



May 5, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Letter of Support: I-85 FUTURES Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I would like to express my strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) grant application for the I-85: Funding Transportation Utilizing Resilient, Equitable, Solutions (I-85 FUTURES) project in Gaston and Cleveland Counties. I-85 from Charlotte, NC to Atlanta, GA, which includes I-85 FUTURES, is major travel route that powers the nation's third largest economic region, and the largest metro region in the state of North Carolina.

Centralina Regional Council, which serves the nine-county Greater Charlotte region, led two important transportation projects that will be implemented through this grant proposal: the Greater Charlotte Regional Freight Study and the CONNECT Beyond Regional Mobility Plan. I-85 is a primary freight corridor in the Centralina region and our freight study recommends improvements to capacity, operations and geometric design. CONNECT Beyond's bold transit vision anticipates high-capacity transit between Gaston and Mecklenburg counties to increase economic competitiveness, improve transportation choices and advance social equity. The I-85 FUTURES bike and pedestrian improvements support first and last mile connections to and within Gaston County and will remove barriers to non-motorized vehicle transportation, improving connections, and increasing mobility throughout the area. This is an important step toward addressing equity concerns that date back to the construction of this portion of I-85 in 1962.

The proposed rail improvements will benefit operation of the Southeast High Speed Rail corridor as well as ensure vital freight operations are not interrupted. The proposed broadband, along I-85 from the South Carolina border to US 74 at Kings Mountain, will expand the work funded under previous INFRA grants awards and build the strong technology foundation for enhanced education, telemedicine, and business development. NCDOT is investigating the development of electric vehicle



704-372-2416 | info@centralina.org | www.centralina.org
9815 David Taylor Drive, Suite 100 | Charlotte, NC 28262



(EV) charging stations in this corridor from SC to I-485 that will reduce dependence on fossil fuels. As a U.S. Department of Energy's Clean Cities Program, the Centralina Clean Fuels Coalition supports these efforts to improve air quality and stands ready to assist with education and implementation efforts to support economic, environmental and energy security.

There has been a documented need to improve the I-85 corridor for more than 20 years. It is vital not only to the movement of our workforce, but also for the raw materials and finished products that are made in the Centralina region's advanced manufacturing centers. Since 1991, when NCDOT first explored the potential construction of another high-speed crossing of the Catawba River, the need to increase the capacity of the I-85 corridor is unquestioned. In addition, the efficient operation and resiliency of the I-85 corridor is crucial to the economy of the United States. This portion of I-85 has frequent delays due to congestion and becomes almost impassible when crashes occur.

Projects like I-85 FUTURES are the reason the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was passed. We request your strong consideration of the I-85 FUTURES application for receipt of MPDG grant funding.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Gardner", is enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Geraldine I. Gardner
Executive Director



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9815 David Taylor Drive, Suite 100 | Charlotte, NC 28262