



Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council

Guiding the Future of Transportation for the Twin Ports Area

July 11, 2023

Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
1568 Hwy 2
Two Harbors, MN 55616

Re: Letter of Support – Workshop Proposal - Identifying Beneficial Use Priorities for Dredged Material from the Port of Duluth-Superior

Dear Amber Westerbur:

The Harbor Technical Advisory Committee (HTAC), an advisory committee of the Metropolitan Interstate Council (MIC), is pleased to add their support for the workshop entitled *“Identifying Beneficial Use Opportunities for Dredged Material from the Port of Duluth-Superior”* being submitted by the University of Minnesota Sea Grant College Program to the Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program *“Capacity Grants for Coastal Management”* competition (conferences and training).

As the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Duluth-Superior area, the MIC is charged with transportation and land use planning for the urbanized area. The Port of Duluth-Superior is a key asset within our region's transportation network and our region's economy benefits from the ongoing strategic investment. This workshop will address a particularly timely and urgent need for the Port of Duluth-Superior. The demand for dredged material for habitat restoration projects is expected to decrease rapidly over the next few years due to the expected delisting of the St. Louis River Area of Concern. Dredging operations cannot commence unless a placement option is identified well in advance (two years prior) of the dredging contractor mobilization. This workshop and its outcomes are essential to the continued operation of the Port of Duluth-Superior.

The HTAC agrees that the proposed project supports the goal to ensure the economic and safety goals identified as a *“Short Term”* need in the project list(s) of the Duluth-Superior's Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Since the Dredging Subcommittee is a working group of the HTAC, we look forward to working with Minnesota and Wisconsin Sea Grants to plan and implement this important one-day workshop.

Thank you for your consideration. The MIC looks forward to the collaborative work ahead. If you have any questions or need any further information please let me know.

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Tel 218-529-7541

www.dsmic.org

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Sincerely,

Ron Chicka

Ron Chicka, AICP
Director – Metropolitan
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Cc: Ed Anderson, HTAC Chair
Jeff Stollenwerk, HTAC Vice-Chair





Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council

Guiding the Future of Transportation for the Twin Ports Area

July 14, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Subject: Letter of Support – Blatnik Bridge Reconstruction Project
Mega Program & Bridge Investment Program (BIP) Funding Applications

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

On behalf of the Metropolitan Interstate Council (MIC) the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Duluth-Superior urbanized area, I am pleased to submit this letter of support for the joint Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Transportation applications for federal funding for the Blatnik Bridge Reconstruction Project under the Mega Program and the Bridge Investment Program (BIP).

The Blatnik Bridge is one of two bridges that connects Duluth, Minnesota to Superior, Wisconsin, carrying I-535 across the St. Louis Bay. This project will replace the entire Blatnik Bridge structure to restore it to good structural condition, modernize the approaching interchange and ensure the bridge's long-term operations and safety. Many industries, employers, health care patients, students, shoppers, commuters, and tourists depend on the Blatnik Bridge to deliver their goods and services and provide access to jobs, hospitals, and other destinations in Duluth, Superior, and the surrounding region. As such, replacing this bridge is a top priority for both states.

This bridge is an important freight and commercial connection between the Twin Ports and the Upper Midwest region. The Blatnik Bridge is essential to the functioning and success of the national shipping industry, as the project serves commerce through the international multi-modal Port of Duluth-Superior. The Port of Duluth-Superior is the largest U.S. port on the Great Lakes and one of the largest marine gateways for U.S. trade with Canada, the number-one trade partner of Minnesota and the nation. The port is located on the western tip of Lake Superior and the St. Lawrence Seaway, one of the nation's principal USMCA trade corridors. Improvements made to the bridge

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will bring further economic success to the port and regional economy, and strengthen the national supply chain as the Port of Duluth-Superior is 17th largest port in the U.S.

This project will improve the poor conditions of the bridge by completely replacing all structural elements of the bridge and ensuring it is resilient to weather and climate threats. Inefficient and dangerous traffic operations will also improve, with a redesigned bridge span and Wisconsin approach that has a high crash history. Additionally, this project provides the opportunity to add strongly supported bicycle and pedestrian facilities to the Blatnik Bridge, improving non-vehicle mobility and recreation.

This project's improvements are consistent with both the BIP and Mega Program goals and grant criteria. The BIP grant carefully considers projects that improve the condition of bridges as well as the safety, efficiency, and reliability of the movement of people and freight over bridges. The proposed transportation improvements will greatly improve safety and mobility on the Blatnik Bridge and improve access to and from regional businesses—especially the downtowns of Duluth and Superior and the Port of Duluth-Superior. These improvements will not only encourage regional economic growth but also strengthen the reliability of the transportation network that serves hundreds of communities across northern Minnesota and Wisconsin while also expanding nationally.

As the federally designated MPO for the Duluth-Superior area, the MIC is responsible for determining transportation projects that are federally funded. Our mission includes dedication to region-wide transportation planning and acting as a forum (with our member committees) for transportation issues in the urbanized area. The initiatives within this grant application support a key objective within the MPOs Metropolitan Transportation Plan; that of safe and efficient movement of people and goods within the Duluth-Superior metropolitan area.

Thank you for your consideration of this application for a grant to help fund the Blatnik Bridge Reconstruction Project under the BIP and Mega programs. The MIC looks forward to the collaborative work ahead. If you have any questions or need any further information, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Ron Chicka, Director AICP
Metropolitan Interstate Council
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218.529.7506

cc: Wayne Boucher, MN MIC Policy Board Co-Chair
Nick Baker, WI MIC Policy Board Co-Chair

