

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 25, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We are writing to express our strong support for the National Park Service's (NPS) submission to the 2023 Bridge Investment Program (BIP) for a grant to rehabilitate the Gardner River Bridge, a structurally deficient bridge along the Mammoth to Tower segment of the Grand Loop Road in Yellowstone National Park. This \$28.8 million project will rehabilitate and extend the bridge's life span by approximately 30 years. The NPS has already committed \$5.8 million in its transportation funding to match this grant application.

Established as America's first national park in 1872, Yellowstone National Park continues to attract millions of people from all over the world each year. Visitors have a range of opportunities to experience its unique geothermal wonders, free-roaming wildlife, inspiring views, cultural heritage, and spectacular wilderness character. The Yellowstone Grand Loop and Entrance Roads provide access to these nationally significant recreation opportunities and are part of a regional transportation network connecting southwestern Montana, northwestern Wyoming, and southeastern Idaho. The Gardner River Bridge is a critical transportation link to Yellowstone's major destinations and multiple rural communities. Small businesses and local economies rely heavily on access to the park in order to function. Moreover, this bridge is along the route that provides the only access in the winter to Cooke City and Silver Gate, Montana.

The Gardner River Bridge was originally constructed in 1939 and last rehabilitated around 1978. This project will replace the original deteriorated 1939 concrete approach slabs and expansion joints. Other cracked, broken, or damaged concrete and steel components will be repaired, and the major steel truss structure will be repainted. Rehabilitation at this stage will extend the life of the bridge for approximately 30 years. Without rehabilitation, the expected performance of the bridge will include major load restrictions and potential closure. The safety of this bridge is on a critical inspection schedule as it was discovered to be the only NPS bridge with similar construction to the I-35W Mississippi River Bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota that collapsed in 2007.

While Yellowstone has implemented major improvements to the Grand Loop Road and bridges in recent years, reconstruction and rehabilitation work is far from complete. The original design and construction of Yellowstone roads and bridges do not meet modern standards for vehicular traffic or safety. Some segments of the road have not seen significant repairs since the 1930s. Meanwhile, recent increases in visitation, particularly among tour buses, have further compounded the strain on the park's road system. Rehabilitation of this bridge at this time is a top priority in the program as rehabilitation will prevent significant deterioration and will help manage the funds for the overall road program needs. The total replacement of this bridge would be a significant cost.

Completing this work through a BIP grant award will contribute to the economic growth of nearby communities and support regional, national, and international tourism for Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho. Continuing the only winter access to Cooke City and Silver Gate, Montana will be assured. Further, funding for this project will also guarantee public access and safety to one of the world's most renowned and spectacular landscapes.

As the Wyoming delegation representing America's oldest national park, we urge your favorable consideration of the NPS's submission to the 2023 Bridge Investment Program to ensure that necessary work to rehabilitate the Gardner River Bridge can be completed.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of John Barrasso in blue ink.

John Barrasso, M.D.  
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Cynthia M. Lummis in blue ink.

Cynthia M. Lummis  
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Harriet M. Hageman in blue ink.

Harriet M. Hageman  
Member of Congress