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March 8, 2012

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary of Transportation
U. S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE
Washington, DC 50590

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I write in support of the TIGER IV Discretionary grant submitted by Gallatin County, the city of Belgrade, and Gallatin Field Airport seeking funding to complete the East Belgrade I-90 Interchange Project. These local partners have been working together on this project for more than a decade, and it is exciting to see their work nearing completion.

In 2011, Gallatin Field is expected to board nearly 800,000 passengers and offer non-stop service to ten destinations outside Montana. Gallatin Field is the fastest growing airport in the region and contributes an estimated $282 million to the region's economy, according to a 2009 study by the Montana Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration. In October 2011 it was awarded a $950,000 federal grant to establish a direct flight to the New York City region. The direct flight will correct the misconception that the Bozeman area is hard to reach and will make the area more accessible for outside business and tourists, particularly those headed for Yellowstone National Park.

Traffic congestion, however, has reached a saturation point on local roadways. Traffic headed south to Yellowstone National Park must navigate four-way stops on a two-lane city street and the existing transportation network is constrained by parallel railroad and road systems, limiting opportunities to expand and accommodate future demand.

Public safety is also highly compromised by the lack of any above or below grade rail crossings. Additionally, when the rail is blocked, first responders must access the airport and north Belgrade areas from Bozeman, 10 miles to the east, and Manhattan, 10 miles to the west. This proposed project will remove two on-grade rail crossings and create a north-south grade separating the rail and interstate crossing at the airport entrance. It will provide long-term efficiency and effectiveness in commodity movement, connections for existing businesses and homes, and the connectivity needed for growth and development.

The project will create greatly needed Montana jobs. It will resolve traffic safety and congestion issues and increase intermodal transportation connectivity, opening up access for future commercial development and growth. Receiving this TIGER grant will offer the project the final piece of funding necessary to make the project a reality.

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Thank you for your attention to this application. If I can provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would also appreciate you informing my office of the eventual decision on this application.

Sincerely

Jon Tester
United States Senator