



August 18, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

MountainTrue is pleased to recommend the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) "Greater Rural Access and Highways to Accelerate Mobility" project ("Project") application for USDOT Rural Program funding. The Project will invest in the development of a 12-mile portion of Corridor K of the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) in Graham County, North Carolina, one of the last sections of the ADHS to be completed. Consistent with the ROUTES Initiative, the Project has been developed to address this rural corridor's unique challenges while delivering on USDOT's priority transportation goals of safety, mobility, and economic competitiveness.

The Project improves travel reliability and emergency response by addressing topographic challenges with climbing and passing lanes along NC 143 and NC 28, between Robbinsville and the Stecoah Valley. It expands active transportation access to Federal lands used for recreation by constructing new sidewalks, a multi-use path, and an innovative new land bridge that will allow pedestrians and wildlife to safely cross NC 143. The Project will also improve access to the area's significant natural areas, supporting the local recreational/tourism economy. ITS enhancements built into the Project will help to overcome the area's "remoteness" by providing tools for managing emergencies and road closures along US 19/74, which occur frequently due to flooding, downed trees, and landslides. US 129, NC 143, and NC 28 are vital detours, but with only a single lane in each direction and inadequate communications to travelers, any increased traffic along the route leads to congestion and travel delays.

Collectively, these individual investments will work together to modernize one of the last segments of the ADHS Corridor K, while addressing multiple national goals (23 U.S. C. § 150) and mitigating system vulnerabilities by improving the safety, condition, and reliability of the corridor. By investing in the delivery of these outcomes, the Project supports the economic vitality of this tourist-dependent economy. Without a Rural grant, construction cost increases will greatly delay the delivery of these improvements to ADHS Corridor K.

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The Project is the outcome of extensive coordination over many years between federal and state agencies, local officials, and environmental stakeholders – including MountainTrue – to ensure a project that meets the local and broader needs for reliability and connectivity in this remote area, while incorporating a variety of additional features just described.

MountainTrue strongly encourages you to support the “Greater Rural Access and Highways to Accelerate Mobility” project and NCDOT’s application for Federal Rural grant funding, so that NCDOT can improve safe transportation access throughout this rural area and advance completion of Corridor K.

MountainTrue is an incorporated 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to creating and sustaining a healthy environment by championing resilient forests, clean waters, and healthy communities, promoting clean energy, and increasing civic engagement in policy-making in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Callie D. Moore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Callie D. Moore
Western Regional Director