



April 15, 2021

Secretary Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue
SE Washington, DC 20590

Subject: Support for the Apple Capital Loop INFRA Grant

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is the primary agency responsible for wildfire planning, response, and suppression across public and private lands in Washington State. Wildfires do not recognize property lines, accordingly, to achieve our mission DNR must coordinate its work with federal and local jurisdictions.

The Wenatchee region is surrounded by private, state, and federal forestlands that, in recent years, have experienced some of the region's most devastating wildfires. The Apple Capital Loop project will help the region's pressing need to safely improve response time for wildfires. It also improves the ability of our first responders, including DNR wildfire teams, to reliably react to people's needs during a wildfire emergency.

The summer of 2015 was a wakeup call for Washington State. That year, the state experienced its worst wildfire season in recent history, burning more than 1 million acres. That was more than double the record set in just the previous year. Wildfires destroyed more than 500 structures and severely injured four firefighters. Sadly, three firefighters lost their lives.

Wildfire smoke blanketed the state, causing significant air quality concerns for nearly five weeks. Washington also experienced its hottest year on record in 2015, leading to water shortages, as much as \$733 million in agricultural losses, and the death of hundreds of thousands of salmon and other fish.

Unfortunately, in 2020, Washington State again endured a devastating wildfire season, with more than 800,000 acres burned. The 2020 fires destroyed the town of Malden, and, tragically, led to the loss of child's life.

Forest lands surrounding the Wenatchee Valley have borne much of the brunt of these recent fires. Not only has the region been blanketed with smoke for weeks, but the fires have also spread into the City limits. The Sleepy Hollow Wildfire in 2015 was sparked by the region's wildfires and burned more than 30 acres within the City of Wenatchee's urban core.

Transportation corridors in the region converge in Wenatchee and East Wenatchee. The Apple Capital Loop will upgrade the convergence of the major corridors that access to the north, south, east, and west. The project will improve the ability of first responders and wildfire equipment to safely, and efficiently, respond to emerging wildfires throughout the region.

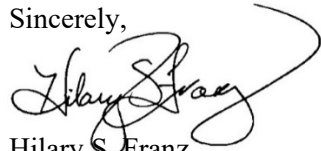
The DNR believes the Apple Capital Loop project will save lives and devastation by providing additional evacuation routes for motorized and non-motorized vehicles and pedestrians during future urban-interface wildfires, like those experienced in 2015. It will also facilitate efficient movement of wildfire response teams and equipment throughout Central Washington.

The risk of wildfire is not going away and is exacerbated by our changing climate. The Apple Capital Loop will provide long term benefits by improving safety, reliability and movement of people and vehicles through the region. In combination, these will reduce carbon emissions. Additionally, the project's emphasis on transitioning to carbon free transit options and providing routes for bicycles and pedestrians adds another layer of benefit to the project.

We urge support of this INFRA grant proposal. The Apple Capital Loop will improve our ability to respond to future wildfires, help save lives and, over the long run, reduce carbon emissions to the atmosphere.

Thank you for your consideration of this application.

Sincerely,



Hilary S. Franz

Commissioner of Public Lands