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February 23, 2026

The Honorable Sean Duffy  
Secretary of Transportation  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy:

On behalf of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, I am pleased to express our strong support for the Rest Area Expansion for Safe Transportation project, submitted to the U.S. Department of Transportation's 2026 BUILD program. The proposed restoration and modernization of the I-77 North Welcome Center in Surry County, North Carolina, represents an important investment in roadway safety, visitor services, and an enhanced regional tourism economy.

The project's planned improvements—including expanded parking capacity for freight trucks, enhanced traveler information systems, and the construction of a modernized welcome center facility—will significantly improve safety and convenience for both commercial drivers and the traveling public. Equally important, the new visitor center will serve as a critical gateway for travelers, providing high-quality information about nearby destinations, including the Blue Ridge Parkway and its surrounding gateway communities.

Interstate 77 is a vital commercial and tourism corridor connecting the southeastern United States with major midwestern markets. Each day, tens of thousands of vehicles stop at the welcome center on I-77 North, making it one of the most visited welcome centers in North Carolina. This high volume underscores the opportunity to engage travelers at a key moment—encouraging safe travel decisions, while also inspiring exploration of local destinations.

The Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation supports this project because of its alignment with our Blue Ridge Rising initiative, which focuses on improving the economic wellbeing of gateway communities along the Parkway corridor. By directing travelers to local communities, attractions, and outdoor recreation opportunities, the enhanced welcome center will help convert pass-through traffic into meaningful visitation—supporting small businesses, local economies, and sustainable tourism throughout the region.

For these reasons, we strongly support the REST Project and believe it represents a thoughtful, high-impact investment in transportation safety, economic development, and visitor engagement for North Carolina.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Widner, CEO  
Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation