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February 5, 2021

Milwaukee Common Council
C/O Council President Cavalier Johnson
Milwaukee City Hall
200 E. Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Subject: I-94 East / West

We are sending this letter to the members of the Milwaukee Common Council to provide some background information and to address some misconceptions made about the I-94 East/West study. Specifically, we hope this information will address any concerns that may develop related to Resolution file 201313 which is asking the City to devote effort to lobby against the project.

The project addresses the need to replace and modernize this section of the freeway system. The project will reconstruct the portion of I-94 between 16th Street and 70th Street. This section of freeway is currently one of the most congested and dangerous roads in the state. This project provides an opportunity for a significant investment in the City of Milwaukee, its neighborhoods, the area and the state.

The project will be a generational investment into the infrastructure serving Milwaukee. It is expected to direct \$100 Million to DBE firms with many of them based right in the City of Milwaukee. The project will modernize the segment and will seek an improvement that harmonizes with the \$2 Billion plus investments in the Marquette and Zoo Interchanges. The result will provide a safer, more reliable and efficient roadway by eliminating the unsafe bottleneck between the two interchanges. The project will be constructed largely within the existing right of way and will not impact any of the graves in the cemeteries within the project limits.

There have been misconceptions about the project that we would like to address. One is that the project will cost over a Billion dollars. This is incorrect and was possibly based on the costs associated with a double deck option which is not being considered. Another is that the Department is not being transparent with the re-evaluation of the project. While Covid 19 has changed our ability to meet face to face, it has not changed a key component of our process. We are committed to a high level of public involvement and engagement. During the 2012 to 2016 time period, we had extensive outreach with over 300 stakeholder meetings, 5 public involvement meetings and a pair of public hearings. Since Governor Evers revived the project in 2020, we have had 66 stakeholder meetings which included the Black Health Coalition, MICA, the Menomonee Valley Partners and the Story Hill Neighborhood Association. The goal of the extensive outreach effort is to gather public input and incorporate that into how the project interacts with transit, mobility and access. There are more meetings already planned for this year as we work to update the previous plan and seek to re-obtain a Record of Decision.

Another misconception shared relates to vehicle miles traveled. It points to a study estimating that vehicle miles traveled will settle at 90% of pre-covid numbers. It is important to note, the number of pre-covid vehicle miles traveled were at historical highs and that based on pre-covid numbers, 90% of the traffic volume will still warrant the modernization with added capacity along the corridor.

There has been a talking point expressed that the project should happen but without the added capacity. The premise being pushed is that the savings should be then moved to address local street needs. This may be a well-intentioned idea, but it is a flawed theory. The funds for this project will go to this project or other similar projects. The funds cannot be moved into local roads funding. The budget process is just now getting underway in Madison and the requests in the budget address many of the concerns being forwarded. Lastly, if the project is cancelled or restarts at the beginning, there will be a substantial cost in time lost on current efforts and additional costs to design and construction of the project. There would also be substantial maintenance funds

that would be needed to keep the current roadway functioning. The roadway is at the end of its life cycle and will see continually higher maintenance costs as more time goes by.

The Department hopes the effort to lobby against the project will be tabled and that the City and its representatives work together with WisDOT to make this investment in Milwaukee as beneficial to everyone as possible. The track record of successful partnerships between WisDOT and Milwaukee should and can continue with this project. Looking back at the Marquette Interchange and the Hoan Bridge/Lakefront Interchange projects stand as reminders of the good that has taken place when we worked together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dewayne J. Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dewayne J. Johnson, P.E.
Regional Director

Cc: Mayor Tom Barrett
Ald. Robert Bauman
Milwaukee Common Council
Jeff Polenske, Commissioner of Public Works
FHWA, Wisconsin Division