



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

02/02/2024

J.R. "JOEY" HOPKINS
SECRETARY

Secretary Buttigieg
US 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 or "the Project") 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)'s vision and strategy – led by the Integrated Mobility Division (IMD) – to partner with transit agencies and leaders, private industry, and the research community to deliver affordable, convenient, safe, and expanded transit services to transportation disadvantaged communities in rural areas using advanced technology. CREATE will pilot the future of advanced transportation technologies in an on-demand transit service (also known as "microtransit") by leveraging software and automated vehicles (AVs) to provide easier, more reliable, efficient, and equitable access for riders to reach key destinations in Wilson, North Carolina.

The Project will build on the City of Wilson's popular RIDE microtransit service and the recently awarded Mobility for Everyone, Everywhere in NC (MEE NC) initiative to address service gaps and unmet needs while also gathering data to understand rider preferences and behaviors related to AVs and on-demand transit services. NCDOT IMD will partner with May Mobility, Via, the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (NC A&T) State University to accomplish the following:

Expand the existing microtransit service area to include major employment centers and other community hubs. The Project will deploy conventional vehicles to support the expanded coverage to facilities that are on high-speed roadways where AVs cannot currently operate.

Pilot a prescheduling option for riders to secure rides to work shifts, medical appointments, care centers, and for other preplanned trips.
Integrate five hybrid electric AVs into the fleet. Riders will be able to select between a conventional vehicle and an AV to complete their trip. Qualitative and quantitative data

will be collected and analyzed to better understand rider preferences, behaviors, and perceptions surrounding AVs, particularly as part of an on-demand transit service. Leverage an Autonomous Driving Kit (ADK) and Multi-Policy Decision-Making (MPDM) system in each automated vehicle for safe navigation in diverse road and traffic environments. The AVs will feature onboard safety operators that will educate riders on the technology, provide customer service, and assist riders using mobility devices. The findings from CREATE will provide a replicable model and guidance for communities in North Carolina to leverage advanced technologies in serving new employment centers, riders with disabilities, and prescheduled trips. The Project will also contribute to the greater body of research and inform innovative deployments across the country.

By addressing challenges faced by rural areas and increasing transportation options for all travelers, CREATE supports multiple FHWA focus areas, including advanced public transportation systems, the ROUTES Initiative, and Complete Trip Program. The modernization and automation of public transportation in North Carolina is vital to creating vibrant and inclusive communities by connecting people to places, addressing mobility needs, and increasing high-quality transportation choices for all people. The Project is reflected in our mission statement:
Connecting people, products and places safely and efficiently with customer focus, accountability and environmental sensitivity to enhance the economy and vitality of North Carolina.

To that end, the NCDOT will fund the CREATE project in the amount of \$2 million (2024\$) towards a successful ATTAIN grant from the FHWA.

Thank you for your consideration of the CREATE project for the 2023 ATTAIN Discretionary Grant Program. If NCDOT can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at 919-612-6133 or via e-mail at mnewsome2@ncdot.gov

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:


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Mark Newsome
Chief Financial Officer
North Carolina Department of Transportation