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September 11, 2009

Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

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. Our community is proud to host Eglin Air Force Base, the largest Department of Defense installation with one of the most diverse mission complexes in the military. The Eglin Reservation is home to the Air Armament Center, Air Force Special Operations Command, 6 wings and 42 tenant organizations. Eglin provides employment to over 7,900 military and 9,100 civilians and contractor employees. Eglin supports major military operations throughout the world and any degradation of weapons development, test, fighter aviation and special operations is a blow to national defense. In addition, Eglin will also soon be home to members of the Army's 7th Special Forces Group which will add 2,200 soldiers and 4,000 family members in our area. As the first home of the Joint Strike Fighter, we will also see another increase in contractors and military members from all services and our international partners.

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. Warriors in the field employ the technology that is conceived and tested right here in Northwest Florida; in short, our warriors depend on this community to support that infrastructure.

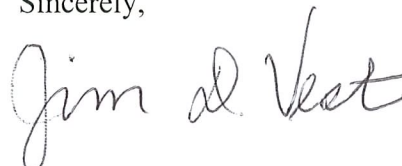
The primary transportation corridor on Eglin is Florida State Road 85 (SR 85). This corridor is also designated as a segment of Florida's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), which is a state-wide network of high priority transportation facilities that have been designated as critical to the

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.

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 Mid-Bay Bridge Authority 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim D. Vest". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jim D. Vest
Executive Director