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September 2, 2016

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo  
Governor of Rhode Island  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: 6/10 Interchange Letter of Recommendation

Dear Governor Raimondo:

I write with an urgent recommendation to immediately pursue an in-kind replacement of the structurally deficient bridges of the 6/10 Interchange using the \$400 million in funding made available under the RhodeWorks legislation. This replacement will bring the bridges of the interchange into a state of good repair and ensure the continued public safety of the infrastructure which is the primary mission of the Department of Transportation.

Over the past several weeks, RIDOT has conducted a safety evaluation of the bridges in the 6/10 Interchange. The results indicate that the deterioration of the bridges is accelerating and therefore immediate action is needed. Critical issues found in the Huntington Bridge over the Northeast Corridor are particularly troubling. The Federal Highway Administration also inspected the bridge and noted that it is "high risk" and has a sufficiency index of only 19 out of 100. They asked for an immediate action plan to fix it. The RhodeWorks legislation you signed into law provides the vital funding for fixing these bridges. That funding was put there specifically to provide a critical safety net and ensure Rhode Island can address this basic state-of-good-repair issue. Given the pressing nature of the bridge condition, now is the time to use that \$400 million, fix the 6/10 interchange and ensure the continued safe operation of the highway network.

To that end, I recommend we begin immediately using our new Project Management approach and design-build project delivery methodology to assure this project proceeds quickly and efficiently.

### **Background**

The 6/10 Interchange was originally constructed in the 1950s and does not meet today's highway and serviceability standards. Of more pressing concern is the fact that seven of the nine bridges in the interchange are structurally deficient and have been for more than a decade. Their

deterioration is accelerating in recent years, increasing my concern. Nearly 100,000 vehicle trips are made through the trunk of the 6/10 Interchange each day, with two-thirds of those trips, regional in nature, originating or destined from outside the City of Providence.

The project has a long history at RIDOT. We have known for decades that this problem has needed to be addressed. In fact, a \$500+ million project to replace, upgrade and expand the capacity of the 6/10 interchange has been in design at RIDOT for thirty years without a funding source to move the entire project into construction. The RhodeWorks plan that was introduced in the spring of 2015 included \$800 million in highway and transit improvements for the entire 6/10 Corridor – half of which was to be funded by new competitive federal discretionary funding. The RhodeWorks legislation that you signed into law last February provided the \$400 million in non-discretionary funding specifically for fixing the 6/10 corridor. When a new grant opportunity became available shortly after passage, RIDOT immediately began preparing an application for an additional \$175 million in funding for the 6/10 interchange itself (without transit corridor improvements) through this new federal FASTLANE program last April. The intent of this additional funding, was to enable RIDOT not only to reconstruct the bridges of the interchange, but it would also fund an enhanced design including:

- The missing move from Route 10 North to Route 6 West;
- Roadway geometry improvements;
- A “capping” of the existing depressed Route 10 allowing for the construction of a surface “boulevard” that would serve to connect the neighborhoods of Olneyville and West Broadway;
- Increased local roadway distributor capacity;
- An accommodation of a future Bus Rapid Transit system or “BRT”; and
- \$50 million of local community improvements specifically requested by the City of Providence west of the Amtrak Northeast Corridor.

As you know, we were informed by Washington that the 6/10 project was not selected for funding under FASTLANE and unfortunately precludes us from pursuing these enhancements. I am therefore recommending a path forward that addresses the 6/10 Interchange infrastructure basic and essential needs.

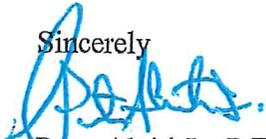
### **Recommendation**

I recommend using the \$400 million of funding made available by RhodeWorks as we originally intended, to fund an in-kind replacement of the structurally deficient bridges of the interchange. I believe it is the most prudent approach given the serious condition of the infrastructure. The time to act is now, and the \$400 million will allow us to fix the bridges of the Route 6/10 Interchange and, most importantly, keep the public safe. RIDOT’s recommendation is based on several considerations, including:

- **Safety/Infrastructure Condition** – The primary basis of this recommendation is the serious condition of the infrastructure. Seven of the nine bridges of the infrastructure are structurally deficient. The bridges are well beyond their 50 year design life, with a majority of them being constructed in the 1950s.
- **Recent Worsening of Condition** – Given their historically poor condition, RIDOT inspects the bridges of the 6/10 Interchange on an annual basis (most bridges of the state are inspected biannually). This year’s inspection was significantly worse than the inspection of a year ago, which was conducted as part of the Emergency Bridge Inspection Program I ordered upon becoming Director. Three of the nine bridges of the interchange saw their ratings worsen in 2016 as compared to 2015. More disturbing, the 2016 inspection had five “critical findings.” By comparison, there were no critical findings in the 2015 inspections. These “Critical Findings” are issues that require immediate attention. One of the Critical Findings involved a 20+ foot steel temporary support that was movable by hand. Had this temporary support failed and collapsed, it had the potential to fall upon the overhead catenary wire of Amtrak’s northeast Corridor. RIDOT acted immediately to secure the support (see attached photo) and then replace it. All other critical findings have also been acted upon. I’ve attached additional photos from the 2015 and 2016 inspections showing the deterioration. Given the number of critical findings, I have ordered that the inspection cycle for the bridges of 6/10 Interchange be moved from an annual to a quarterly cycle until such time as construction crews have a permanent presence on the site. These facts provide the compelling reason to act quickly in order to assure public safety.
- **Federal Highway Administration Concurrence** – My recommendation is also consistent with the Federal Highway Administration findings. Both the FHWA Division Administrator, Carlos Machado, and I personally examined the bridges of the 6/10 Interchange in July. He expressed to me on that day that the bridges of the 6/10 Interchange are the worst in Rhode Island. Further, he indicated that an in-kind replacement of the infrastructure would qualify as a “Categorical Exclusion” under federal environmental rules and regulations, allowing us to expedite the reconstruction of the bridges. FHWA provided the attached letter reiterating their concern for the infrastructure.
- **Ongoing Repairs** – Even with this accelerated approach, it will be necessary to make emergency repairs to the existing infrastructure to keep it safe for the traveling public. In fact, RIDOT was planning to a \$4.9 million contract for emergency bridge repairs this year alone. That funding is essentially wasted once the bridges are reconstructed. Accelerating the reconstruction of these bridges could help lessen these extra costs, whereas delaying reconstruction would further waste taxpayer money.

In summation, given the critical public safety concerns of this infrastructure that carries nearly 100,000 vehicles every day, I believe we must move forward with dispatch. An in-kind replacement of the failing bridges of the 6/10 Interchanges offers the best approach to accelerating this much-needed work in order to provide continuous and uninterrupted service for the State's commerce and commuters and most importantly, helps ensure that Rhode Island's bridges remain safe to travel. Thanks to RhodeWorks, this critical step is possible.

Sincerely



Peter Alviti Jr., P.E.

Director

Rhode Island Department of Transportation

## RhodeWorks and the 6/10 Interchange Timeline Summary

**Winter 2015: New Administration** – When RIDOT's new management team took office last February, they found that RIDOT had a \$500+ million project to replace, upgrade and expand the capacity of the 6/10 bridges in design for thirty years without a funding source to move the entire project into construction. The new RIDOT management team implemented working groups in several areas, including bridge condition. RIDOT also convened a new transit working group (with participation from RIPTA) to address the state's below average transit utilization. Through a combined planning effort of both working groups, RIDOT proposed the reconstruction of the 6/10 interchange with a transit feature that would run beyond the interchange and through the entire corridor.

**Spring 2015: RhodeWorks Introduced** – The RhodeWorks legislation released in the spring of 2015 targeted \$800 million for highway and transit improvements on the entire corridor (not just the 6/10 interchange). The plan called for \$400 million to be funded from the new funding streams of RhodeWorks and \$400 million of new competitive discretionary federal funding, primarily from the Federal Transit Administration's grant programs for transit expansion.

**Summer 2015: Community Outreach** – Last summer, RIDOT briefed several interest groups, including GrowSmart and the Coalition for Transportation Choices on the 6/10 Reconstruction with a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) feature. While the BRT component was generally well received, members of the group began to express concerns with the extent of traditional highway flyovers and excessive infrastructure in the renderings that RIDOT presented. RIDOT took note, but delayed advancing alternative concepts until the passage of RhodeWorks assured there would be funding for the project.

**December 2015: FAST Act Passes:** Last December, after much delay, Congress finally passed a long term transportation authorization bill. Importantly, that bill included a new federal discretionary program for Projects of Regional and National Significance. This provided a second federal program which RIDOT could tap into for 6/10 Interchange – one that could be used for the highway portion.

**February 2016: RhodeWorks Passes:** With the passage of RhodeWorks in February 2016, RIDOT immediately began work on preparing the 6/10 Interchange for an eventual application under the new federal program – this time incorporated the comments heard from the stakeholder groups the previous summer. This action proved fortuitous because shortly after the passage of RhodeWorks, USDOT released the notice of funding availability for the Projects of National and Regional Significance program – which it now called "FASTLANE".

**April 2016: FASTLANE Application:** RIDOT presented a new 6/10 Interchange concept based on the feedback it had received over the summer of 2015 at four public forums held prior to the application due date in April 2015. RIDOT also held two special meetings of the Environmental Counsel (which normally meets quarterly) and participated in a forum sponsored by the City of Providence. RIDOT's concept reduced the highway massing associated with flyover infrastructure in favor an approach that "capped" the 6/10 highway allowing for a two level express/local distributor highway system. This "capping" approach added approximately 5% to the cost as compared to the transitional highway construction approach. RIDOT also added \$50 million in additional scope to restore the grid west of Route 10 at the request of the City of Providence. RIDOT submitted the application with a request for \$175 million in federal discretionary funding to support a \$595 million project. The application indicated that, with a reduced award of \$95 million, RIDOT could advance a \$515 project that did not include elements west of Route 10

other than the viaduct itself. Importantly, the \$595 million project did NOT include the transit feature that was originally conceived for the corridor. The \$595 million in RIDOT's FASTLANE application included only the highway portion of the interchange.

**July 2016: RIDOT's FASTLANE Application not funded:** In July of 2016, RIDOT received word from the Rhode Island congressional delegation that the 6/10 Interchange Reconstruction project was not among those forwarded to the congress for review prior to award.