



July 10, 2019

Elaine Chao
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Subject: Nielsville Bridge Replacement, FY2019 BUILD Grant

Dear Secretary Elaine Chao,

I am writing to express support from West Central Ag for the application submitted by Polk County, MN, and Traill County, ND, on behalf of the Multi-State Regional Connectivity Project to the FY 2019 BUILD Grant Program.

The closure of the Nielsville Bridge has severed the primary route between Traill and Polk Counties. This has caused severe problems for 300 to 500 ranchers, farmers, manufacturers, and residents who utilized this critical transportation link on a daily basis.

The continued closure of the bridge is a significant blow to local agriculture, which is the backbone of the local economy. According to the USDA in 2012, Traill County produced \$255 million worth of grain, oilseeds, dry beans, and dry peas, ranking it 64th in the nation.

West Central Ag Services is a locally owned Cooperative of 1500 farmers with annual sales of \$450 million located in west central Minnesota. Since 2013 our cooperative has invested over \$30 million into our Grain and Fertilizer facilities in Beltrami. The Nielsville bridge closure has made doing business across state lines very difficult. We can attest that the most direct route for much of those agriculture products to get from the field to the market is Polk County State Aid Highway 1 and the shuttered bridge. The loss of this route has cost producers increased transportation costs and damaged the fluid movement of ag products regionally.

We hope you will review this application and consider the significant cost to local agriculture the loss of the bridge has brought.

We appreciate your consideration of this application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bryan Mueller", is written over a horizontal line.

Bryan Mueller
West Central Ag