billings Heights.
- Increased connectivity that addresses the natural barrier created by the Rimrocks, a 600-foot sandstone cliff created by the shoreline of an ancient ocean.

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- Separate facilities to reduce conflicts between motorized and non-motorized modes within the compressed artery that connects Billings and the Billings Heights. Present conflicts are observed in vehicle-pedestrian and/or vehicle-bicycle crashes that result in injuries, including fatalities.
- Dramatically improved access to primary residential and employment areas adjacent to the Billings International Airport.
- Enhanced active transportation and recreation-based economic opportunities.

The City of Billings, non-profit Billings TrailNet, the Billings Chamber of Commerce, and Big Sky Economic Development have made substantial investments totaling more than thirteen million dollars into the Northwest Billings Connector and Marathon Trail over the course of several years. Partners funded planning studies, preliminary engineering, and construction of initial project phases. Funding from the 2020 BUILD Discretionary grant will complete the Northwest Billings Connector and connect existing sections of the Marathon Trail to create nearly 25 miles of continuous parkways.

Construction of the Northwest Billings Connector will greatly benefit the Billings and Yellowstone County and we are writing to express our support.

Please give this 2020 BUILD Discretionary Grant proposal your full attention, and if I can answer anything further, please let me know. I may be reached at wwoods1945@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Woody Woods
Planning Board
Yellowstone County Board of Planning