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January 30, 2019

The Board of Directors  
Florida Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc.  
P.O. Box 12007  
Tallahassee, Florida 32317

Dear Board of Directors, Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc.,

It's my understanding that the Okaloosa County Commission is requesting that the Triumph Board place on an early agenda its proposal, styled as Triumph Project #41, to construct the Highway 85 bypass in north Okaloosa County. I'm writing today to emphasize the strong relationship between this project and the military missions which undergird the economy of the county and region.

More than thirty thousand uniformed military personnel and military contractors rely Highway 85 every day as their principal means of transportation among and between Eglin AFB, the Air Force Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field, Duke Field, the 7th Special Force Group and the communities of Niceville-Valparaiso-Bluewater and Crestview. There are three thousand more uniformed military personnel in Northwest Florida than two years ago and every expansion of mission, including those being planned but not yet announced, not only brings more jobs and more positive economic impact to our area but also more pressure on Highway 85. Vastly most of these additional personnel and their families live and work in Okaloosa County and depend on Highway 85 to travel to and from their bases and homes.

Pentagon officials and commanders in Northwest Florida have made it abundantly clear to me that the current conditions on Highway 85 have an undeniable, cumulative impact on the military missions and seriously jeopardize the ability of military personnel to respond and deploy in support of essential operations throughout the Americas and elsewhere. Commanders have informed me that this sole north/south artery is consistently bottle-necked, preventing the flow of equipment and resources in supporting of operations and exercises and that the frequent accidents which occur create immediate and lasting gridlock, potentially creating dangerous threats to readiness. SOCOM operators have hyper condensed response timelines in order to be effective rapidly deployed tactical units. We expect the best from our tier one assets. But, we must ensure that we provide them the means to accomplish their mission sets. As a member of the Armed Services Committee, I advise the Triumph Board that maintaining, let alone expanding, the thousands of jobs directly tied to our military missions, as well as maintaining our SOCOM mission set, requires immediate action to create a lasting solution to the Highway 85 traffic crisis.

The Board of County Commissioners has responded creatively and constructively by proposing a solution jointly funded by the State of Florida, local governments and Triumph Gulf Coast. The voters of Okaloosa County have recognized their responsibility to contribute to this project by approving a half cent sales tax, a substantial portion of which is designated to fund the proposed western bypass critical to alleviating the traffic gridlock on Highway 85. The State of Florida is committed to paying the largest share of the costs. Triumph Gulf Coast is being asked to contribute a percentage of the project, consistent with your stated objective of being the "junior partner" in infrastructure projects.

As one of the authors of the Triumph Gulf Coast legislation, I assure you that the Highway 85 project is precisely what is meant by the law's direction to your board to support public infrastructure that sustains and expands our regional economy and to supplement, not supplant the role of government. Simply put, Triumph's participation in this project is critical to retaining thousands of military-related jobs. A decision by Triumph to not be a funding partner, and thereby significantly delay this solution, will imperil thousands of jobs and place Northwest Florida in a dangerously uncompetitive position as decisions are made to locate and relocate military missions and contracts.

I underscore in the strongest terms the economic value of this project to our region, the nexus between this project and thousands of jobs and the essential fit of this project to the mission of Triumph Gulf Coast.

I look forward to the privilege of personally testifying before the Triumph Board in support of Project # 41 as soon as you can place this matter on your agenda.

Sincerely,



Matt Gaetz  
Member of Congress