

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4704
February 24, 2023

Mr. Shailen Bhatt
Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Administrator Bhatt:

I am writing in support of an application submitted by The Northwest Seaport Alliance (NWSA) and the Port of Tacoma for the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) *National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grant Program (Culvert Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) Program)* for the Wapato Creek Fish Passage Restoration Project.

The Wapato Creek Culvert (WCC) conveys creek and tidal waters beneath the Pierce County Terminal (PCT) to an outlet on the Blair Waterway. Fish passage through the WCC is only possible during high tides, which restricts anadromous salmonids' access to upstream habitat. Chum and Coho salmon have been confirmed in Wapato Creek, and according to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), other potential fish species in Wapato Creek include Pink and Chinook salmon, Steelhead, Coastal Searun Cutthroat, and resident trout. As you are aware, several of these fish are protected species and are listed as 'endangered' or 'threatened' under the Endangered Species Act. Currently, the "dogleg" shape of the culvert significantly restricts light in the system, which further impedes fish migration. A 2022 structural analysis of the culvert indicated that it is at the end of its service life and must be repaired, replaced, or upgraded to maintain safe operations and to avoid disruptions to the Port Terminal.

Addressing the Wapato Creek culvert and outfall at the Pierce County Terminal will improve aquatic connectivity for an important Puget Sound habitat, expanding on recent restoration work on Lower Wapato Creek; reducing the risk of localized flooding; and ensuring safe and resilient terminal operations. If funded, this project would go to its design and permitting phases, allowing NWSA and the Port to determine the best path forward for restoring fish passage to the WCC. Specifically, the design phase will allow NWSA to prepare for the restoration project's significant challenges, including addressing the underground utilities in the area as well as the overhead utilities comprised of high voltage electrical and communication transmission lines. This project is supported by the Washington Public Ports Association, Association of Washington Business, Tacoma Chamber of Commerce, Fife Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Board of Tacoma-Pierce County, City of Tacoma, and City of Fife.

Thank you for your consideration of The Northwest Seaport Alliance & Port of Tacoma application. Please contact Bree Rabourn in my Seattle office at 206-553-0724 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
United States Senator