

Date **9/30/2022**

Secretary Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Supporting Salt Lake City East-West Connections Planning Grant

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I am writing this letter in support of Salt Lake City's planning grant application for East-West Connections. My understanding of the function of this grant is to improve connectivity between neighborhoods within cities. I am writing both representing a community organization - The Third West Merchants Association and I will include some personal observations as both an individual and a small business owner.

Salt Lake City certainly could benefit from some funding for this. There is a very tangible east/west divide in this city. Part of it is some railroad tracks that date back at least a hundred years ago. They were built when there wasn't much of a city. The situation was seriously exacerbated when the interstate highway system was built. The north/south route (I-15) was originally supposed to be about 10 blocks west of where it is currently located. The original location was what we call Redwood Road. For some reason it was moved east. The result was leaving some long time neighborhoods off from the main part of the city, It also divided some of the existing contiguous neighborhoods that had developed in the interim. This has resulted in this east/west divide or should I say, it made it much worse. It has also created some economic inequities that impact SLC to this day.

Here is a specific example. I was previously the long time chair of the Ballpark Community Council. It actually borders both the railroad tracks and the Interstate 15. One thing I was working on as chair was getting an overpass built over the railroad tracks on 1700 south, which is a major east west route. What I found was that railroads are almost an entity unto themselves and encouraging them to do this was almost impossible. It can be done if you build it to their specs in terms of height (makes sense) and IF YOU PAID FOR IT YOURSELF! I dropped this idea because there were a lot more productive things I could spend my time on and generate a lot less frustration for myself. There several other east/west routes although none of them are as large as 1700. 1700 South also leads you into one of the largest retail locations in the city. SLC is in the process of doing some major upgrades to this area known as the 300 West Corridor. Spending millions of dollars in the process. This infrastructure upgrade is slated to be completed in early 2023.

I think it is important for the SLC to invest in connectivity. SLC/Utah is one of the fastest growing areas in the country. The current overpasses that currently exist (900 South, 1300 South and 2100 South) are getting more and more congested. Not just rush hours. This results in a lot of idling cars at all times of the day and it is only going to get worse. A new overpass at 1700 South would relieve a lot of this pressure and go a long ways to enhancing the connectivity of these neighborhoods. Connectivity would also help with the serious economic disparities.

On a personal note, I own and operate couple of small business, literally a block or so east of both the railroad tracks and the Interstate. Here is the general rule, if I have to go west for a business purpose and are in a hurry - I will hit a train! As an aside, the trains aren't necessarily just going thru. They stop and sometimes for long periods of time. On the other hand, if you aren't in a hurry and wouldn't mind some time to catch of text messages, the track is always clear! So I deal with this by taking alternate routes or just avoiding patronizing businesses in which I have to options on the east side. Both of these options either create more driving and the resulting emission (did I mention the SLC has some of the worst air quality in the nation) or I contribute to the economic inequity by avoiding the west side of SLC.

1700 South is also a major east/west bile route in the City. Cyclist avoid the other overpasses because they were built, before people started considering active transit in the design phase of them. Very expensive to add these after the fact.

So in conclusion, on behalf of the 3rd West Merchants Association, my two businesses and myself personally, I support Salt Lake City's initiative and application for this Reconnecting Communities grant request. If received, it will have a very tangible benefit to our neighborhoods and City.

Sincerely

William Davis - Chairperson 3rd West Merchants Association & Regular guy