



# Town of Columbia

"A Heart's Delight" founded in 1793

103 Main Street • P.O. Box 361  
Columbia, NC 27925  
252.796.2781 (P) • 252.796.0082 (F)

March 25, 2021

Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
U.S. Secretary of Transportation  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Secretary Buttigieg:

This letter is in support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) Future I-87 Resiliency, Innovation, Safety, Economy Project application to the U.S. Department of Transportation's INFRA Program. It offers an opportunity for eastern North Carolina to build back better. The Town of Columbia, NC, strongly supports this project.

The future I-87 Rise Project will improve freight movement and rural access by providing an Interstate highway connection between the ports of Virginia, CXS's new Carolina Connector Intermodal Rail Terminal, and the Raleigh, NC, Research Triangle Park area. Upgrading the future I-87 and US-64 corridors will provide much needed investment to serve and strengthen an underserved, rural region of North Carolina that has often been overlooked and left out, not sharing in the state's economic prosperity initiatives.

This project will improve 179 miles of US-64 and US-17 to interstate standards while fortifying a section of US-64 that is part of the US Army Corps of Engineers levee system protecting the Town of Princeville, a historic African-American municipality that is experiencing increasingly frequent and severe flooding due to storms. This project will offer rural residents a safer and faster travel option to reach the Raleigh job market. The future I-87 and US-64 extension to the coast are important evacuation routes. The project upgrades will ensure these roadways function well during weather emergencies to safely and efficiently allow eastern North Carolina residents and Outer Banks vacationers to get out of the way when a hurricane approaches.

This project is a step forward toward building a network of freight distribution corridors in eastern north Carolina. The future I-87 crosses rural eastern North Carolina connecting Raleigh, NC, at its southern terminus and the Hampton Roads-Norfolk region in Virginia. When completed the corridor will serve as an interstate connection between the ports of Virginia and I-95. This corridor is critical to connecting northeastern North Carolina industries and farms to their best export option through the ports of Virginia

Improvements along the future I-87 corridor will capitalize on the \$270-million invested in the Carolina Connector Intermodal Rail Terminal by strengthening highway connections. This will increase access to national and international markets for North Carolina businesses and increase the efficiency of moving goods, producing regionally significant economic trade benefits.

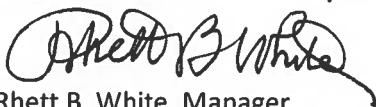
This project will also install fiber optic cable along the length of the future I-87 corridor, as well as the extension of US-64 from Williamston through Columbia to Whalebone Junction in Dare County. This will permit NCDOT to implement state-of-the art wind and flood monitoring, traveler alerts and coordinated management of vehicular movement. It will prepare for a future implementation of connected and autonomous vehicles while enhancing Broadband capability. There is also the potential for revenue generation by NCDOT.

In summary, this project addresses several evaluation criteria for the INFRA program. Included are improving the economic competitiveness of eastern North Carolina's rural communities along the future I-87 corridor. This grant, when combined with significant state investment in resilience measures throughout the project corridor and a \$39.6-million investment by the United States Army Corps of engineers to protect Princeville from flooding, will position North Carolina to immediately move forward to improved safety, address bottlenecks and further build out the backbone of its eastern freight network. At the same time resiliency of communities along two key evacuation routes used by North Carolina and neighboring states during extreme weather events will be enhanced.

Although the Town of Columbia does not lie along the proposed I-87 corridor, its Mayor and Board of Aldermen endorse this project. The tens of thousands of seasonal vacationers that will travel US-64 from the junction of US-64/US-17 also deserve a modern interstate highway that will stretch all the way from Raleigh to the coast.

We urge you to support the "Future I-87 Resiliency, Innovation, Safety, Economy Project" and the NCDOT's application for federal INFRA grant funding to accelerate construction.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rhett B. White". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rhett" being more prominent.

Rhett B. White, Manager  
Town of Columbia, NC