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MAKING MISSOURI A BETTER PLACE TO WALK AND RIDE A BICYCLE!

July 4th, 2021

Mr. Howard Hill
US Department of Transportation
Grant Policy Analyst
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Subject: Warsaw Missouri RAISE Application

On behalf of the Missouri Bicycle and Pedestrian Federation, we want to provide our strongest support of the application from the City of Warsaw for their Livable Community Transportation Project. Our non-profit organization represents the two million Missourians who bicycle and the six million who walk, run, or hike. We advocate for advancement of bicycle and pedestrian access, safety and education in Missouri.

We have been familiar with the good work of the City of Warsaw and applaud their efforts to continue to think of transportation as it relates to all users of our various transportation modes.

Warsaw is a leader in multimodal transportation in Rural Missouri

We are thrilled to see a much stronger interest in bicycling, walking, and trail developing in our smaller, rural cities and towns across Missouri. Much of this interest is spurred by the available federal support for these projects, such as RAISE funds.

In Missouri, Warsaw is a statewide and regional leader in this area. Quite simply, Warsaw is setting the gold standard for small town trails development, connectivity for the public, and safety, with an awareness of alternative forms of transportation. Because of their leadership and forward thinking in this area, they are inspiring many similar rural towns across Missouri to follow their example.

The city has given leaders and opinion-makers from many cities and towns across Missouri tours of their trails and bike/ped improvements, inspiring those towns to provide those transportation options back home.

Warsaw has always strived to develop a multi-modal system that breaks the typical rural mold. They continue to find unique ways to combine their waterfront trail system with typical bicycle and pedestrian access. The result is a transportation system in a small, rural community that meets all of the transportation needs of their citizens and businesses in the community and in the larger region.

We have strongly encouraged rural towns across Missouri to implement Complete Streets principles when expanding or improving roads, particularly in downtown and commercial areas. The proposal follows the Complete Streets model to a T and will



serve as a template for other similar cities and towns across Missouri. We have not seen Complete Streets implemented in a thoroughgoing way in a smaller, rural town yet. So having a model like Warsaw in place will be very helpful, not just for Warsaw, but for the state and the region as a whole.

Warsaw has recently adopted a Complete Streets policy and a city-wide plan to implement Complete Streets principles. The RAISE funds will be a very important step for the city in implementing the plan they have proposed.

Because of Warsaw's statewide and Midwest-wide visibility as a model rural Complete Streets community, a RAISE grant here will have more impact than most projects will. The project will impact not only Warsaw but also other communities across the region who look to Warsaw as a model.

Warsaw's projects are vital to the public health and to create reliable, affordable transportation options to meet the needs of all citizens

These projects are absolutely vital to the community connectivity and health of citizens in Warsaw and surrounding Benton County.

Research by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services shows very clearly that health disparities in rural Missouri are directly related to lack of safe places to walk and bicycle, and difficulty accessing needed services, medical care, and healthy food.

Rural Missouri communities carry a notably higher percentage of elderly and disabled residents than the state as a whole and than the surrounding countryside. For these residents, basic Complete Streets infrastructure and safe routes to walk from home to nearby services, parks, and shopping is key to quality of life and their ability to age in place and maintain independence.

For this reason, the Complete Streets a non-motorized components of Warsaw's RAISE application are vital to the health of the community and for creating safe, reliable, and affordable transportation options for the sizable senior and disabled population that lives in the city.

Warsaw's regional nonmotorized investment creates regional non-motorized and tourism connections and builds the local and regional economy

An important aspect of these RAISE-funded projects is that they are an integral element of Warsaw's long-term plan to use these community transportation assets as a key part of the regional economic development plan.

Tourism in the form of boating, fishing, hunting is a traditional mainstay of the regional economy, but by tying together the existing tourism industry with new regional tourism opportunities, the regional economy is diversified and expanded.



The city's multimodal plans tie the existing tourism economy (boating, fishing) directly into the city via the harbor and the trails and complete streets that tie the harbor directly into the city's business district. This element is already partially implemented and the positive results for the business community and the downtown area have already been dramatic.

Adding trails, bicycling, walking, running, and hiking to the region's tourism mix complements the existing lake and hunting tourism base, given the region a more complete tourism profile, which encourages more tourists to visit and those who visit to stay longer and spend more. The Complete Streets elements, walking and cycling connections to important location destinations, walkable and bicycleable community elements, and integration of the residential areas with business districts make the community more accessible and attractive to residents and businesses, but also make the city far more attractive and viable as a tourism and visitor destination.

These elements are very significant for the local economy—they are among the key factors that have kept the economy of Warsaw and Benton County growing and thriving at a time when the economy of many rural communities is shrinking.

An important outcome of Warsaw's investment in a local and regional trails and Complete Streets network is that plans are now in the works to make Warsaw an important tourism destination in statewide and national bicycle and trails tourism system.

A regional workgroup is currently working to implement the Missouri portion of a national bicycle touring route, U.S. National Bicycle Route 51, that is planned to extend from New Orleans, Louisiana to Minnesota. The Missouri portion of USBR 51 will connect the Razorback Trail in northwest Arkansas with U.S. Bicycle Route 66, and the TransAmerica Trail (USBR 76) in the Springfield area, to the Frisco Highline Trail to Bolivar, Missouri, to Warsaw.

From there, USBR 51 will make a bicycle/trails tourism connection north to the Rock Island Trail—which will create a trail connection from Warsaw to dozens of rural Missouri communities along the Rock Island that are currently developing a joint trail tourism effort.

From there USBR 51 will continue north to the Katy Trail at Sedalia, which creates a trail tourism connection from Warsaw directly with another two dozen rural Missouri trail towns along the Katy Trail.

USBR 51 will continue from the Katy Trail north to the Spirit Trail at Warrensburg, currently under construction, which connects Warrensburg with Whiteman Air Force Base. From there, USBR 51 will continue north, connecting with the Lewis & Clark Bicycle Touring route and thence north to Iowa and finally, Minnesota.

In short, USBR 51 will connect Warsaw with all important trails and bicycle tourism routes in Missouri, and with dozens of towns across the state that have burgeoning



trail tourism economies.

And Warsaw's work to develop its local and regional trails and bikeways system is the key reason that Warsaw was chosen as a destination city for USBR 51.

The first component of the USBR 51 project was opened in 2019—the Butterfield Stage Experience, a 250-mile adventure bicycle touring route using existing county gravel roads and trails, connecting the Capitol in Jefferson City, Missouri, with Springfield, Missouri. The links Missouri's 3rd largest city with the state capitol and passes directly through the downtown area of 12 small, rural Missouri along the way—including downtown Warsaw, where the statewide route connects directly to the proposed RAISE project area.

The Butterfield Stage Experience route also makes connections between the Katy Trail and Rock Island Trail, the Razorback Trail in Arkansas (forthcoming) and Amtrak Stations in St Louis, Kirkwood, Washington, Hermann, Jefferson City, Sedalia, Warrensburg, and Kansas City. This links all of these major regional trails and transportation assets directly to the Warsaw RAISE project via a nonmotorized route.

Projects vital to rural transportation, affordability, safety, health, and economic development

This RAISE grant will be vitally important to meet the transportation needs of Warsaw citizens and the many from outlying areas who depend on Warsaw for work, shopping, school, and other needs, to create affordable and safe transportation options for the rural community, to improve health in this rural region, and to develop trails tourism and active outdoor recreation into a stronger economic driver for Warsaw and other rural communities in the region, and for tying Warsaw into the regional trails tourism network—an industry with a \$2.8 billion annual impact on Missouri's economy.

With the tourism industry hard-hit by the coronavirus travel restrictions this year, particularly in rural Missouri, strengthening the industry going forward will be more important than ever.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Brent Hugh
Executive Director