

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

November 15, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE, West Building, 9th Floor  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I write you following our phone call on August 12, 2024, to reiterate and expand upon my strong support for the application submitted by the City of Utica to the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) grant program, requesting \$1,809,957 to pilot a network of smart traffic signals along a 2-mile stretch of Genesee Street – Utica’s main street – which is heavily traveled by emergency response, public transit, and snow removal vehicles, as well as pedestrians with disabilities, health conditions, and language or cultural barriers. Recognizing the importance of this project to the City of Utica, Oneida County and the entire Mohawk Valley, I am working with the city to secure funding through the FY’25 Congressionally Directed Spending process to greenlight the project, and I strongly urge DOT to do its part in helping the city realize this longstanding transportation priority.

Dating as far back as the 1950s, the antiquated, asynchronous traffic signals along Genesee Street in the City of Utica are infamous, symbolizing generations of frustration with traffic delays, safety hazards and more in the heart of the city’s downtown. After decades of underinvestment, the Genesee Street traffic signals have evolved from a mere inconvenience into a multi-faceted safety and development challenge. Today, despite regular maintenance and calibration, the deteriorating Genesee Street traffic signals are prone to repeated time “slippage,” increasing vehicle congestion and emissions, delaying emergency responders, endangering high-risk pedestrian groups, chilling economic development, and more. Additionally, the existing signals lack of accessibility features presents significant safety concerns for the city’s high-density of non-English speaking populations and persons with disabilities. Per 2022 NYS Sherriff’s Association data for the City of Utica, 38% of pedestrian-involved crashes and nearly 20% of all crashes occur in the project pilot zone. Simply stated, the traffic signals currently in operation along Genesee Street are inadequate to control the up to 10,000 vehicles and hundreds of high-risk pedestrian crossings occurring daily, leaving this vital downtown corridor ill-equipped for future growth and development as the city seeks to accelerate its downtown revitalization.

With funding, the City of Utica plans to install nearly two dozen new, smart traffic signals along a 2-mile stretch of Genesee Street and a contiguous 5-block offshoot of Bleecker and Elizabeth Streets (the “pilot zone”) to address the traffic, safety and development challenges caused by the city’s current antiquated, asynchronous traffic signals. Utica projects that new, smart signals could reduce emergency response times up to 25%, reduce overall traffic and vehicle travel time up to 25%, reduce overall vehicle wait time up to 35%, reduce pedestrian-involved traffic injuries up to 25%, reduce traffic incidents up to 20%, reduce emissions up to 21%, and reduce fuel consumption up to 10% across the pilot

zone, which is heavily concentrated by disadvantaged populations. In support of this project, the City of Utica has compiled an impressive list of local partners, including the Utica Fire and Police Departments, the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Utica's nationally recognized refugee agency (the Center), Utica's public transit hub (CENTRO), the Mohawk Valley Economic Development District, the Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Council, the NYS Department of Transportation, and more.

This is Utica's third consecutive year requesting SMART funds for traffic signals, demonstrating the city's commitment to the project and the project's importance to the community. After writing you in support of Utica's request last year, I was disheartened to learn that their request was unsuccessful. At my urging, Utica worked to obtain feedback from USDOT SMART program staff on the city's previous applications. Utica used that feedback to improve this year's application by directly addressing the weaknesses identified by SMART program staff – clarifying that curb ramps and other ADA infrastructure are already in place, adding technical training requirements and education partners, updating the work plan to provide 10 months for installation, and more.

In view of the foregoing, and for many other reasons, I respectfully reiterate my strong support for Utica's SMART application. I applaud Utica for its diligence, commitment, resolve, and work in submitting this application as the city works tirelessly to realize this longstanding transportation priority. I sincerely hope that this application is met with your approval.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my grants coordinator in my Washington, DC office at (202) 224-6542.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator