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WATER RESOURCES
AND ENVIRONMENT

January 29, 2014

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson:

It was a pleasure to meet you in person several weeks ago during your visit to Capitol Hill. I was particularly encouraged by your interest in the photograph displayed in my front office of the Blue Water Bridge in Port Huron. As you saw in the photograph, there is severe congestion with vehicles crossing into the United States but not with vehicles exiting the United States. I write today to urge your assistance in making the expansion of the Blue Water Bridge plaza a priority as it relates to the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) prioritization process for funding of a lease agreement and the U.S. General Services Administration's (GSA) funding for Land Port of Entry.

In December 2011, Canadian Prime Minister Harper and President Obama signed the *Beyond the Border: A Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness* agreement designed to foster a perimeter approach to security, infrastructure investment and economic competitiveness. The premise of the agreement was the need to harmonize our efforts in security, regulation and infrastructure planning to aid the flow of commerce and trade that exists between our two nations. The Blue Water Bridge was clearly identified in the action plan as an investment priority – a welcome development that underscores the national importance of this crossing.

The Blue Water Bridge is the second busiest land border crossing on the northern tier of the nation. Both Interstate 94 and Interstate 69 have their genesis at the Blue Water Bridge. It sits at the crossroad of the trade corridor for our nation, ensuring the transit of goods and services that are critical to the economic strength of Michigan and the nation writ large. U.S.-Canada goods and services trade at over \$700 billion each year – much of which is transported across the Blue Water Bridge. In fact, our neighbors in Canada view this as such an important crossing to both security and commerce that they have completed their own plaza expansion. Unfortunately, the United States is significantly behind in our efforts to modernize this vital port of entry.

For more than 10 years, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have worked with CBP and GSA to plan and develop improvements on and around the international border processing station in Port Huron. The lengthy planning process involved multiple local government agencies and resulted in a Record of Decision in May 2009 on a new 57 acre plaza that met CBP specifications at the time. However, soon after submitting the budget request for lease financing, CBP announced that it did not consider the project a funding priority.

Following this disappointing news, MDOT and FHWA worked with CBP to develop a reduced 16 acre plaza proposal with the goal of balancing both functional and budgetary concerns. A Land Port of Entry Feasibility Study Revision was completed; yet, CBP once again announced this project would still not receive priority funding.

The most recent CBP and GSA feasibility study estimates the cost to be \$165 million. There is no doubt that our nation is facing a difficult fiscal climate. Tough funding decisions must be made. Yet, the safety of our citizens and nation should be of the utmost importance when making these budgetary decisions. Moreover, national security is an economic imperative. Completing this project is not simply a security matter but also one of profound economic impact.

Optimally, full funding for this project would be included in the President's Fiscal Year 2015 budget request. I have communicated the importance of federal funding for this project to the Administration several times in the past. However, recognizing the fiscal constraints on our federal budget, I ask you to explore whether it is feasible to establish a public-private partnership as an innovative way of providing the necessary resources for this critical project.

This can be accomplished several ways, such as through a lease-purchase agreement where the private sector finances and builds the facility and then leases it to a public agency, through a financial agreement where the public facility is sold to a holding company and then leases it back and continues to operate it, or through a single contract that is awarded to a private company with the title to the facility remaining with the public sector. No two public-private partnerships are alike; each is unique to the infrastructure needs at hand.

In this instance with the Blue Water Bridge Customs Plaza, a public-private partnership should not replace a federal funding stream; rather it should be considered as a more efficient, less costly way of completing this project. Utilizing this method could be a more prudent use of taxpayer dollars in these challenging economic times.

While I firmly believe the federal government is responsible for the entire cost associated with the customs plaza expansion, the economic realities of Washington have made that difficult to achieve. This is a project that has been analyzed, studied, and debated for over 10 years. The time has come for a mutually agreeable solution. I look forward to your answer on this vitally important project.

I look forward to working with you as you begin your tenure as Secretary.

Sincerely,



Candice S. Miller

Chairman

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

Committee on Homeland Security

cc: Secretary Anthony Foxx
Administrator Dan M. Tangherlini
Governor Rick Snyder
State Sen. Phil Pavlov
State Rep. Paul Muxlow
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