



April 28, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the Dickerson Park Zoo, a division of the Springfield-Greene County Park Board, I am writing to express our dedicated support for FIX I-44: Freight, Innovation and Safety for the Ozarks project. Federal funding for improvements to I-44 through Springfield, Missouri will improve freight mobility, safety, economic vitality, and community connections.

Interstate 44 is a major east-west corridor that begins in Texas, traverses through Oklahoma, and terminates on the eastern border of Missouri at St. Louis. It provides a vital freight corridor for the country and for our metro area of nearly half a million people. Springfield is the third largest city in Missouri and northern Arkansas and center of an economic area comprising twenty-seven counties in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas. I-44 is a critical connection for the region to the rest of the United States.

In 2023, the Zoo will turn 100 years old. Its proximity to the I-44 corridor, as well as the MO 13/I-44 interchange, ensure connectivity to the community and region. A major destination for conservation education, scientific research, state of the art animal hospital, and recreation for families and schools in the surrounding four-state area, it is vital to the Zoo that I-44 maintains its role as an economic corridor connecting the region to the nation.

I have worked at the Zoo for 45 years, and daily I experience the traffic on I-44, MO 13 and at the MO 13/I-44 interchange. Traffic volume on I-44 is heavy, with heavy freight-hauling trucks comprising a major portion of it. Most of the families and school groups that come to the Zoo, or to experience events at the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds, our neighbor to the East, reach these destinations by way of I-44 and MO 13. Zoo attendance has been growing, and the calendar of events at the Fairgrounds, with whom we coordinate for parking and traffic flow, has also grown, further adding to the traffic volume in the area. Increased traffic volume has resulted in frequent backups on I-44 and MO 13 at the MO 13/I-44 interchange. That can be especially acute on weekends due to traffic headed to or from the Zoo or Fairgrounds. Traffic accidents on these routes also cause traffic delays, particularly on I-44 from my personal observations.

The Dickerson Park Zoo is proud of its contributions to animal conservation in the Ozarks, and worldwide, the conservation outreach presentations to as many as 100,000 children and adults throughout the state of Missouri annually, the quality of life experiences we provide for more than 200,000 guests each year, and looks forward to the continued success an improved I-44 can provide. We encourage you to consider the FIX-I44 project and the resulting benefits of safety, pedestrian connectivity, reduced congestion, and improved freight mobility.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike Crocker".

Mike Crocker
Assistant Parks Director/Zoo Director