



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Christine O. Gregoire
Governor of Washington
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Gary R. Herbert
Governor of Utah
Vice Chairman

Pam O. Inmann
Executive Director

Headquarters:
1600 Broadway
Suite 1700
Denver, CO 80202

303-623-9378
Fax 303-534-7309

Washington, D.C. Office:
400 N. Capitol Street, N.W.
Suite 388
Washington, D.C. 20001

202-624-5402
Fax 202-624-7707

www.westgov.org

April 3, 2012

The Honorable Ray H. LaHood
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

In 2010, the Western Governors' Wildlife Council (the Council) wrote to you in appreciation for the inclusion of "improved habitat connectivity" in the list of environmentally sustainable criteria for the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) discretionary funds. We are writing again to commend the inclusion of this criteria in TIGER discretionary funds provided through the 2012 Appropriations Act.

Since 2008, the Council has been working at the direction of Western Governors to identify key wildlife corridors and crucial habitats in the West and coordinate implementation of needed policy options and tools to aid in conserving those landscapes. With its public release in 2013, we expect this information to support transportation planning efforts across the region.

In part through the leadership of the Western Governors, but also through priorities pursued by your department, many Western states have developed good working relationships between their wildlife agencies and departments of transportation. We commend state departments of transportation for their efforts to work with state wildlife agencies to construct valuable wildlife crossings, overpasses and underpasses across the West.

Such projects foster important partnerships among state wildlife agencies, DOTs, local government and non-governmental organizations that support innovation and environmental sustainability in the transportation arena. These partnerships maintain, improve and restore connectivity for wildlife while also improving highway safety by significantly reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions. Examples include projects submitted this year by the Boise River Wildlife Linkage Partnership; Kittitas County, Washington; and Sublette County, Wyoming.

Funds provided through the TIGER program not only make highways safer for the public and for wildlife but also boost the economies of Western states through job creation. Thank you for the leadership being advanced by the U.S. Department of Transportation on the use of these funds, and for consideration of projects that support wildlife and habitat connectivity.

Sincerely,

John Harja
Chairman, WGWC
State of Utah

cc: WGWC members
Western State DOT Directors