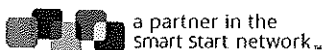


MARTIN-PITT
Partnership for Children



a partner in the
Smart Start network

111B Eastbrook Drive
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April 1, 2021

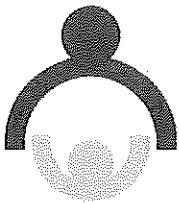
Dear Mr. Hulse,

As the executive director of the Martin-Pitt Partnership for Children, I have seen firsthand the impact that the lack of a strong transportation system can have on the children and families in our community. The investments described in the North Carolina's Department of Transportation's Future I-87 Resiliency, Innovation, Safety, Economic Project will provide incredible support to young children whose families have experienced economic hardships, and it's my pleasure to provide a letter in support of this investment.

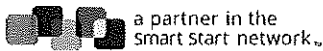
Our agency is a non-profit that works with parents, caregivers, and childcare providers of children birth through five years to help strengthen their kindergarten readiness skills. Many of the families and child care providers we work with, particularly those in Martin County, struggle with life challenges that will be directly impacted by this project:

- flooding due to climate change
- A lack of adequate or reliable internet and cell phone access
- Access to a more direct route to surrounding cities, increasing job prospects and profitability.

The project will upgrade nearly 180 miles of US 64 and US 17, helping control the flooding frequently seen in the area. In addition to the direct safety concerns raised by flooding, children are negatively impacted by these events in less direct ways. Many homes in our community have been damaged or destroyed during heavy rains. Children have experienced an increase in allergies and asthma due to the growth of mold from increased moisture, and have missed dozens of days of school over the last several years when schools have closed to be used as evacuation shelters for families unable to remain at home. The updated road system will also allow families to evacuate in a safer manner without worrying about the structural integrity of the roads they are traveling on.



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Although the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the impact of unreliable or nonexistent internet and cell phone connectivity, the problem has existed for many years. As remote employment positions increased in availability, many people who would greatly benefit from a steady work-from-home position have been unable to attain them due to internet access that is ill equipped to handle the speeds or coverage needed to maintain employment. Students of all ages experience the same issues, making online learning for grade school or higher education nearly impossible. The project's installation of a fiber optic cable will drastically enhance the broadband availability to the area's rural residents who need it most.

Although Eastern North Carolina is centrally located to provide access to larger cities such as Raleigh and the Port of Virginia, there is no direct route for many rural residents looking to obtain employment or engage in the sale and transportation of agriculture. The project's creation of a direct link between I-95 and the Port of Virginia will allow farmers to increase the movement of goods, businesses to expand, and parents to seek employment across a larger area while still having the availability to spend quality time with their families thanks to a shortened commute.

This project has the capacity to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in North Carolina, including those directly served by our agency. The local, regional, and national impact and return on investment of this project is undeniable, and I kindly ask for your support of the Future I-87 Resiliency, Innovation, Safety, Economy Project and the NCDOT's application for federal INFEA grant funding to ensure its timely construction.

Kind regards,

Sharon Cooper
Executive Director