20 January 2023

Gloria M. Shepherd
Executive Director
Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE., Mailstop E62-204
Washington, DC 20590-0001

RE**: NWSA Federal Highway Administration Culvert AOP Grant Application**

Dear Ms. Shepherd,

Please accept our support for The Northwest Seaport Alliance (NWSA) Wapato Creek Fish Passage Restoration grant application submitted *to the Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration's FY*2022 Culvert Aquatic Organism Passage Program.

The Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber is a non-profit service organization focused on equitable economic development and community engagement in the South Sound. We have been in service for over 138 years and today serve almost 1400 members that represent diverse businesses and industry partners, many of which share our passion and commitment to supporting smart investments in ecological and economic infrastructure.

The NWSA seeks federal funding to design and permit a solution to the Wapato Creek Culvert (WCC) which currently presents a significant barrier to aquatic connectivity between Puget Sound and Wapato Creek. In addition to concerns for aquatic organism passage, local flood risk and declining structural integrity at the culvert threaten to disrupt international marine terminal operations.

The WCC conveys creek and tidal waters beneath Pierce County Terminal 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. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) classifies the WCC as a fish barrier with an "unknown" percent passable. There is also a 'dogleg" in the culvert significantly restricting light in the system which further impedes fish migration. Improving aquatic connectivity at WCC will allow fish access to upstream habitat including the new habitat site at Lower Wapato Creek completed by the Port of Tacoma in collaboration with the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, city governments, and other permitting agencies.

Addressing the WCC and outfall at the Pierce County Terminal will improve fish passage and establish hydrologic connectivity within the Wapato Creek estuary, reducing flood risks for surrounding communities while maintaining critical international marine terminal operations and safety. I urge you to support the NWSA Culvert AOP application. If you have any questions about our support for this planning effort, please contact me, phone, and email below.

Sincerely,

Andrea H. Reay
Pres./CEO Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber
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