



July 28, 2023

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
2023 Mega and INFRA Grant Request

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of Representative Angie Sapik (Lake Nebagamon), 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 Multi-modal Project Discretionary Grant Program.

The Blatnik Bridge is one of two bridges that connects Duluth, Minnesota, to Superior, Wisconsin, carrying I-535 across 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 its long-term operations and safety. Many industries, employers, healthcare patients, students, shoppers, commuters, and tourists depend on the Blatnik Bridge to deliver 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 a critical freight and commercial connection between the Twin Ports and 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



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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 USMCA trade corridors. Improvements 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 the 17th largest port in the U.S.

This project will improve the poor conditions of the bridge by completely replacing all structural elements and ensuring it is resilient to weather and climate threats. Inefficient and dangerous traffic operations will also improve, with a redesigned bridge span and Wisconsin approach with 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 align with the MPDG's goals and grant criteria. The MPDG grant carefully considers projects that improve the nation's core infrastructure in a way that is consistent with the USDOT's resiliency, equity, and economic mobility goals. The proposed transportation improvements will significantly improve safety and mobility on the Blatnik Bridge and enhance access to and from regional businesses—especially the downtowns of Duluth and Superior and the Port of Duluth-Superior. These improvements will encourage regional economic growth and strengthen the reliability of the transportation network that serves hundreds of communities across northern Minnesota and Wisconsin and expands nationally.

The initiatives within this grant application support my goals. As a representative of the hardworking constituents of our district, I am proud to lend my support to the application of the 2023 Mega and INFRA grant for the Blatnik bridge project connecting Superior and Duluth.



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The Blatnik Bridge is a vital link between these two communities, facilitating the movement of goods and the daily commute for numerous residents. It is both a critical transportation artery and a symbol of unity between Superior and Duluth.

By securing the 2023 Mega and INFRA grant, we can ensure that this vital transportation corridor remains fully functional, reliable, and safe for years. The grant would allow for necessary repairs and upgrades, including strengthening the bridge's structural integrity, improving traffic flow, and implementing advanced technologies to enhance overall safety.

This project and grant application aligns perfectly with our ongoing commitment to prioritizing sustainable and resilient infrastructure development.

I wholeheartedly endorse this application and look forward to working diligently with all stakeholders to secure the funding necessary to bring this project to fruition. Thank you for your consideration and approval of this application.

Sincerely,

Angie Sapik
Representative 73rd Assembly District
Wisconsin Legislature



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