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NEW DEMOCRAT COALITION

July 14, 2023

Robin Carnahan
Administrator
U.S. General Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20405

Dear Administrator Carnahan:

I would like to first thank the U.S. General Service Administration (GSA) for their continued work and responsiveness to my office and community members as it pertains to the Bridge of the Americas (BOTA) Land Port of Entry modernization project. Built in 1967, BOTA has reached the end of its lifecycle as most of the buildings and infrastructure are operating at or beyond capacity and are no longer meeting the U.S. Customs and Border Protection current design standards. Thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, \$600 - \$700 million have been designated to renovate BOTA. I welcome this funding and know that the investment is desperately needed. As the agency continues to work with the El Paso community on this historic project and as you begin the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping process. I write to request you consider conducting a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) as part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that is required by NEPA.

As you know, BOTA connects with the Mexican land port of "Cordova" in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, and is one of the four crossings in my district of El Paso, Texas. This port processes toll-free inbound and outbound commercial, non-commercial, and pedestrian traffic. Although this project will undoubtedly transform BOTA and the movement of people and commerce within our region. Residents who live near the port have raised concerns about the environmental and health impacts that already exist along with questions about whether the project could potentially exacerbate existing issues.

El Paso is an economically disadvantaged community in a region where our residents are burdened with poor air quality and the negative impacts of climate change. The pollution emitted by idling vehicles waiting for inspection at all of our land ports has significantly impacted the well-being of residents, federal personnel, and students and staff at nearby schools. The lack of adequate CBP personnel to operate all our land ports at full capacity – to more efficiently move that traffic -- has exacerbated wait-times and increased that pollution.

I appreciate the significance of the NEPA process and its broad definition of "environment," encompassing physical, natural, safety, housing, and health aspects. I also applaud your focus on creating a sustainable land port of entry at the Bridge of the Americas, one that will reduce the carbon footprint and could be LEED certified. If conducted, I believe a HIA within a three-mile radius of BOTA could support the NEPA process by helping GSA better understand the current health challenges faced by residents who live near what is one of the busiest land ports of entry in our region, one that sees disproportionately high traffic because it is toll-free.

HIAs help thoroughly examine various factors, including health indicators such as respiratory and cardiovascular health, non-chemical stressors like noise pollution, indoor and ambient air pollutants, as well as other sources of pollution in the area. By incorporating a HIA, recommendations to mitigate any harmful or negative factors could be identified and adopted.

I understand that any decision around conducting a HIA will also carefully evaluate the impact on the timeline and budgetary restraints for the BOTA project. I recommend that GSA assess the possibility of conducting a Health Impact Assessment (HIA), provided that it can be carried out efficiently and expeditiously, and without jeopardizing the current project schedule or posing any substantial risks to the funding that has already been allocated to El Paso.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you about how we can protect public health, uphold the principles of sustainable development, and safeguard the environmental well-being of El Paso through this historic investment.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Veronica Escobar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress