US Department of Transportation

How to Draft Merit Criteria Narrative

January 18, 2024

Webinar Information

All participants automatically join on mute, with cameras off

Audio

- Select "Computer Audio" or
- Call: 669 254 5252
  - Webinar ID: 161 151 5672
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Technical Support

- Email:
  - Sharon.Hurst.CTR@dot.gov
  - webconference@dot.gov

Questions for Presenters

- Please type your questions in the Q&A box

More Information

- This webinar is being recorded and will be posted on the RAISE Grants website: https://www.transportation.gov/RAISEgrants

Agenda

- RAISE Team
- RAISE Merit Criteria
- Rating Rubric
- How Merit Criteria Narratives are Evaluated
- What Projects Compete Well Under the Merit Review?
- Framing Merit Criteria Narrative
- Define and Provide Examples
- Q&A

RAISE Team Introductions

Andrea Jacobson

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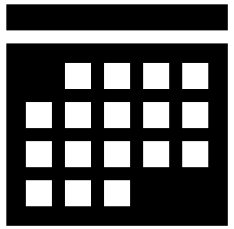
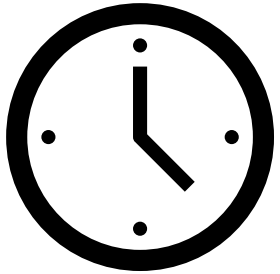
RAISE NOFO Is Now Open!



Notice of Funding Opportunity is **OPEN**

Grants.gov Opportunity Number: DTOS59-24-RA-RAISE

Assistance Listing: 20.933



APPLY by **February 28, 2024**, at 11:59 pm Eastern

Submit on grants.gov

No late applications accepted

Additional resources at www.transportation.gov/raisegrants

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RAISE 2024 Webinars

Webinars:

1) **How To Compete for RAISE Grants** (December 19, 2023)
2) **RAISE Location Designations** (January 4, 2024)
3) **Completing the SF 424 and Project Information Form** (January 8, 2024)
4) **How to Draft Merit Criteria Narrative** (Today)

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5 **How to Compete for RAISE Grants: Rural and Tribal Applicants**
January 23, 2024

6 **What Happens After Being Selected for Award?**
February 1, 2024

https://www.transportation.gov/RAISEgrants/outreach

RAISE Merit Criteria

RAISE Merit Criteria

Statutorily required **8 merit criteria** are:

1. Safety
2. Environmental Sustainability
3. Quality of Life
4. Mobility and Community Connectivity
5. Economic Competitiveness
6. State of Good Repair
7. Partnership and Collaboration
8. Innovation

Questions? Use the Q&A box

See RAISE NOFO Sections D and E

RAISE Merit Criteria Rating Rubric

For **each** merit criterion, the Department will consider whether the anticipated benefits are clear, direct, data-driven, and significant which will result in a rating of "high", "medium", "low", or "non-responsive", as described in the rubric in the NOFO.

- Primary Project Purpose (high) vs. Ancillary (medium)
- Activities listed in the High column are different than activities listed in the Medium column
- Projects do NOT need to address all elements in the high column to get a high; One is sufficient.
- Data-driven, well justified assumptions about what the project will accomplish

See RAISE NOFO page 28

RAISE Merit Criteria Rating Rubric

Merit Criteria:	Non-Responsive	Low	Medium	High
Safety	Application did not address the Safety criterion OR Project negatively affects safety	Application contains insufficient information to assess safety benefit	The project has one or more of the following safety benefits, but safety may not be a primary project purpose or does not meet the description(s) of a 'high' rating: • Protect non-motorized or motorized travelers from safety risks; or • Reduce any number of fatalities and/or serious injuries	Safety is a primary project purpose AND the project has clear, direct, **data-driven** (for capital projects only), and significant benefits that targets a known, documented safety problem, by doing one or more of the following: • Protect non-motorized travelers from safety risks; or • Reduce fatalities and/or serious injuries in underserved communities to bring them below the state-wide average; or • Incorporate and cite specific actions and activities identified in the Department's National Roadway Safety Strategy plan or Improving Safety for Pedestrians and Bicyclists Accessing Transit report, or FTA's Safety Advisory 23-1: Bus-to-Person Collisions; or • Incorporate specific safety improvements that are part of a documented risk reduction mitigation strategy and that have, for example, port-wide or transit system impact.
Environmental Sustainability	Application did not address the Environmental Sustainability criterion OR Project negatively affects environmental sustainability	Application contains insufficient information to assess environmental sustainability benefits	Project has one or more of the following environmental sustainability benefits, but environmental sustainability may not be a primary project purpose or does not meet the description(s) of a 'high' rating: • Reduce transportation-related air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions; or • Reduce vehicle miles traveled; or • Incorporate lower-carbon pavement/construction materials; or • Redevelop brownfield sites; or • Improve resilience of infrastructure to current and future weather and climate risks; or • Make basic stormwater improvements	Environmental sustainability is a primary project purpose AND the project has clear, direct, **data-driven** (for capital projects only), and significant benefits that explicitly considers climate change and environmental justice, by doing one or more of the following: • Reduce transportation-related air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in disadvantages communities; or • Address the disproportionately negative environmental impacts of transportation on local communities such as by reducing exposure to elevated levels of air, water, and noise pollution; or • Align with the applicant's State Carbon Reduction Strategy, State Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Deployment Plan, or other State, local, or tribal greenhouse gas reduction plan; or • Align with the U.S. National Blueprint for Transportation Decarbonization; or • Implement transportation-efficient land use and design, such as drawing on the features of historic towns and

What Projects Compete Well Under the Merit Review?

Application clearly defines transportation **problem** and why your project is the **solution**

Application **tells a story** about the transportation challenges and details local, regional, or national **impacts**

Projects that align with the Merit Criteria and include **data-driven**, reasonable and justifiable **outcomes**

Projects that emphasize improved access to **safe, reliable, and affordable** transportation, particularly for underserved communities

Projects that explicitly consider **climate change** and **racial equity** throughout the project life cycle

Framing Merit Criteria Response

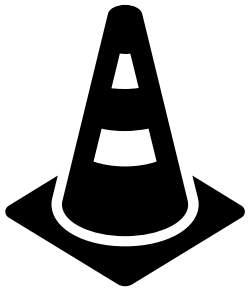
- Identify Bullet the Project Aligns With
- Define the Problem
- Provide Supporting Data
- Explain Why Project is the Solution

Merit Criterion: Safety

Protect motorized or non-motorized travelers from safety risks

Reduce fatalities or injuries to bring them below the statewide average

National Roadway Safety Strategy

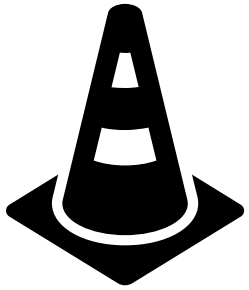


Improving Safety for Pedestrians and Bicyclists Accessing Transit

FTA's Safety Advisory 23-1: Bus-to-Person Collisions

See RAISE NOFO pages 30 and 37

Merit Criterion: Safety



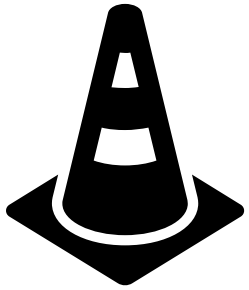
Transit Mobility Hub

The Problem: Propensity for broadside accidents at intersection, limited inaccessible sidewalks, lack of amenities for transit riders, non-existent turnarounds suitable for transit buses

The Data: 215 total crashes January 2018 – December 2020 with 5 fatal crashes, 12 involving bicycles, and 4 involving pedestrians.

The Solution: Project protects non-motorized travelers from safety risks by constructing a roundabout in place a traditional intersection, reducing road speeds from 45mph to 25mph, construct universally accessible 10FT-wide sidewalks and includes safety countermeasures as outlined in DOT's National Roadway Safety Strategy

Merit Criterion: Safety



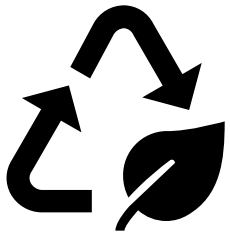
Multimodal Port Infrastructure

The Problem: Limited land for a variety of multimodal cargo necessitating some loading on a public street risking safety of port workers and non-motorized travelers in the neighboring community.

The Data: Two or more accidents per month over the last year. Truck collisions, rail engine escort guard vehicle collisions. Two pedestrian-truck accidents. Four serious accidents involving lost work, significant medical recovery or disability.

The Solution: Improve safety by creating a 3-acre multimodal laydown area using an abandoned railyard near the port road entrance eliminating loading on the public street. Shifting port staff to a renovated building off port to reduce personnel on the active dock area as part of the port-wide safety plan.

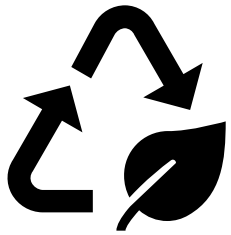
Merit Criterion: Environmental Sustainability



- Reduce transportation-related air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in underserved communities
- Improve the resilience of at-risk infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events and natural disasters caused by climate change
- Incorporate lower-carbon materials as described in the Environmental Protection Agency's interim guidance on low-carbon materials or align with the principles/objectives outlined the U.S. National Blueprint for Transportation Decarbonization.

See RAISE NOFO pages 30-31 and 37-38

Merit Criterion: Environmental Sustainability



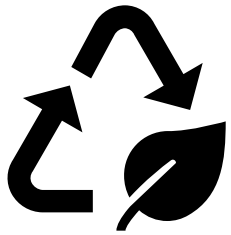
Village Trail

The Problem: The Village was relocated due to coastal erosion caused by climate change and has no road or path access which is distressing to the area's ecosystem

The Data: Damage to wetlands and streambeds is estimated to be as much as 200 acres, which includes ATV travel in intertidal zones and up to 30 unimproved ATV crossings of fish streams. Unquantified disturbed wetlands are associated with the approximately 13.5 miles of the trails connecting the villages

The Solution: Project will install 30-mile geocell trail to connect the village to the regional commercial hub which includes medical services. The use of Geocell trail infrastructure results in no permanent loss of wetlands and concentrates travel onto one main route avoiding adverse environmental impacts to air and water quality, wetlands, and indigenous wildlife habitats, and providing environmental preservation of wetlands.

Merit Criterion: Environmental Sustainability



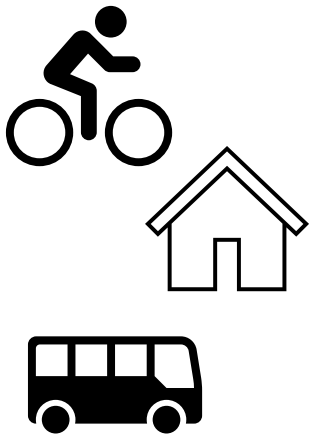
Highway and Street Corridor Planning

The Problem: High crash rate along a 3-miles stretch of road, water drainage issues, no pedestrian or bicycle facilities

The Data: There are **seven locations** where runoff from this highway segment discharge directly into a nearby Lake without any pre-treatment.

The Solution: The project will complete planning of roadway, drainage, utility and multimodal improvements along the existing highway and identify innovative ways to effectively treat stormwater, maintain the health of adjacent aquatic ecosystems, and build measures to improve infrastructure resiliency from flooding. Project also seeks to reduce vehicle miles traveled and emissions specifically through modal shift to active transportation by providing non-motorized linkages between businesses, high-density residential areas, and essential services within the 3-mile segment of the highway to the commercial center.

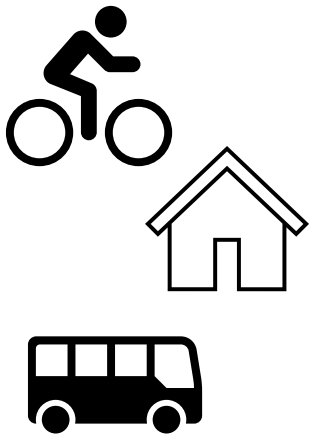
Merit Criterion: Quality of Life



- Increase affordable transportation choices by improving and expanding active transportation
- Reduce transportation and housing cost burdens by integrating mixed-use development and housing with multimodal transportation infrastructure
- Coordinate and integrate land use, affordable housing, and transportation planning in order to create more livable communities and expand travel choices
- Improve access to daily destinations like jobs, healthcare, grocery stores, schools, places of worship, recreation, or parks through transit and active transportation

See RAISE NOFO pages 31 and 38

Merit Criterion: Quality of Life



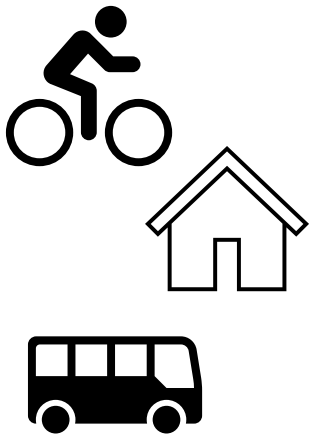
Neighborhood Walking Paths

The Problem: Underutilized walkability due to lack of shared-use paths and sidewalks

The Data: 23% of residents walk to grocery stores, pharmacies, a park and college which are less than 1 mile from the community center. 68% expect significantly greater usage.

The Solution: Construct 3 miles of multiuse path to improve access to daily destinations like grocery stores, parks, schools through active transportation which improves public health. Revise zoning to preserve housing choice and affordability

Merit Criterion: Quality of Life



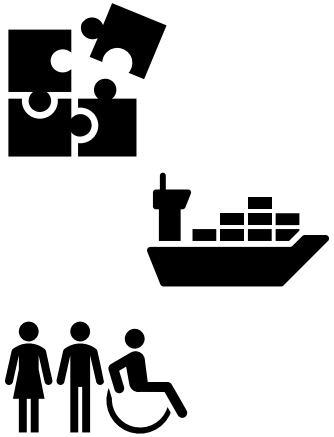
Reconnecting Planning

The Problem: Highway and urban renewal projects disrupted walkable, economically thriving neighborhoods, separated Black residents from the densest employment center, obliterated housing, lowered real estate values, etc.

The Data: The highway displaced an estimated 24,000 people and separated the historic Black neighborhoods from jobs in downtown. Urban renewal programs in the neighborhoods surrounding the highway further displaced an estimated 17,000 individuals, resulting in 41,000 displaced individuals

The Solution: This project will plan for the removal of a physical barrier and reconnect the local street grid with multimodal, active transportation, and transit-oriented development improving access to daily destinations such as two major employment centers, education, and healthcare in the urban core lowering combined housing and transportation cost burdens

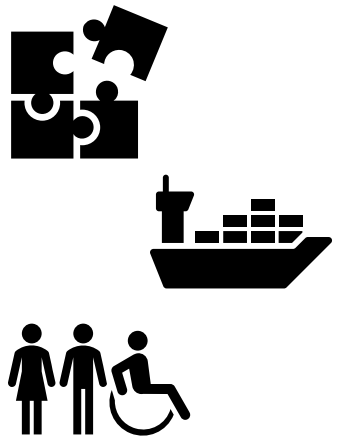
Merit Criterion: Mobility and Community Connectivity



- Improve system-wide connectivity with access to transit, micro-mobility, and mobility on-demand
- Remove physical barriers for individuals by reconnecting communities to direct, affordable transportation options
- Incorporate Universal Design including details of how the improvements go beyond ADA requirements
- Directly increasing intermodal and multimodal freight movement
- Consider last-mile freight plans in a Complete Streets and multimodal approach

See RAISE NOFO pages 32 and 38

Merit Criterion: Mobility and Community Connectivity



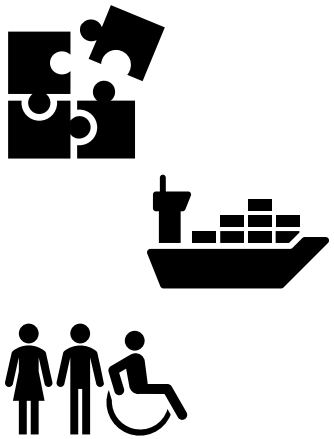
Trail Project

The Problem: The current bicycle and pedestrian connection between rural communities has limited connectivity with gaps that require on-road travel.

The Data: The approximate 4-mile connection between rural communities requires about 2.5 miles of travel on roads without any active transportation features.

The Solution: The project removes physical barriers for individuals by reconnecting communities to direct, affordable transportation options via the construction of 2.5 miles of off-road trail with signage and lighting.

Merit Criterion: Mobility and Community Connectivity



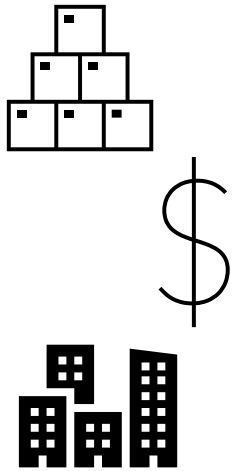
Transit Transfer Facility

The Problem: The current transit system lacks a facility in the downtown that can accommodate transfers between local and regional bus routes and streetcars.

The Data: The transit systems currently converge at four locations downtown and require riders to walk 5-minutes and cross 6 lanes of traffic to make most transfers.

The Solution: The project improves system-wide connectivity with access to transit by creating a single off-street transfer facility that accommodates local and regional bus routes and streetcars.

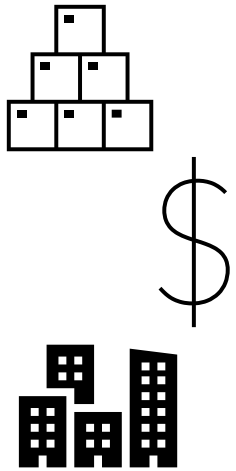
Merit Criterion: Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity



- Improve freight supply chain bottlenecks
- Utilize Disadvantaged Business Enterprises or 8(a) firms
- Create good-paying jobs with free and fair choice to join a union including using project labor agreements
- Promote greater public and private investments in land-use development
- Revitalize rural main street or locally driven density decisions that support equitable commercial and mixed-income residential development

See RAISE NOFO pages 33 and 39

Merit Criterion: Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity



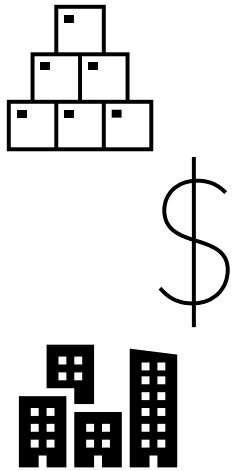
Investments to a Major Freight Corridor

The Problem: The current road is above capacity and experiences significant traffic delays that inhibit freight mobility.

The Data: Over 30% of daily traffic is trucks connecting between a major port, military base, and an international airport.

The Solution: The project improves intermodal and multimodal freight mobility between the port, military base, and international airport by reducing delays that will result in over $1 million in annual travel time savings for trucks.

Merit Criterion: Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity



Waterfront Trail Rehabilitation

The Problem: The existing waterfront trail serves as a key connection for tourism within the community but is being degraded due to coastal degradation and changing climate.

The Data: Tourism along the waterfront that is accessed via the trail is responsible for over 30% of the community's economy.

The Solution: The project facilitates tourism opportunities by rehabilitating the current waterfront trail to ensure continued connections between downtown and waterfront tourism opportunities.

Merit Criterion: State of Good Repair

- Restore and modernize core infrastructure assets that have met the useful life
- Create new infrastructure in remote communities that will be maintained in a state of good repair
- Address current or projected system vulnerabilities for underserved communities
- Prioritize improvement of existing transportation infrastructure within the existing footprint

See RAISE NOFO pages 34 and 39

Merit Criterion: State of Good Repair

Railroad Bridge Overpass Replacement Project

The Problem: The 87-year-old railroad bridge is a barrier to vehicular and non-motorized travel underneath as travel lanes are confined to the limits of the bridge's underpass abutments, as well as vertical clearance limitations for trucks and frequently clogged drainage structures.

The Data: The bridge is structurally deficient, rated in Poor Condition with signs of scaring and bent webbing from repetitive bridge strikes, and has met its useful life.

The Solution: The replacement bridge will be constructed within the existing footprint and will be modernized to accommodate all pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and vehicular infrastructure with expanded travel lanes and added sidewalks. The bridge will have added vertical clearance for last-mile freight access for large trucks. The project will also install a new stormwater system to improve drainage and flooding vulnerabilities. The asset will be maintained in a state of good repair.

Merit Criterion: State of Good Repair

Multimodal Transit Center Project

The Problem: The existing 48-year-old outdated transit facility is physically disconnected to the community it serves, lacks space for existing vehicle maintenance and storage, and cannot accommodate electric bus charging for a growing transit system that has experienced increased demand due to the county's 20% gain in population and an increase in the 65 and older demographic and persons with a disability.

The Data: The deadhead miles traveling to the existing storage and maintenance facility will be reduced by 34,117 miles annually with the new centrally-located facility. Storing vehicles indoors will reduce their exposure to weather-related damage and extend a bus's useful life by up to one year. These state-of-good repair improvements are projected to yield $1.1 million in annual maintenance and operations savings.

The Solution: The new centrally located transit center will modernize the transit system's core asset by providing a facility with enough indoor storage space for the current fleet, introduce electric bus charging stations, accommodate potential future modern transit loads and vehicle acquisitions, as well as provide a centralize maintenance, operations, and transfer facility that will keep pace with the transit agency's growing demand.

Merit Criterion: Partnership and Collaboration

- Engage residents and community-based organizations to ensure equity is being considered throughout the project's lifecycle
- Coordinate with other types of projects such as economic development, commercial or residential development near public transportation, power/electric infrastructure projects, or broadband deployment
- Partner with high-quality workforce development programs to help train, place, and retain people in good-paying jobs or registered apprenticeships
- Participate in the Thriving Communities Network

See RAISE NOFO pages 34 and 39

Merit Criterion: Partnership and Collaboration

Neighborhood Walking Paths

Engage residents directly in program decision-making, such as right of way acquisition, through briefings, site visits, social media, public hearings and open forum hearings, small group discussions, and surveys

Participating in a non-DOT capacity building program called the State Initiative for Community Housing. This program, sponsored by the University and the State Department of Community Affairs builds local capacity to address challenges of housing and community development with local leaders, public stakeholders, and community members.

Merit Criterion: Partnership and Collaboration

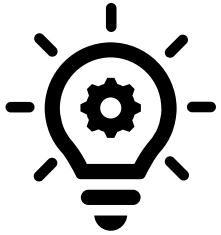
Urban Trails to Transit

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) participation rate of 30%

Small business incubator offers affordable commercial office space for six small DBE

Works with numerous public, private, nonprofit, and community-based partners to connect residents to services and training to guide them through the workforce pipeline

Merit Criterion: Innovation



Innovative Technologies

- Enhanced environment for electric vehicles to mitigate safety risks
- Low-carbon materials

Innovative Project Delivery

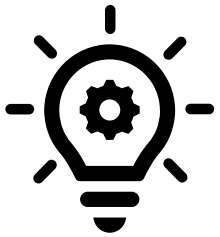
- Accelerated project delivery:
  - Single contractor design-build arrangements, advanced digital construction management, accelerated bridge construction

Innovative Financing

- Secure TIFIA, RRIF, or private activity bond financing
- Use congestion pricing or other demand management strategies

See RAISE NOFO pages 35 and 40

Merit Criterion: Innovation



Advanced Truck Travel Plaza Project

The Problem: Lack of available commercial truck parking in an area that needed safe and authorized places to park. Truckers often nearing the end of their hours of service are often forced to park in unsecure or unauthorized locations, such as the shoulder of the road, entrance/exit ramps, frontage roads, abandoned lots, or other prohibited locations.

The Data: On an average peak-hour weekday night there are 32,000 trucks needing a safe and authorized place to park but statewide there are only 27,000 authorized truck parking spaces.

The Solution: 120 truck parking spaces and the deployment of Innovative Technologies with a smartphone application to inform truckers of real-time parking space availability at the Plaza, along with a parking reservation system. The app also allows truckers to pay electronically for food and other services while at the travel plaza. In addition, the project will utilize a network of Dynamic Message Signs (DMS) along the highway to further alert truckers to real-time parking availability at the travel plaza. The Project introduces Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations.

Merit Criterion: Innovation

Railroad Grade Separation Project

The Problem: At-Grade conflicts between the transit line and freight rail services with the roadway for both vehicles and pedestrians that resulted in vehicle and train delays, as well as safety threats to all travelers both motorized and non-motorized.

The Data: Utilizing ABC technologies, it is 25 to 60 percent more cost effective than conventional construction methods as the new bridge slides into place, tied in to the approaches, and rail service resumed with only a 16-hour track closure.

The Solution: Build a new double track rail bridge over the roadway for both the transit line and freight line. The project utilized Innovative Project Delivery with Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC) methods including utilizing Prefabricated Bridge Elements, Slide-In Bridge Construction, and Geosynthetic Reinforced Soil – Integrated Bridge System (GRS-IBS) which all significantly reduce the onsite construction time, maintain rail and vehicular traffic, and ensure work-zone safety.

Q & A

Please type your questions in the **Q&A box**

- Email future questions to us at raisegrants@dot.gov
- See the frequently asked questions on our website for more answers