



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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I would like to express Gaston County Government's 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, powers the nation's third largest economic region, as well as being a major travel route moving people and goods.

Interstate I-85 is a major connecting corridor between Charlotte and Atlanta and extends through the heart of Gaston County. Businesses and residents of Gaston County rely heavily on the corridor for access to and from other locations, emergency response, and the route helps sustain the economic engine of our region. The corridor provides connectivity to the Charlotte Douglas International Airport, which is a major transportation hub providing access in the US and internationally, and I-85 provides access to employment opportunities in Mecklenburg County.

Congestion continues to worsen along the corridor causing frequent delays, and the route becomes almost impassible when crashes occur. There has been a documented need to improve the I-85 corridor for more than 20 years. 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 has been identified through various studies. The need exists for increased use of EV and multi-modal options to improve air quality while still providing the vital links necessary for our community. The efficient operation and resiliency of the I-85 corridor is crucial to the economy of our area and the United States.

Recent roadway construction material increases have complicated financing this project, rendering MPDG assistance even more crucial. In addition, the proposed improvements to bicycle and pedestrian accommodations on interchanges and overpasses will remove barriers to non-motorized vehicle transportation, improving connections, and increasing mobility throughout the area. This is a 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. NCDOT is investigating the development of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in this corridor from SC to I-485 that will reduce dependence on fossil fuels. 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,

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Gaston County Government

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