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February 2, 2017

Dear Mr. Knorr,

On behalf of approximately 3,000 members in southern Wisconsin, Madison Audubon Society strongly opposes the construction of any proposed alternative corridor in the I-39/90/94 study. These alternative corridors would have significant negative impacts on hundreds of acres of protected conservation lands within and surrounding Madison Audubon's 660-acre Goose Pond Sanctuary. This sanctuary extends to USH 51 and Leeds Township in the area considered for such alternative corridors. All four east relievers (A-D) under consideration by the DOT project team would pass within 1.5 miles of Madison Audubon's Goose Pond Sanctuary, and three of them (east relievers B, C, and D) would directly impact a conserved and restored property, Ankenbrandt Prairie.

Goose Pond Sanctuary is the largest prairie restoration of the original Empire (Arlington) Prairie that once covered 150,000 acres in the region. It includes 400 of mesic prairie, one of the largest restorations in the state. It contains the largest healthy prairie pothole/wetland remaining from that ecosystem and is an extraordinarily important breeding area and migratory stopover for waterfowl and shorebirds. The extensive prairies of the sanctuary are critical habitat for a variety of rare grassland birds and birds of prey, for prairie mammals such as the American badger, for threatened insects such as monarch butterfly, and for endangered species such as the silphium borer moth. In 2016 alone, 51 species of birds were found nesting at Goose Pond. The sanctuary is known both statewide and nationally as a critical refuge for a variety of resident and migratory wildlife and as a popular and accessible area for viewing and studying such wildlife. The Ankenbrandt Prairie is a vital part of the sanctuary and is a key area for grassland birds, wildlife and endangered species. In addition, like much of Goose Pond Sanctuary lands, Ankenbrandt Prairie was acquired using Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funding that permanently protects the property. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also holds a conservation easement on Ankenbrandt Prairie.

Constructing an east reliever from the interstate through this area would be an unmitigated conservation disaster. First, three of the corridor options would directly destroy much of the Ankenbrandt prairie and severely weaken any surviving remnant. In addition, Madison Audubon has restored and added to Goose Pond Sanctuary for almost 50 years in a

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scientifically-supported manner to create native habitats that benefit wildlife, restore and maintain valuable ecosystem services like soil retention and nutrient cycling, and provide recreation for Wisconsin residents. This was achieved thanks to the efforts and supports of many thousands of area citizens. An interstate alternative corridor would reverse the significant gains that have been made in these areas as well as the benefits they bring. The new road would also bring noise, light, air and water pollution to the sanctuary and would severely detract from public enjoyment of one of our area's premier natural areas.

From a broader perspective, any alternative corridor would disrupt an important conservation and farming area by needlessly consuming its most valuable component – land. The land in and around Goose Pond Sanctuary contains some of the richest soils in the world. As such, Madison Audubon and our neighbors value this land for its extraordinary productivity. It grows crops and a rich and diverse prairie in magnificent profusion. The east relievers would permanently destroy many acres of this most valuable natural resource and significantly reduce quality of life in the area. This unnecessary destruction is the reason many of our neighboring farmers and local officials are so opposed to an alternative corridor option. We join them in such opposition.

We understand the interstate that you study is increasingly congested and will grow more so over time. Working within the existing interstate corridor is the most timely and cost-efficient way to address those challenges. Madison Audubon staff, board, members, and volunteers will follow your study closely through all the means DOT affords us. Thank you for your consideration of our comments. Please contact us with any questions.

Signed,



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Executive Director



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