



STATE OF MINNESOTA

Office of Governor Tim Walz

75 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. ♦ Suite 130 ♦ Saint Paul, MN 55155-1611

July 27, 2022

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

Subject: Letter of Support – Blatnik Bridge Reconstruction Project Bridge Investment Program (BIP)
Funding Application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the State of Minnesota, I am pleased to submit this letter of support for the joint Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Transportation application for a grant to help fund the Blatnik Bridge Reconstruction Project under the Bridge Investment Program (BIP).

The Blatnik Bridge is one of two bridges that connects Duluth, Minnesota to Superior, Wisconsin, carrying I-535 across the St. Louis Bay. This project will replace or rehabilitate the entire Blatnik Bridge structure to restore it to good structural condition, modernize the approaching interchange, and ensure the bridge's long-term operations and safety. Many industries, employers, health care patients, students, shoppers, commuters, and tourists depend on the Blatnik Bridge to deliver their goods and services and provide access to jobs, hospitals, and other destinations in Duluth, Superior, and the surrounding region. As such, replacing this bridge is a top priority for both states.

This bridge is an important freight and commercial connection between the Twin Ports and for the Upper Midwest region. The Blatnik Bridge is essential to the functioning and success of the national shipping industry, as the project serves commerce through the international multi-modal Port of Duluth-Superior. The Port of Duluth-Superior is the largest U.S. port on the Great Lakes and one of the largest marine gateways for U.S. trade with Canada, the number-one trade partner of Minnesota and the nation. The port is located on the western tip of Lake Superior and the St. Lawrence Seaway, one of the nation's principal NAFTA trade corridors. Improvements made to the bridge will bring further economic success to the port and regional economy, and strengthen the national supply chain as the Port of Duluth-Superior is 17th largest port in the U.S.

This infrastructure investment will improve the poor conditions of the bridge by completely replacing all structural elements of the bridge and ensuring it is resilient to weather and climate threats. Inefficient and dangerous traffic operations will also improve, with a redesigned bridge span and modifications to the Wisconsin approach, which has a high crash history. Additionally, this project provides the opportunity to add strongly-supported bicycle and pedestrian facilities to the Blatnik Bridge, improving non-vehicle mobility and recreation.

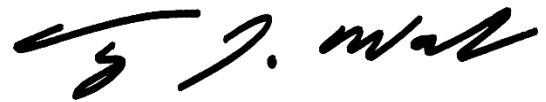
This project's improvements are consistent with the BIP's goals and grant criteria. The BIP grant carefully considers projects that improve the condition of bridges as well as the safety, efficiency, and

reliability of the movement of people and freight over bridges. The proposed transportation improvements will greatly improve safety and mobility on the Blatnik Bridge and improve access to and from regional businesses—especially the downtowns of Duluth and Superior and the Port of Duluth-Superior. These improvements will not only encourage regional economic growth but also strengthen the reliability of the transportation network that serves hundreds of communities across northern Minnesota and Wisconsin, and expanding nationally.

The initiatives within this grant application represent strong collaboration between Minnesota and Wisconsin to ensure long-term safety of residents and workers in our states, support efficient commerce and transport of goods, and ensure connectivity to jobs, healthcare, and education.

Thank you for your consideration and approval of this application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Walz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Walz
Governor
State of Minnesota

cc: Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger, Minnesota Department of Transportation