

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1803

November 8, 2011

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

I write in strong support of the "LA 1 Highway Improvement Project Grant Application" (LA 1) as submitted by the South Central Planning and Development Commission and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development. The rural project funded by this application will make great strides towards protecting our national economy and improving the safety of those who live, work and vacation at Port Fourchon and Grand Isle, Louisiana.

The applicants have requested \$15 million from the TIGER III program. If provided, this funding will be matched by \$20 million from the state of Louisiana and \$10 million in private funding; a breakdown consistent with the funding of the total LA 1 elevation project, 67 percent of which has been provided by state and local sources. The previously provided local funding includes the enactment of a 30-year toll the locals have placed on themselves for use of the new elevated LA 1.

The funding sought by this request will be utilized to construct the northernmost mile of an elevated LA 1. This segment will cross over the Federal Hurricane Protection Levee and extend into the marsh. Constructing this mile of highway using Federal funding will allow for the more efficient use of state funding becoming available in the near future, thus saving Federal and state taxpayer dollars over the course of the entire LA 1 elevation process.

As part of the LA 1 construction process, the project will use innovative "end-on" construction techniques in which each future segment of LA 1 will be built off of the previous section. This construction method will minimize disturbance to the sensitive coastal marshes. While environmentally beneficial, this construction method prevents the rest of the project from being started until this first segment is completed. As such, the segment of LA 1 funded by this application has tremendous utility as a springboard for the rest of the project.

The importance of an LA 1 cannot be overstated. By constructing this project, we ensure the nation has continued access to Port Fourchon. This critical port facilitates 16 percent of oil this nation uses on a daily basis and 30 percent of the domestic natural gas produced - resources that add \$5 billion to the Federal Treasury every year.

Without an elevated LA 1, access to Port Fourchon is in jeopardy. Currently, more than six miles of LA 1 traverse through the coastal marshes at an elevation of only two and a half feet above sea level. As such, the highway—and access to our largest energy port—was washed out by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, and Ike and even the relatively weak Tropical Storm Lee. In total, the road has

been closed for more than 20 days since 2005. Considering the rate at which the Louisiana coast line is eroding, this problem will only increase in the coming years.

For this reason, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has repeatedly found that LA 1 is of national strategic importance, first listing the route on their Critical Asset Prioritization list in 2008 and recently releasing a report on the national consequences of losing highway access to Port Fourchon. The findings of this report stated that if LA 1 were closed for 90 days, the nation would see a decrease in our Gross Domestic Product of \$8 billion. We would also see our energy supply decrease by 120 million barrels of oil and 250 billion cubic feet of natural gas. These impacts would continue, according to the report, for at least 10 years.

What is even more troubling than losing access to the energy serviced through Port Fourchon is the fact that LA 1 is the only evacuation route for the thousands of port workers, tourists, fishermen, and residents of Grand Isle. Moreover, the overabundance of curves on the current at grade LA 1 makes this road treacherous in the best of conditions, let alone during a hurricane evacuation.

The sponsors of the LA 1 TIGER III grant request estimate that constructing the segment of LA 1 to be funded by the grant will result in more than 1,000 construction jobs. Additionally, by preserving access to Port Fourchon, the nation will maintain countless jobs nationwide by continuing our access to relatively low-cost domestic energy resources.

In addition to these economic and security justifications for an elevated LA 1, there are also environmental benefits to this project. In addition to the previously mentioned environmentally conscious construction technique, LA 1 will have a positive environmental impact by lessening the need to build additional ports. The previously mentioned DHS study found that existing ports could only handle 25 percent of the service that is currently provided out of Port Fourchon. That means we would need to construct new ports along Louisiana's coast, a daunting prospect considering the fragile ecology that is found along much of Louisiana's coastline, and the constant battle the state faces with coastal erosion.

An additional environmental benefit of this grant request is the fact that the new elevated LA 1 will be constructed with wide shoulders that facilitate long-distance bicycling. This is an improvement over the current at grade alignment of LA 1, the narrow shoulders of which do not allow for bicycle access to Grand Isle or other areas of the Louisiana coastline.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to grant the South Central Planning and Development Commission and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development's request and provide \$15 million to this important project. Doing so will provide immense benefits to the economy, safety and environment of Louisiana residents and the nation.

I thank you in advance for your time and thoughtful consideration. If I can ever be of service, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Respectfully,



Jeff Landry
Member of Congress