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January 18, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Madera County Transportation Commission supports the application of the County of Madera to the United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) competitive grant program for the Madera 41 South Expressway Project (Project). If awarded, the funding will allow Caltrans and its partners to deliver a meaningful project and advance our region's smart, sustainable growth goals.

This Project is a collaborative effort between Caltrans, Madera County, and the local property owners along State Route 41 (SR 41). The Project 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 \$20 million, which will be leveraged with \$47 million of local funds. The County is also obtaining a Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan to ensure timely construction that is scheduled to begin in 2024.

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.

This segment of SR 41 is currently one lane in each direction. The demands of the corridor causes significant congestion-related travel delay, exacerbated by growth in through travel and the area's households and employment centers, including two large

Member Agencies: County of Madera, City of Madera, City of Chowchilla

regional medical facilities. This Project will provide crucial roadway safety improvements and congestion relief at a heavily utilized regional travel convergence point. Safety improvements will involve reducing conflict points caused by unprotected left-hand turns, widening of shoulders, and developing a center median to provide separation between opposing travel directions.

The national importance of this route cannot be understated as SR-41 is the busiest of four entrances to Yosemite National Park visited by four and a half million people each year. It also supports the transport of agricultural goods from one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. In 2020 Madera County was ranked 18th in agricultural production in the United States, and as such, the economic impact of supporting infrastructure reaches far beyond Madera.

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.

The Madera County Transportation Commission strongly supports the Madera 41 South Expressway project. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

XXX, Chair
Madera County Transportation Commission