



Life. Well Crafted.

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August 22, 2023

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 the City of Hickory's strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) grant application for Calibrating Our National Network to Encourage Commerce and Tourism - (321 CONNECT) project in Catawba, Burke, and Caldwell Counties. The US 321 corridor is a critical part of North Carolina's infrastructure, serving as a major travel route moving people and goods.

Many sections of US 321 still lie on a roadbed laid down in the late 1950s. Because of its outdated design, accidents are regrettably frequent along the corridor. The southbound US 321 bridge crossing the Catawba River was constructed in 1962 and in need of replacement. In addition, US 321 and the Catawba River are difficult to cross for bicycles and pedestrians. NCDOT has developed State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Number U-4700 to address these concerns, but the cost of the U-4700A segment, which includes replacing both bridges over the Catawba River, has delayed project construction.

Recent roadway construction material increases have complicated financing the U-4700A project, rendering MPDG assistance even more crucial. The City of Hickory has obtained RAISE grant funding to develop the Hickory Trail, an extensive bicycle and pedestrian network. U-4700A will provide multiple safe access points to this network, reconnecting the communities of Hickory and Long View bisected by US 321. The 321 CONNECT project will transfer ownership of the US 321 northbound bridge to the City, which will convert the structure to a bicycle and pedestrian path crossing the Catawba River. The converted bridge will provide the only crossing of the Catawba River with bicycle and pedestrian facilities within 60 miles.

In addition to the improvements above, the 321 CONNECT project will provide a broadband connection along US 321 between Hickory and Lenoir. This will extend proposed broadband installation along US 321 from Gastonia to Hickory and will provide much needed commercial and educational capabilities that are critically needed in the

area. Hickory has built a diversified economy that includes Commscope and Corning (fiber optic cable manufacturing), Apple Computers, and educational hubs alongside food distribution, and traditional furniture manufacturing. Projects like 321 CONNECT are the reason the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was passed and enjoys such wide support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Wood". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and a long, sweeping underline.

Warren Wood  
City Manager