



March 9, 2021

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

**RE: Support for the Apple Capital Loop INFRA Grant**

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council (CDTC) membership, I'm writing as chairman of the organization to urge your support for the City of Wenatchee's INFRA grant application for the Apple Capital Loop.

Located in central Washington state midway between Seattle and Spokane and two hours south of the US/Canada border, highway connections to the Wenatchee Valley are limited to narrow two-lane state highways. Wenatchee is the business services, packing and shipping hub of the central Washington tree fruit agricultural economy – fresh apples, cherries and pears exported domestically and internationally, and highly dependent on reliable shipping by truck. Wenatchee is one of only eight small metropolitan areas in the nation not directly served by the interstate highway system or a four-lane highway connection to the nearest interstate (I-90 is 40 miles to the southeast). This community is proud to be the Apple Capital of the World, but recognizes that the current transportation system is a key impediment to realizing our economic potential.

The Apple Capital Loop project resulted from a decade of collaboration among communities across the region, with broad community engagement and support. The project is divided into five subcomponents that combined will improve safety, mobility, system reliability, freight movement and congestion relief for the citizens and businesses of Central Washington. Without the backbone mobility of an interstate route through the community, our focus is to complete our central loop of local highways and bridges crossing the Columbia and Wenatchee rivers, the hub of our regional transportation system.

Recent events underscore the importance of moving quickly to implement this project. The Wenatchee Valley is surrounded by vast federal and state forest lands that bring increasingly frequent and devastating wildfires to the region. The recent Sleepy Hollow fire spread into the urban area and burned more than 30 acres of industrial property inside the City of Wenatchee. That event demonstrated that our current transportation system is not suitable for responding to

a large-scale emergency. Completion of the Apple Capital Loop will greatly enhance public safety, both for day-to-day emergency responders and for potential disaster evacuation scenarios.

The Apple Capital Loop INFRA grant will be combined with more than \$100 million of public and private funding budgeted and ready for phased construction over the next several years. It will also leverage more than \$200 million of recent investments in our agricultural sector for expanded production, storage and transportation, and create access to developable properties expected to attract over \$500 million in new private and public investment to our region based on recently completed planning and pre-permitting.

USDOT's focus on applying the INFRA grant program to improve freight mobility and grow rural economies and jobs is truly exciting. Thank you for your consideration of this important project in the Wenatchee Valley.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Wilkens", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeff Wilkens  
Executive Director