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April 6, 2020

Secretary Elaine L. Chao
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

As the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for Pinellas County, I am pleased to offer this letter of support for Pinellas County's application for the Dunedin Causeway Bridges project for funding through the Department of Transportation's National Infrastructure Investment BUILD Transportation grant. The project involves the construction of a tide relief bridge and mid-level movable bridge in place of the two existing bridges, which are the sole connection from the City of Dunedin to Honeymoon Island State Park. The completion of the project will address critical structural and functional deficiencies of the existing bridges while supporting improved accessibility and economic opportunity for residents, businesses and visitors along the Dunedin Causeway.

Located on the Gulf Coast of Florida, Pinellas County is home to nearly one million residents, with an additional 15.5 million visitors each year, including seasonal residents and tourists. The City of Dunedin and Honeymoon Island State Park bring tremendous value to Pinellas County and the Tampa Bay region, both economically and as a favorite destination for citizens and visitors to enjoy natural Florida. Honeymoon Island State Park has the highest volume of visitors among Florida's State Parks.

Honeymoon Island State Park is enriched with serene beaches, bountiful wildlife and natural vegetation and is also the ferry terminal for access to another unspoiled state park, Caladesi Island. Honeymoon Island has a direct annual economic impact of \$150 million to the county. The Dunedin Causeway located along the existing bridges is a popular area for citizens and visitors to enjoy recreational activities such as walking, jogging and biking on the designated trail and swimming, kayaking, paddle boarding, and fishing in the intracoastal waterways. The Causeway is also home to several small business vendors that support these recreational activities or offer food and beverage options. The new bridge design will better accommodate the outdoor activities residents and visitors partake in when visiting the Causeway, with wider bicycle lanes, sidewalks and a spur of the iconic Pinellas Trail.

Funding for the Dunedin Causeway Bridges project through this BUILD Transportation grant will complement efforts underway through the existing partnership between Pinellas County, the State of Florida, the City of Dunedin and Forward Pinellas to advance an innovative Transportation Systems Management & Operations (TSMO) project for advanced traffic management, congestion mitigation and safety improvements along the Dunedin Causeway. I urge you to consider the tremendous economic, environmental and social benefits tied to more resilient and structurally sound bridges on the Causeway.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Whit Blanton', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Whit Blanton, FAICP
Executive Director