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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-4706

OFFICES  
1226 LONGWORTH OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC, 20515  
(202) 225-5916

950 PACIFIC AVENUE  
SUITE 1230  
TACOMA, WA 98402  
(253) 272-3515

345 6<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
SUITE 500  
BREMERTON, WA 98337  
(360) 373-9725

[www.kilmer.house.gov](http://www.kilmer.house.gov)

August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I am pleased today to write in strong support of the Northwest Seaport Alliance's (NWSA) grant application submitted to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Federal Highway Administration's Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant program. This funding, if awarded, would enable NWSA to seek a solution to the Wapato Creek Culvert (WCC), which currently presents a significant barrier to aquatic connectivity between Puget Sound and Wapato Creek.

Running through the Puyallup River Valley, Wapato Creek provides a critical habitat for a wide variety of plants and wildlife—including species of endangered salmon. 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 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.

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 at the Port of Tacoma. This funding, if awarded, will enable the NWSA to mitigate the potential for upstream flooding during periods of high tide/flow, therefore decreasing the risk of flood damage to critical infrastructure and port properties upstream.

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. It is for these reasons that I strongly support the NWSA's application to the DOT Federal Highway Administration's PROTECT grant program, and I urge your fair and full consideration of their proposal. Should you have any questions, please contact Emma Abraham in my Tacoma district office at [Emma.Abraham@mail.house.gov](mailto:Emma.Abraham@mail.house.gov) or 253-272-3515.

Sincerely,

Derek Kilmer



Member of Congress