

April 8, 2022

Secretary Pete Buttigieg  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE  
Washington, DC 20590



**Re: Madera 41 South Expressway Project, RAISE Grant Application**

Honorable Secretary Buttigieg:

The San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Agencies' Directors' Committee is writing to express our strong support for Madera County's application to the RAISE Program for the Madera 41 South Expressway Project (Project).

This Project is a collaborative effort with Caltrans and will improve approximately 4.5 miles of SR 41 and is necessary to modernize a rural highway into a facility that provides safe and efficient traffic operations for our region. This request is for \$25 million, which will be leveraged with \$26 million through local Developer Impact Fees and local Tax Increment to improve this corridor. The County is also obtaining a Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan to ensure timely construction.

The SR 41 Expressway project is located north of the Fresno-Madera County border in one of the fastest-growing communities in Madera County and the San Joaquin Valley. In addition, SR 41 provides access to several rural, disadvantaged, and remote communities leading into the Sierra Nevada. It is a crucial commute corridor between rural eastern Madera County and employment centers in urban valley communities. Nationally, this corridor helps to transport the agricultural commodities of the San Joaquin Valley to rail, freight, and port terminals for worldwide distribution and is also the most utilized travel facility used by local, state, national, and international visitors to Yosemite National Park each year.

As with many rural corridors in California, this route serves as a reliable primary and alternative evacuation route for communities living in nearby high-risk fire zones. In the last four years, seven wildfires greater than 5,000 acres required SR 41 to be used as an evacuation route. As wildfire seasons in California continue to become more severe and deadly, these primary evacuation routes must be improved to sustain access for residents to escape the fires and for emergency personnel to access them.

This Project is vital to Madera County residents and is a critical infrastructure project that the community has selected as part of the region's preferred Sustainable Community Strategy. This Project is part of a long-range community vision to help Madera County reduce harmful emissions, improve traveler safety, and support a robust and vibrant economy.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

Ahron Hakimi  
Executive Director for the Kern Council of Governments  
Chair of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Agencies' Directors' Committee

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