

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 26, 2012

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

We are writing to express our support for the City of Maricopa's FY 2012 discretionary grant request to the Federal Highway Administration at the U.S. Department of Transportation for the State Route 347 (SR-347) grade separation project.

As you may know, the City of Maricopa is located 35 miles south of Phoenix, Arizona. According to the most recent census, it is the fastest growing city in the nation. Incorporated in 2003 with a population of approximately 1,000 people, Maricopa is now a burgeoning community of more than 43,000 and continues to grow at the rate of approximately 100 people per month.

SR-347 is Maricopa's "Main Street." It is the area's primary north-south corridor and serves as the most direct route to the Phoenix area. Originally paved in the 1950's as a two-lane highway, the roadway was upgraded to a five-lane facility in the early 1990's. At that time, the population of Maricopa and the surrounding communities was less than 1,000 people.

The Union Pacific Railroad's (UPRR) Sunset Line crosses SR-347 in the center of the Maricopa community. The Sunset Line has been recently double-tracked with plans for a third track. It serves as one of UPRR's key trans-continental freight corridors and currently, over 60 trains per day pass through the UPRR/SR-347 intersection at speeds in excess of 50 mph.

According to traffic counts taken in February 2009, approximately 34,000 vehicles, including 168 school buses carrying an estimated 2,856 children, cross this rail line during the morning and afternoon peak hours. On average 30 pedestrians cross the tracks at peak times, including many students walking to and from Maricopa High School. Additionally, a majority of the patrons of Harrah's Ak-Chin Casino, located just a few miles south of Maricopa, cross the UPRR line on SR-347 in both personal vehicles and charter buses.

Crash statistics documented in the City of Maricopa's 2007 feasibility study show that SR-347 at the UPRR Line had 21 accidents including one fatality in the previous three years. The Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) most recent 10-year accident statistics for all of Pinal County show an average of three fatalities a year out of 30 incidents per year countywide. In the City of Maricopa, FRA statistics show five

fatalities in the past 20 years at crossing **741343C** (SR347 & UPRR)-this includes an incident in June, 2000 in which a toddler was trapped in a truck stalled on the crossing. Residents of the community remember this tragedy vividly and never want to see it repeated.

Besides the congestion and traffic nightmares, the crossing presents problems for emergency and hazardous materials vehicles that must often sit and wait for trains to pass. Or worse, the congestion stalls traffic as the trains upload and download passengers at the nearby Amtrak station.

The City of Maricopa is requesting \$2.028 million from the discretionary grant program to fund phase one of their five-phase plan to construct the SR-347 grade separation project. Phase one will eliminate the existing intersection conflicts with the future SR-347 overpass/underpass by providing a high-capacity intersection between SR 347 and Honeycutt Road, north of the grade separation, by merging the Maricopa-Casa Grande Highway into Honeycutt Road.

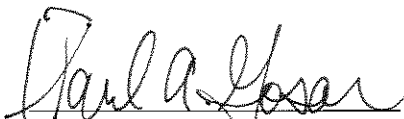
It is also important to note that the City of Maricopa has already committed \$720,000, and the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) has committed another \$500,000 to this project. Both the city and ADOT are expected to commit additional funds to this important project as it moves forward.

In conclusion, the UPRR crossing at SR-347 is one of the most dangerous rail crossings in Arizona. Because it bisects the fastest growing area of the state, traffic is congested, public safety is compromised, and children are at risk. The only way to resolve this dangerous situation is an over- or underpass at the current grade crossing.

Therefore, we strongly support the City of Maricopa's SR-347 grade separation project DOT grant applications. As always, we ask that this matter is handled in strict accordance with existing agency rules, regulations, and ethical guidelines.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. Please do not hesitate to contact either of our offices with questions, or if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,


Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S
Member of Congress


Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

cc: Victor Mendez, Administrator, FHWA