



December 22, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department 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. Led by the North Carolina Department of Transportation Integrated Mobility Division (NCDOT IMD), **CREATE** advances NCDOT's vision and strategy to partner with May Mobility, Via, Toyota, the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (NC A&T) State University, transit agencies and leaders, and private industry to deliver safe, affordable, convenient, and expanded transit services. These services use advanced technology such as on-board human-assisted Automated Driving System (ADS)-equipped and accessible microtransit services that connect transportation disadvantaged rural communities to essential services and job opportunities by:

- Bridgestone America's tire manufacturing facility, the single largest industrial employer in Wilson County, NC with over 1,800 employees;
- A new FedEx distribution facility; and
- A new production facility, Diversified Opportunities, Inc., that hires individuals with developmental disabilities.

CREATE builds on North Carolina's experience with the Connected Autonomous Shuttle Supporting Innovation (CASSI) program as well as existing on-demand and shared mobility efforts by testing and integrating automated vehicles (AVs) into rural transit fleets. The technology is expected to deliver economic benefits through safe, reliable, and efficient access to employment, key destinations, and services in these rural communities. **CREATE** will support multiple USDOT focus areas, including advanced public transportation systems, the ROUTES Initiative, and Complete Trip Program as well as meaningfully improve the lives and economies of North Carolinians by increasing access to healthcare, employment, education, and other services while piloting and evaluating AVs to make these connections.

The modernization and automation of public transportation in North Carolina is vital to creating vibrant and safe communities by connecting people to places, addressing mobility needs, and increasing high-quality transportation choices for all people, including rural communities. Lack of transportation options contributes to the formidable barriers such communities face that lead to problems such as poorer health outcomes, reduced safety, and limited economic development. **CREATE** is the next step to fulfill the state's vision to combat these barriers and deliver transit more equitably to everyone with a focus on underserved and rural populations.

I thank you for considering the **CREATE** grant application for ATTAIN program funding.

Sincerely,



Patrick Woodie

President, NC Rural Center

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