



February 20, 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 Mount Airy Tourism Development Authority and the Tourism Partnership of Surry County, I am pleased to express our strong support for the Rest Area Expansion for Safe Transportation (REST or “the Project”), submitted to USDOT’s 2026 BUILD program. The proposed restoration and modernization of the I-77 North Welcome Center in Surry County is a strategic investment that will enhance roadway safety, strengthen freight mobility, and significantly improve the visitor experience at one of North Carolina’s most heavily traveled gateways.

The Project’s addition of 30 new freight truck parking spaces, implementation of a Truck Parking Information Management System (TPIMS), and installation of additional traffic cameras will address critical safety and operational deficiencies along this corridor. Constructing a new Welcome Center facility with upgraded amenities will better serve both commercial drivers and traveling families, improving accessibility, comfort, and overall user experience at the third most visited Welcome Center in North Carolina.

I-77 is both a major commercial artery and a primary tourism corridor connecting the Southeast to Midwestern markets. Approximately 39,000 vehicles cross into North Carolina from Virginia each day along I-77, and roughly one-third of that volume consists of freight trucks transporting goods that are foundational to the state’s economy. However, severe truck parking shortages along this corridor create significant safety concerns. Drivers are frequently forced to park along ramps and shoulders to comply with federal Hours of Service regulations, contributing to infrastructure damage, obstructed emergency response, and heightened crash risk in an area already challenged by steep grades, limited sight distance, and winter weather conditions.

Expanding safe truck parking capacity will directly reduce fatigue-related risk and improve overall corridor safety. Research from the American Transportation Research Institute shows



drivers lose an average of 56 minutes per day searching for parking, with measurable economic consequences. Addressing this shortage supports freight efficiency, reduces unsafe parking practices, and protects both commercial operators and the traveling public.

Equally important, the I-77 North Welcome Center serves as a first impression of North Carolina for millions of visitors each year. Surry County and the City of Mount Airy function as gateway communities to the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Yadkin Valley Wine Region, welcoming travelers seeking heritage tourism, outdoor recreation, arts and culture, and culinary experiences. A modernized Welcome Center enhances our ability to engage travelers at the point of entry—encouraging extended stays, increasing visitor spending, and strengthening room occupancy tax collections that fund local tourism development initiatives.

The REST Project represents more than infrastructure improvement; it is an investment in safety, economic vitality, and destination competitiveness. By modernizing one of the state's most strategically located welcome centers and addressing a documented truck parking shortage, this project will improve operational efficiency while reinforcing North Carolina's reputation as a safe, welcoming, and travel-ready state.

Thank you for your consideration of this important BUILD grant application. We strongly support REST and its role in strengthening both North Carolina's transportation network and its tourism economy.

Sincerely,

Jessica I. Roberts
Executive Director
Mount Airy Tourism Development Authority
Tourism Partnership of Surry County