



CITY OF PALM DESERT

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August 26, 2024

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

RE: CVAG's ACCESS Indian Canyon Drive Project - Support

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the City of Palm Desert, I strongly support the Coachella Valley Association of Governments' (CVAG) application to the United States Department of Transportation's Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program (WCPP). CVAG's Addressing Climate Change, Emergencies and Sandstorms (ACCESS) Indian Canyon Drive project is a multi-benefit project that will improve habitat connectivity for threatened and endangered species in the Whitewater Floodplain Preserve Conservation Area, while also improving public safety, mobility, sustainability, and equity for surrounding disadvantaged communities.

The Whitewater Floodplain Preserve area is home to listed species such as the Coachella Valley fringed-toed lizard, the Coachella Valley milkvetch, and the burrowing owl, all of which depend on the unique sand transport ecosystem for habitat and survival. As a result of the sand transport process, blowsand accumulates on Indian Canyon Drive, an at-grade arterial road that crosses the conservation area. In effect, species that rely on the blowsand are placed in direct conflict with motorists traveling on Indian Canyon Drive. Building bridges and culverts at two key areas along Indian Canyon Drive would allow wildlife and blowsand to more easily pass under the road, significantly improving wildlife connectivity.

The proposed project would have the added benefit of decreasing prolonged road closures due to blowsand and flooding. Road closures on Indian Canyon Drive prevent access to essential services, including job centers, schools, childcare facilities, and the region's only Level 1 Trauma Center.

CVAG's ACCESS project represents an essential step towards building a resilient desert transportation infrastructure that can protect our environment while improving the safety and resiliency of our local communities.

For this reason, we strongly support CVAG's application to the WCPP for the ACCESS Indian Canyon Drive project and look forward to your favorable consideration. If you have any questions regarding our position, please do not hesitate to contact the City Manager, Todd Hileman, at (760) 346-0611 or email thileman@palmdesert.gov.

Sincerely,

Karina Quintanilla
Mayor, City of Palm Desert