June 8, 2017

Secretary Elaine L. Chao
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao,

On behalf of more than 31,000 members, the National Society of Professional Engineers offers our expertise to you and the Department of Transportation should any needs regarding the work of professional engineers or the planning of transportation infrastructure in which professional engineers will be involved arise during your term as secretary.

In its 83-year history, NSPE has focused on advocating for professional engineers in all disciplines and the public they serve. As you have witnessed during your many successful years serving the public as secretary of labor and deputy secretary of transportation, being a professional engineer means more than just holding a certificate and possessing technical competence. It demonstrates a commitment to hold the public health, safety, and welfare above all other considerations.

NSPE believes the professional engineer’s education, experience, and professional obligations to protect the public health, safety, and welfare place the professional engineer in a key leadership role in ensuring infrastructure innovation, rebuilding, and growth. Infrastructure is the framework that supports virtually every aspect of our lives: transportation, commerce, public health, safety, and security. Specifically, professional engineering activities associated with infrastructure, such as development studies, design, implementation plans, construction quality assurance, operations, and maintenance, fulfill DOT’s mission, as well as enrich and enhance our global economy. As we invest in our infrastructure, professional engineers play a critical role in ensuring the quality and safety of its development and improvement.

The decay of our country’s critical infrastructure is occurring at an unacceptable rate. Decades of neglect and underfunding has brought US infrastructure to a tipping point. Events such as the near-failure of the Oroville Dam in California, the Gold King Mine blowout that had effects in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and further down the Animas River, and the I-35W bridge failure in Minnesota over the Mississippi river emphasize that the time to invest in infrastructure investigation, maintenance, and development is now.

A strong national transportation infrastructure enriches our nation’s global economic position, benefits our workforce, and protects the public health and safety. Professional engineers can provide DOT with critical expertise and serve a unique role in infrastructure development as the individuals in the decision chain
who have a duty to put public safety first. Professional engineers also play a key role in innovative design, ensuring cost savings, and construction quality that will better position us to compete with our international counterparts.

NSPE and the professional engineers we serve have a paramount responsibility to protect the public health, safety, and welfare, including in the identification of areas where these core considerations may be at risk. If we can answer any questions or be of service to you or your agency, please contact Arielle Eiser, senior manager of government relations, at aeiser@nspe.org.

Sincerely,

Kodi Jean Verhalen, P.E., Esq., F.NSPE
President