



PUBLIC WORKS | RON WHITEHEAD

August 05, 2022

Representative Chris Stewart
253 West St. George Blvd.
St. George, UT 84770

Re: Washington County Requesting Project Funding to Pave Big Plains Road

Dear Representative Stewart,

Washington County is requesting funding for paving the Big Plains Road in Washington County. Big Plains Road connects State Route 9 in Rockville to State Route 59 in Apple Valley. SR-9 is the main road to Zion National Park (with over 5 million visitors annually) and SR-59 is one of the main roads used to get to Lake Powell and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.

The Big Plains Road would provide a much needed connection between SR-9 and SR-59. Providing an emergency safety access for both highways, economic development associated with recreation and tourism, and congestion mitigation for the area.

The Big Plains Road was submitted to the State for some 'hot spot funding' in 2017. This funding was one time money for transportation upgrades that would provide economic development, increase recreation opportunities for Public Lands, enhance tourism opportunities, and provide congestion mitigation.

Although this road ranked #1 in our regional area by a Committee made up of State, County, and Municipal leaders and representatives of the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization, the money available for our area was given to a transit project which did not meet the requirements for funding that the Big Plans Road project did.

This road project is supported by State Transportation officials, Washington County officials, Local Government officials, and Regional Transportation officials.

Economic Benefit Associated with Recreation and Tourism

Improving this road would provide several economic benefits. The attached analysis of time and cost savings estimates an annual saving of over \$1,323,648.00 due to the savings in vehicle fuel and time. This benefit will be realized by tourists and employees traveling from the Utah/Arizona state line to Springdale and Zion National Park. The paved road would also cause an increase of recreation on the scenic Public Lands the road accesses—including a nationally recognized mountain biking trail system and the Canaan Mountain Wilderness Area.

One of the greatest economic benefits would be reducing the travel cost of potential employees traveling from their homes in the Hildale / Colorado City area to work in the tourist industry in Springdale



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for Zion National Park. Currently, there is a need for additional employment opportunities in this area, but the rates of pay do not justify the commute from Hildale to Springdale. Paving this road would address this problem.

Congestion Mitigation

Paving the road will also reduce the need for vehicles to travel through Hurricane and LaVerkin in order to reach Zion National Park. This is an area that has seen double digit increase in visitors for each of the past three years—with 5 million visitors in 2021, and SR-9 is the only access to Zion in Washington County. A passable, alternate route to the area is needed.

Additionally, the road will likely reduce the congestion in and around Zion National Park. The road often requires four-wheel drive for travel due to a rough slope near Rockville and mud near Apple Valley. Many visitors to Zion cannot currently access the pristine public lands in the area because their vehicles are not four-wheel drive.

In conclusion, this road is exactly what the area needs for economic development, recreation, tourism, and congestion mitigation. We respectfully request that you grant funding for us to pave the Big Plains Road.

If you have questions about this information please contact me on my office phone (435) 634-5780 or cell phone (435) 632-5000.

Best Regards,

Ron Whitehead
Public Works Director
Washington County