



VILLAGE OF DEFOREST

*"Working Together
Growing Together"*

306 DeForest Street
P.O. Box 510
DeForest, Wisconsin 53532-0510

(608) 846-6751
Fax (608) 846-6963

March 12, 2009

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
U.S. House of Representatives
2446 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Baldwin:

The US 51 Highway Improvement Project in the DeForest-Windsor area of Wisconsin relates to a surge in traffic volume with no increase in capacity that has created a dangerous highway in an area that is rapidly growing in population and related economic development. The Town of Windsor and Village of DeForest are jointly requesting your support for \$4.5 million in targeted federal assistance in FY2010 to enable us to begin construction of this \$70 million project by 2012, as called for in the Wisconsin State budget. This project cannot proceed on the needed timeline without this federal assistance.

The segment of US Highway 51 (US 51) corridor that passes through this region enables thousands of travelers daily to reach employment, housing and commercial centers in the Greater Madison Metropolitan Area. Increasing traffic volumes on US 51 have caused the road to become congested and unsafe. In 1985 an estimated 6,150 vehicles drove this stretch of US 51 every day – today that number is approximately 14,100 vehicles per day. This number is projected to increase to 22,100 vehicles by 2027. Local officials have worked with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to find an answer to the exponentially increasing congestion and safety problems. The "Reconstruction of US Highway 51" project would expand US 51 from its current status as a two-lane highway into a four-lane highway. The project extends 4.6 miles from just north of the US 51/WI Highway 19 interchange to just north of the County V (Grinde Road) intersection. This reconstruction project will have a significant impact on traffic safety, congestion, and the continued growth of the local economy.

The primary goal of the "Reconstruction of US Highway 51" project is to reduce congestion and improve safety in the DeForest-Windsor area as a vital regional north-south corridor to Madison, Wisconsin. Increasing traffic from the northern suburbs in Columbia County has substantially increased traffic volumes along the corridor. In addition, the corridor interconnects a Foreign Trade Zone that is tied to the Dane County Regional Airport. Capacity and safety-related deficiencies have developed over time due to increasing traffic volumes. Between 1990 and 2000 there were 300 crashes on the segment of US 51 between Reardon Road and County V. In the years from 2000 to 2004 the area has seen 168 crashes. Of this total, 98 crashes resulted in injuries and 3 involved

a fatality. Sixty percent of all crashes occurred during daylight hours, including morning and afternoon rush hours. A particular concern is for families with students that attend DeForest High School that is next to the highway. School buses and many older students use the highway. Economic growth continues to make US 51 more congested and dangerous. The "US Highway 51 Improvement Project" project is expected make the highway more safe for all users by not only widening the highway, but to also by constructing a number of interchanges that will allow for safer access on and off of US 51.

The "Reconstruction of US Highway 51" project was slated to begin construction in 2025 because of insufficient state funding, a delay of 15 years from the original start date for the project. However, the Wisconsin State government included language in the 2008 budget that requires construction to begin no later than 2012. The budget language states:

"8. USH 51 EXPANSION PROJECT IN DANE COUNTY
Require DOT to commence, in 2007-08, the preparation of an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment, as applicable, for the USH 51 north segment reconstruction project in Dane County, which includes expanding the highway to a four-lane divided highway from the intersection of USH 51 and Reardon Road to just north of the intersection of USH 51 and CTH V/Grinde Road in the Village of De Forest. Require the Department to commence construction of this project no later than December 31, 2012. [Act 20 Section: 2528m]"

The state budget language forces the state to reprioritize projects where safety is less of a concern in order to fund the project. However, federal funds can provide relief to the state by providing an alternative source of revenue to begin Highway 51 construction. These funds will ensure the start of construction no later than 2012.

Feasibility studies and preliminary design were completed in anticipation of the original 2010 construction start date. However, significant work remains related to site preparation and environmental impact studies so that construction can begin on schedule. Again, the new State budget requires action on the EIS in anticipation of the 2012 date for construction. This allows time for final site preparation and other impact studies beginning in Spring 2009.

The success of this project will be measured by the increased capacity of the highway, in turn easing congestion for the area and making the road safer for all travelers. A four lane highway is the only solution that will enable the area to remain economically viable, while ensuring the safety of highway users. In addition, the project will create hundreds of full time construction jobs over multiple years as this project is constructed.

Many regional residents are very concerned about the congestion and road safety issues. We appreciate your interest and vocal support for this project, and we hope that you are

able to advance this initiative on behalf of greater Madison area.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jo Ann Miller". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Jo Ann Miller
Village Administrator