



GREATER FORT WALTON BEACH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

...helping businesses help themselves

September 9, 2009

Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC20590

Dear Secretary LaHood

To ensure mission readiness and economic viability of any military support system requires an adequate transportation support system. A failed transportation system that hinders mobility and has excessive delays compromises military operations and economic viability.

The world's largest Air Force Base, the Eglin US Air Force Base, is located in the Northwest Florida Panhandle. Eglin is a center of Armament Research and Development and is a primary installation for Air Force weapons development to include every fighter, bomber, and fighting vehicle in the US Air Force. It is also home to Special Operations Commands of both the Air Force and Army.

Eglin supports major military operations throughout the entire world for the protection of our Nation's Defense, and any compromises to Eglin operations result in unacceptable compromises to our Nation's Weapon Capabilities Testing, Fighter Aviation Capabilities, and Major Special Operations.

Industries of the region are among a globally-competitive support system for emerging aerospace and defense technologies that also support research in areas such as electronics and micro-electronics, nano-technology, composite and exotic materials, advanced power systems, computing, robotics, uninhabited systems and avionics.

The primary transportation corridor on Eglin is Florida State Road 85 (SR 85). This corridor is also designated as a segment of Florida's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), which is a statewide network of high priority transportation facilities that have been designated as critical to the state's economic viability. However, the present capacity of the SR 85 corridor is not sufficient to meet the needs of the Eglin mission, nor the needs of the state's SIS system. The Level-of-Service (LOS) is failing with an LOS of F. This means excessive transportation delays, a halt to regional residential development, and a complete stop to any regional business development. If additional capacity is not added to SR 85, Mission Critical Operations will be compromised and Regional Economic Development will be stopped.

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Through cooperative working relationships, Okaloosa County, Florida, which is where SR 85 is located, has developed a consensus among multiple agencies to develop an overall capacity improvement plan for the SR 85 corridor. As one potential source of support, Okaloosa County is looking to the Office of the Secretary of Transportation for the award of a transportation grant through the "Grants for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery", commonly identified as "Tiger Grants", for the development of capacity improvements along the SR 85 corridor. Given support from the Tiger Grant program and with the regional consensus developed by Okaloosa County, capacity improvements along the SR 85 corridor will ensure our Nation's defense is not compromised and also ensure economic viability of the Northwest Florida Region is maintained.

The Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce wishes to express its full support for the Tiger Grant application being submitted by Okaloosa County, Florida and commits to doing all it can to ensure the successful implementation and completion of these critical transportation system requirements.

Sincerely,

Alan Gieseeman
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