

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 11, 2019

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

We write today in strong support of the application submitted by the Maine Department of Transportation for funding assistance through the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) Program. MaineDOT's application seeks \$36 million in federal funding toward the Madawaska International Bridge Replacement Project, a project that will also receive contributions from Maine and Canada, with a total cost of more than \$73 million.

The Madawaska International Bridge, which connects Madawaska, Maine, with Edmundston, New Brunswick, Canada, serves as a vital link for residents, businesses, and tourists alike, not only between two communities, but between two nations. This bridge was deemed fracture critical in October 2017, and has been posted with a five ton weight limit ever since. The bridge's deteriorating condition has proved detrimental to the communities served by this crucial connector, hindering the ability of businesses in the region to operate at full capacity.

One of the Maine companies that is being harmed by the highly restrictive weight limits on the bridge is the Twin Rivers Paper Company. The company's Madawaska mill is the largest employer in northern Maine, responsible for nearly 500 full-time equivalent Maine jobs and more than 5,800 indirect jobs across the region, and supporting more than 1,400 companies in its supply chain. The mill's wages are well above the average forest manufacturing earnings in the state, and Twin Rivers' operations generate nearly \$13 million in annual tax revenue for the state of Maine. Under the Madawaska International Bridge's current weight limits, all commercial traffic from Canada to Madawaska must now be re-routed primarily through the Van Buren, Maine, U.S. Customs and Border Protection facility, adding 75 miles and nearly two hours in transit time to each trip. Due to these mandatory detours, Twin Rivers is expected to absorb roughly \$12 million in additional transportation costs for raw materials and finished goods over the course of the replacement bridge's construction period.

The poor condition of the bridge also creates challenges for residents and tourists as they travel across the border to make deliveries, purchase everyday goods and services, and enjoy the outdoor recreation that Maine has to offer. A safe and structurally sound Madawaska International Bridge is essential to the daily lives of area residents and the regional economy, and a failure to replace it will create a continued decline in economic and employment opportunities in this region of Maine.

Therefore, we respectfully request that you consider funding this project in this round of INFRA grant awards. We urge your careful consideration of these applications, subject to all applicable laws and regulations.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus King
United States Senator