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November 14, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg

Please accept this letter of support for the Connected, Rural, Equitable, and Autonomous Transportation for Everyone (CREATE) grant application to the United States Department of Transportation's Advanced Transportation Technology and Innovation (ATTAIN) Program. CREATE advances the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Integrated Mobility Division (IMD)'s vision and strategy to partner with transit systems to deliver affordable, convenient, safe, and expanded transit services to transportation disadvantaged communities in rural areas using advanced technology. The Project builds on existing on-demand mobility efforts and seeks to evolve the Connected Autonomous Shuttle Supporting Innovation (CASSI) program by piloting and evaluating higher speed, Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) compliant automated vehicles by testing and integrating vehicles into rural transit fleets and will involve a partnership with May Mobility, Bridgestone, Toyota, and NC A&T in order to deliver on-demand mobility services to transportation disadvantaged communities. This project will also serve to connect these transportation disadvantaged communities to employment opportunities, including the new Toyota megasite in Randolph County.

On-demand mobility is a technology-enabled service typically using shuttles or vans to provide pooled responsive transit with dynamic routing. It provides several benefits to riders including more efficient and responsive services, reduced wait and travel times, and flexibility to address changing mobility needs. On-demand service zones are designed to address local gaps and were informed by NCDOT's Equity and Transportation Disadvantage Screening tool that uses six quantitative indicators to identify populations facing barriers to transportation access. By integrating autonomous vehicles into on-demand transit services, NCDOT will be able to further understand how they fit into compliance and identify the future of AVs (Autonomous Vehicles) in North Carolina while also potentially working toward addressing the lack of transit drivers. The Project will lay the groundwork for a sustainable mobility ecosystem statewide by implementing findings from pilots funded through this grant opportunity.

Rural systems face formidable barriers to access of critical services, employment and opportunities, which form the root cause of problems like poorer health outcomes, reduced safety, and limited economic development. By addressing rural transit, the Project will meaningfully improve the lives and economies of North Carolinians by increasing access to healthcare, employment, and essential services while having the added benefit of using automated vehicles to make these connections.



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The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) and its more than 1,200 members around the country are excited about the CREATE grant application because it proposes to develop a fully accessible, autonomous transit pilot in rural and small-urban areas — precisely where the bulk of our members operate. Further, we are pleased that CTAA’s considerable inclusive community outreach experience will help serve this proposal.

The modernization and automation of public transportation in North Carolina is vital to creating vibrant and inclusive communities by connecting people to places and addressing the mobility needs of vulnerable users. The additional benefits (safety, efficiency, affordability, reliability, usefulness) that accrue from adding autonomous vehicles result from removing the driver – the technology has not reached the stage of development where this is fully possible. The Project fulfills this vision to provide transit more equitably to underserved and rural populations while providing useful transit service that supports workforce development and improved access to key destinations and services, also enabling NCDOT to gather data and information to better understand the impact of autonomous vehicles within the transit context. This data will allow assessments including the readiness of the state, communities, the technology, and FTA for autonomous driving.

Thank you for considering the CREATE grant application for ATTAIN program funding.

Sincerely,

Scott Bogren  
Executive Director