

April 23, 2020

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue Southeast
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Billings County Little Missouri River Crossing (LMRC) Safety and Mobility Project

Dear Secretary Chao:

Please consider this letter an expression of the Medora City Council's support of the Billings County application for BUILD funding to support the Little Missouri River Crossing project.

Medora is the only incorporated community and the county seat of Billings County. Founded in 1883 along the transcontinental rail line of the Northern Pacific Railway, the community has been, and continues to be predominantly supported by agricultural and ranching industries and tourism. We are perhaps most well-known for the Medora Musical, one of the most popular tourist attractions in North Dakota.

North Dakota is a predominantly rural state. Billings County is no exception, with an estimated population of 940 (2017), 112 of whom are estimated to be living in Medora. The Little Missouri River flows northward through the western portion of the county and the entire region is part of the Little Missouri National Grasslands, the largest grassland in the United States. In addition to the Medora Musical, tourists come to the region to take advantage of wide-open spaces ideal for hunting, fishing, bicycling and, as we write this letter, "social distancing."

Given the vastness of the region and the rural nature, it is probably not surprising that transportation infrastructure is sparse. Many of the roads outside Medora and the federal highway system remain gravel and river crossings for the Little Missouri River are few and spread miles apart. This project seeks to remedy a regional concern related to the lack of east-west bridges/crossings. For local purposes, the I-94 crossing is most utilized, however, this is the only safe, reliable and functional crossing for 70 miles. In between I-94 and the other crossing are several privately-owned fords. Although these can sometimes be used in dry weather seasons and with private owner permission, they are often impassable due to high water and/or flooding. The lack of "formal" crossings, combined with the inaccessible and unsafe nature of the fords, often results in people just driving through the river despite great risk to themselves and their vehicles as well as subsequent damage to the riverbed. This is also an issue for emergency personnel, who will, in order to respond to someone in the fastest way possible, send personnel into the river to "test" for drivability/depth, and then drive through the river if necessary.

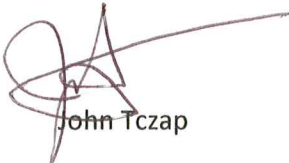
Proposed bridge construction would create a safe, reliable bridge almost exactly halfway between the existing I-94 and Long X Bridge crossings. It would vastly improve local and regional connectivity,

avenues for agricultural, natural resource and tourist commerce, and safety for not just emergency personnel/vehicles, but for all the traveling public.

We believe the proposed bridge is important to Billings County, but also to Medora in supporting the economy and much needed improvements to the safety of our local, regional and national travelers.

Thank you!

Sincerely,



John Tczap



Kinley Slauter



Tracy Sexton