



February 19, 2026

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

*RE: REST (Rest area Expansion for Safe Transportation): FY 2026 Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant Program*

Dear Secretary Duffy:

On behalf of the North Carolina Department of Commerce, I am pleased to express my support for the **Rest area Expansion for Safe Transportation (REST or “the Project”)**, submitted to USDOT’s 2026 BUILD program. The Project will restore and modernize the I-77 North Welcome Center in Surry County, North Carolina (NC) by adding 30 new commercial motor vehicle (CMV) parking spaces alongside a Truck Parking Information Management System (TPIMS) and additional traffic cameras to alert motor carriers of available parking spaces and dangerous road and weather conditions ahead. Additionally, REST will construct a new Welcome Center Facility to better meet the needs of both truckers and traveling families with upgraded amenities and improvements to the user experience that improve safety and convenience at the 3<sup>rd</sup> most visited Welcome Center in NC.

While welcome centers are constructed and maintained by the NC Department of Transportation, the NC Department of Commerce operates and staffs each center with nationally certified travel counselors. Located on interstate highways just inside the state line, each welcome center has a statewide focus, with an emphasis on providing information for visitors including travel guides and other marketing publications, and the ability to book room reservations at no charge for visitors staying overnight. The centers also offer clean, modern facilities for visitors.

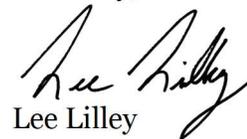
As North Carolina ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation for domestic visitation, the tourism economy is a critical component to the state’s economic vitality. In 2024, North Carolina’s tourism economy hit a record \$36.7 billion in visitor spending. This industry supports over 230,000 jobs, representing 6.2 percent of total state employment, and generates nearly \$4.6 billion in tax revenue. The I-77 North Welcome Center is located on southbound I-77 at milepost 105, just south of Virginia state line. I-77 is a key tourism corridor that connects the southeast to major midwestern markets.

Of the approximately 39,000 vehicles cross into NC from Virginia on I-77 daily, a significant percentage – 33 percent – are CMVs transporting goods. As the leading manufacturing state in the Southeast U.S., North Carolina thrives on making and transporting goods. Manufacturing is a cornerstone of North Carolina’s economy, contributing over 15 percent of the state’s GDP with \$114 billion in economic impact and supporting over 467,000 jobs. Keeping products productively, efficiently and safely moving to and from our state is imperative.

Unfortunately, the I-77 Welcome Center experiences excessive truck parking along the entrance and exit ramps, as well as the emergency ramp/runaway truck lane in the mornings and evenings. REST will improve the visitor experience and increase the safety of visitors and tourists with a newly constructed welcome center. REST will also allow motor carriers to find safe parking options, reducing the risks of fatigue-related impairment and traffic safety for both the drivers and the traveling public, ensuring efficient and productive movements of goods throughout the state.

North Carolina is recognized as the #1 state to do business in the nation. Investments like the REST Project will provide the essential improvements and modernization needed to continue to support our strong economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee Lilley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lee" and last name "Lilley" clearly distinguishable.

Lee Lilley

CC: Sec. Daniel Johnson, NC Department of Transportation  
Jim McCleskey, NC Washington Office