

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 1, 2017

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
West Building – 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

We are writing to express our strong support for the 2017 INFRA grant application for the replacement of the Merchants Bridge. This \$200 million public-private partnership is a joint venture of the Missouri Department of Transportation, Bi-State Development Agency and the Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis (TRRA). The project includes replacing the main spans of the bridge, reconstructing the east approach, and seismically retrofitting the river piers.

The Merchants Bridge, located in America's heartland, impacts national freight movement, as well as the future of freight and the future of farmers, manufacturers and distributors who depend on it. This 127 year-old bridge spanning the Mississippi River between Venice, Illinois, and St. Louis, Missouri, is a critical asset of the nation's freight network that supports the following:

- Six Class I railroads, the TRRA, and Amtrak;
- The nation's third largest freight hub;
- The nation's third- and eighth-largest inland ports;
- Two international cargo airports: St. Louis Lambert International Airport in Missouri and MidAmerica St. Louis Airport in Illinois; and
- Four interstate highways: 1-44, 1-55, 1-64 and 1-70.

This project will help reduce stress on the National Highway Freight Network that is estimated to grow by 40 percent over the next three decades and is set to generate billions of dollars in cost savings. A reconstructed and modern Merchants Bridge will take almost 200,000 truckloads off the National Highway Freight Network, eliminating 74 million vehicle miles traveled and saving \$63 million in roadway damage over 20 years. With the U.S. Department of Transportation estimating a 150 percent increase in the demand for freight and passenger rail transportation, it is essential that the Chicago- St. Louis corridor operate at the highest level of efficiency possible, and the Merchants Bridge is a key asset in this endeavor. The Merchants Bridge will lead to nearly \$4.7 billion in net benefits over the next 20 years and approximately \$6.6 billion over the next 30 years.

This project demonstrates significant leveraging of private sector resources with nearly two-thirds of the total cost of the project covered by private funds. This project will leverage \$1.67 for every federal dollar invested and is a national model for a public-private partnership. In addition, this project has received environmental clearances, completed 100 percent of the engineering and will be ready for construction in 2018. Over the four years of construction, the

proposed bridge replacement will create an estimated 135 full-time jobs and support \$9.4 million in wages.

Given the many public benefits and economic opportunities associated with this project, we urge you to support this INFRA grant application for the replacement of Merchants Bridge. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you on this and other opportunities to identify and address transportation needs in the St. Louis region, the Midwest and beyond.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Claire McCaskill
United States Senator



Roy Blunt
United States Senator