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United States Senate

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May 15, 2020

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

I write regarding the application submitted by Gila County, Arizona for a grant through the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant program to fund the Tonto Creek Bridge project.

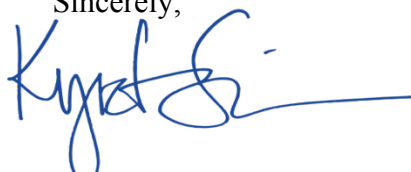
Heavy rainfall and snow melt frequently cause severe flooding on Tonto Creek, limiting access to schools, jobs, and health care facilities. This multi-modal project is needed to provide safe access for Gila County residents in rural areas to safely commute when Tonto Creek floods. The bridge and road improvement will also contribute to the growth in the economy by promoting private development on the very limited – less than 1.5% of Gila County's non-federal land that is not under mine tailings. The Tonto Creek Bridge project will also improve access to public lands, especially the Tonto National Forest, where thousands of Arizonans recreate every year.

Annual flooding of Tonto Creek is caused due to overflows at the Roosevelt Dam, a federal project. Endangered Species Act implementation prevents Gila County from managing the Tonto Creek bed to minimize flooding impacts. Without flood mitigation, yearly road closures average 25 days and flooding has killed 8 people since 1995. This condition continues to pose serious public safety issues and limits economic investment and development.

Using their county transportation tax funds and share of state gas tax revenue, Gila County will contribute 15% of the cost of the Tonto Creek Bridge project. This exceeds the cost share required by FHWA's sliding scale for federal highway projects by almost 3 times. Significant investment by the County signifies the importance of this project to the local area and the region.

Without safe and reliable access year-round, Gila County communities will continue to struggle from annual flooding and its chronic safety economic impacts. In accordance with all existing agency rules, regulations, and ethical guidelines, I urge you to give this proposal full and fair consideration as you make this important funding decision.

Sincerely,



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator