



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR

DANIEL H. JOHNSON
SECRETARY

July 1, 2026

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

Subject: Certification of Financial Contribution 2026 INFRA Application: 321 CONNECT (US
321 - Calibrating Our National Network to Encourage Commerce and Tourism)

Dear Secretary Duffy,

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) wishes to express its full support for the 321 CONNECT application under the United States Department of Transportation's Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight and Highways Projects (INFRA) program. 321 CONNECT seeks INFRA funds to allow NCDOT to replace aging and deficient bridges and improve US 321 from I-40 in Catawba County to US 321 Business in Caldwell County.

The State of North Carolina understands the importance of maintaining a sustainable freight network. US 321 is a part of the National Highway System, a Strategic Transportation Corridor, and a key route for tourists and goods accessing northwest North Carolina. Much of US 321 has not been improved since its construction in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The improvements will provide not only increased capacity for vehicular traffic but will also improve the safety of drivers, as well as bicyclists and pedestrians. The improvements will complement Hickory's investment in a city-wide bicycle and pedestrian network, the Hickory Trail. As part of the proposed improvements, the existing US 321 northbound bridge over the Catawba River will be converted to a bicycle and pedestrian facility that will directly connect to the Hickory Trail network.

The aging bridges over the Catawba River will be replaced as part of this project. The project will also replace the at-grade crossing of US 321 and Catawba County Railroad tracks just south of the Catawba River with a grade separated crossing. The replacement serves two purposes. First, the grade separation removes the possibility of vehicular/train crashes. Second, by increasing the height of the Catawba River crossings, it provides a more resilient, flood resistant crossing for this vital freight corridor.

The residents of Hickory have worked tirelessly to rebound from the decline in the furniture industry to emerge as a technology and logistics hub. On March 23, 2023, CommScope and Corning announced that they will invest over \$540 million combined in Hickory to build American-made fiberoptic cables with the aim of expanding access to broadband to rural areas.

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The 321 CONNECT Project is reflected in our mission statement:

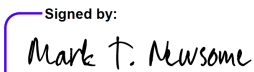
Connecting people, products and places safely and efficiently with customer focus, accountability and environmental sensitivity to enhance the economy and vitality of North Carolina.

To that end, the NCDOT will fund the 321 CONNECT application in the amount of \$144,049,500.00 towards a successful INFRA grant from the non-federal, state funds.

Thank you for your consideration of the 321 CONNECT project for the 2026 Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight and Highways Projects (INFRA) Program.

If NCDOT can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at (919)-418-5858 or via e-mail at mnewsome2@ncdot.gov.

Sincerely,

Signed by:


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Mark T. Newsome
Chief Financial Officer
North Carolina Department of Transportation