



Wildlands Conservancy

7/11/2019

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

Re: United States Department of Transportation, Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development (BUILD)
Grant 2019: Riverside Drive Multimodal Revitalization Corridor Project

Dear Secretary Chao:

Wildlands Conservancy is writing this letter to offer our support for the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission's request for a 2019 BUILD grant. The grant funding is imperative to the implementation of the more than \$50 million Riverside Drive Multimodal Revitalization Corridor project.

The collaboration of more than 20 local, public, private and non-profit organizations, Riverside Drive will be a 3.25-mile project that reclaims a vacant rail bed to become a centerpiece of a more than \$300 million brownfields redevelopment project known as the Waterfront, in the City of Allentown.

The two-lane thoroughfare, paired with a 10-foot hiking and biking commuter trail, will provide the connective tissue for a project that will include a Riverwalk, public plazas, floating docks and a Main Street through an office and housing development on the former site of the long-closed Lehigh Structural Steel.

The project's ADA accessible design connects Allentown residents, commuters, recreational trail users and tourists from established commercial and mixed-use developments to the new cultural, recreational and smart growth redevelopment projects occurring along Allentown's waterfront.

It will close Pennsylvania's highest priority trail gap, providing a critical commuting link in the 165-mile Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Trail network and offering an alternative travel option to regional trail systems. It improves connectivity between rural and urban areas of the Lehigh Valley and eastern Pennsylvania, providing a new commuting corridor to job centers, while strengthening the spine of the region's recreational trail network.

As the region's premiere nonprofit land trust, Wildlands has a legacy of protecting land and connecting people to nature for over 45 years. We greatly value the Lehigh River as an important resource for the Lehigh Valley and are encouraged by the efforts of this public-private partnership to bring people back to the River through Allentown's waterfront. The connections created through this potential grant are critical to the region's growing trail network and will provide more multi-modal opportunities for residents and visitors to the Lehigh Valley.

We offer our support for a project we believe will not only provide greater access to all residents, but continue the rebirth of the Lehigh Valley's urban core.

Sincerely,

Christopher Kocher
President

