



Chad Warmington
President and CEO

May 11, 2020

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

Re: Oklahoma Department of Transportation BUILD grant application for US-281/Route 66 Bridgeport Bridge in Caddo and Canadian counties

Dear Secretary Chao:

I am pleased to submit this letter of support for the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Investment (BUILD) discretionary grant application for the rehabilitation of the US-281/Route 66 Bridgeport Bridge (William H. Murray Bridge) in Caddo and Canadian counties.

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation would use these grant funds to make major improvements to the historic, two-lane bridge that are both necessary and urgent for motorist safety, freight movement, economic growth and heritage tourism. While the project is still in the design and environmental review phase, we are pleased with the department's recent progress and consensus building efforts to balance historic preservation with the significant safety needs now present on the 86-year-old structure, creating a win-win situation for all involved. This progress is the result of a new commitment by the department and Secretary of Transportation Tim Gatz to re-evaluate projects like this one with a willingness to commit more state funding when necessary to better combine preservation and functionality.

A few points on the historic nature of the Bridgeport Bridge:

- The project would preserve and upgrade the internationally recognized attraction along historic U.S. Route 66 just in time for the national celebration of the Mother Road's 100th anniversary in 2026.
- This 1933 bridge is unique in the state due to its length at 3,994 feet and the 38 camelback pony truss spans distributing the structure's weight over the Canadian River.
- A 50-foot section of original Route 66 concrete pavement along the nearby US-281 Spur just to the east of the bridge was donated by ODOT to the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in 2000 to preserve it for future generations to understand the story of Route 66's impact on 20th century America and its culture.
- This bridge was the site of an iconic scene in the 1940 version of "Grapes of Wrath" starring Henry Fonda.

While the bridge's significance in Route 66 history cannot be understated, the need to make urgent safety repairs cannot be ignored. The proposed nearly \$35 million rehabilitation project aims to restore and slightly widen the Bridgeport Bridge to the point it can support legal truck loads along with passenger and tourist traffic. An emphasis will be placed on preserving historic elements including some original Route 66 pavement and the iconic 38 pony truss spans that are a visual highlight of the 17.7-mile-long Bridgeport Hill to Hydro Segment Historic District of Route 66, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
May 11, 2020
Page Two

ODOT, the business community and local Route 66 preservation organizations share a common goal of making this bridge safe for travel for decades to come while keeping its historic integrity intact. BUILD grant funding for this project will help create and retain jobs, improve the quality of life in our state, and preserve the culture and tradition of the Route 66 Mother Road, which remains a vital resource to Oklahoma and the United States.

I appreciate your consideration of ODOT's application for this BUILD grant and your support of transportation infrastructure projects in Oklahoma. Please contact my office if needed as you consider this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chad Warmington". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "C".

Chad Warmington

CW:EC:rm