

# GROUND TO SKY PROJECT



## Letters of Support

**MPDG FFY 2023 and 2024  
GRANT APPLICATION  
AUGUST 2023**



**Ground to Sky**  
**Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Opportunity**  
**Letters of Support Summary**

**Federal & State Legislators and Elected Officials**

Federal and state legislator and elected official Letters of Support will be sent directly to the USDOT from those offices.

**State**

**Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina** Christopher Chung, Chief Executive Officer

**North Carolina Workforce Development Boards** Rodney Carson, President; Stephanie Deese, Executive Director

**North Carolina Economic Development Association** Joanna Helms, President

**North Carolina Trucking Association** Ben Greenberg, President and CEO

**Local & Regional**

**Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College** Kevin Kimrey, Director of Economic & Workforce Development

**Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce** Zach Wallace, Vice President of Public Policy

**Biltmore Farms, LLC** Lee E. Thomason III Vice President

**Buncombe County Board of Commissioners** Chairman Brownie Newman

**Buncombe County Emergency Management** Brittany Robinson, Emergency Management Division Manager

**City of Asheville** Esther Manheimer, Mayor

**Economic Development Commission of Asheville-Buncombe County** Clark Duncan, Executive Director

**French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization** Anthony Sutton, Board Chair

**Haywood County Board of County Commissioners** L. Kevin Ensley, Chairman

**Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization** Mathew Wechtel, Chair

**The North Carolina Arboretum** George Briggs, Executive Director; Drake Fowler, President

**Pratt and Whitney** Dan Field, General Manager

**Skyland Fire and Rescue** Trevor Lance, Fire Chief

**Southwestern Commission** Russ Harris, Executive Director

**WNC Aviation, LLC** Amy Thomas, LLC Manager



ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT  
PARTNERSHIP of  
NORTH CAROLINA

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

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Please accept this letter as the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina's (EDPNC) strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The I-26 interchange project is crucial to the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor and Buncombe County as it would support major economic development projects in the area, such as Pratt & Whitney, an RTX business. Pratt & Whitney's high-tech turbine airfoil production facility is a \$650 million investment adjacent to I-26 and will create approximately 800 jobs through 2027. The average salary for these positions is \$68,000, higher than the current county average of \$43,134.

Pratt & Whitney's investment in Buncombe County and the surrounding area's residents is also an investment in North Carolina's future workforce. The company is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train individuals for careers at Pratt & Whitney and in advanced manufacturing overall. North Carolina has the largest manufacturing workforce in the Southeast and this partnership will play a significant role in training that workforce for careers of the future, helping to eliminate many economic and workforce barriers for North Carolinians of all backgrounds.

The I-26 interchange and NC 191 connector project will allow the area to adapt to and benefit from current economic development projects, as our state has begun to see with Pratt & Whitney, planned and future economic growth that will have long lasting positive impacts on the area. Support through the MPDG will help make this project a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility. USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

Christopher Chung  
Chief Executive Officer



August 21, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as The North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Board's (NCAWDB) strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (ABTech) and the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board and the Southwestern Workforce Development Board to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

It was announced March 6, 2023 that Pactiv Evergreen planned to close the Canton paper mill. The plant, which has been in operation for more than 100 years, employs about 1,000 people in the neighboring county, 915 at the Canton plant, and is one of the largest employers in Haywood County. The training opportunities for those dislocated workers with the proposed new educational facility at A-B Tech is exactly what is needed in the community.

North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards  
1830-B Tillery Place  
Raleigh, NC 27604  
[sdeese@ncawdb.org](mailto:sdeese@ncawdb.org) 919.414.2085 [www.ncawdb.org](http://www.ncawdb.org)

The project area is the also nationally recognized Biltmore Park West (owned by Biltmore Farms Co.). Biltmore Park West is the home of the Prat & Whitney Manufacturing Center. While Prat & Whitney has developed the interior roadway network, the area lacks a convenient interstate exit and roadway facilities that are crucial to the continued success of the greater region, the site, and any future development in the area. With further economically valuable development slated to take place in Biltmore Park West, a No-Build scenario in which the project is not constructed will exacerbate Congestion on the on the existing system, leading to longer travel times and longer distances traveled to get to long-term, high-quality jobs. The I-26 interchange project will construct a direct connection between the new, privately developed roadway to I-26 at the new Exit 35.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility. USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,



President,  
North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards (NCAWDB)



Executive Director,  
North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards (NCAWDB)



August 16, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary  
United States Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The North Carolina Economic Development Association enthusiastically supports the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the I-26 Interchange Project in Buncombe County, near the nationally recognized Biltmore Park West site.

Western North Carolina experiences challenges unlike other parts of the state and country, particularly as it relates to producing competitive industrial sites due to its mountainous topography. However, an award for this transportation investment would capitalize on private investment and fulfill priority regional priorities, which include access to long-term, high-quality jobs that would provide economic diversification and help meet wage growth objectives. This project would also increase access to federal, state and county recreational resources and reduce congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

Furthermore, this project is supported by North Carolina Department of Transportation research. Reports indicate that the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

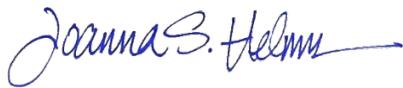
Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, has its manufacturing center in Biltmore Park West, and they are partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train a highly skilled workforce. As a result, a new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This partnership will eliminate

barriers to opportunities, continue to enhance racial equity in the region and produce the workforce necessary to attract employers.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment in Western North Carolina, which will bolster the remaining 800-900 acres that are prime for development and job creation. Your support for this project will demonstrate how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility.

If you or USDOT staff have any questions regarding our support, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joanna S. Helms" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joanna Helms  
President  
North Carolina Economic Development Association



The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as North Carolina Trucking Association's strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

For North Carolina trucking companies, this project will ease congestion, which will hopefully reduce accidents involving commercial vehicles while simultaneously allowing for greater fleet utilization and higher driver pay.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility. USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Greenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ben Greenberg  
President and CEO  
North Carolina Trucking Association

August 15, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College's strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new educational facility near the manufacturing plant has been planned and will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

From a community perspective, this interchange is crucial because of population growth and traffic flow in the area where Pratt & Whitney is located. That area is already congested, and growing, so this interchange would help alleviate bottlenecks. Specifically for A-B Tech, easy and direct access to the proposed training center would ensure training enrollment that would serve not only Pratt & Whitney workforce readiness, but also the multitude of local industries A-B Tech assists and serves. A-B Tech envisions and is planning for a state-of-the-art regional training center that will benefit scores of people who are looking for career opportunities in high-tech, good-paying local sectors.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility. If interested, USDOT staff may contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,  
*Kevin Kimrey*  
Director, Economic & Workforce Development  
Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College



August 31, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project  
Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce's strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

As the home to the Asheville Buncombe Economic Development Coalition, a 30 year public private partnership, tasked with the retention and recruitment key industries that boost our economy for all this project is of vital importance. As a part of our regional transportation system and the area around the new Pratt & Whitney investment this project will enable future economic development while also reducing congestion and commuting times within an important corridor.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility.

USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

Zach Wallace  
Vice President of Public Policy  
Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce



**BILTMORE FARMS**<sup>SM</sup>  
Established 1897

July 31, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Endorsement for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application - I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

I am writing on behalf of Biltmore Farms to express our unwavering support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the I-26 Interchange Project. This vital initiative involves constructing a new interchange on I-26 (proposed Exit 35) and a connecting road to NC 191, situated approximately six miles south of Asheville. As a company invested in the region's economic development, we firmly believe that this transportation project aligns with key regional priorities, including facilitating access over the long-term to high-quality/high wage employment opportunities; improved access to federal, state, and county recreational resources; and alleviating congestion and commute times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has demonstrated the utmost importance of this project. Through the USDOT Rural Grant's support of Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, 800 jobs are projected to be created, offering an average salary of \$68,000, some \$39,000 higher than the current median income. This significant investment by Pratt & Whitney will foster growth in the local workforce, and through the collaboration with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College will ensure the provision of highly skilled employees. The planned 10,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will further augment the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge, fostering enhanced opportunities for all.

We firmly believe that this project will contribute immensely to the region's economic development by generating high-paying jobs and promoting sustainable community growth. Additionally, it addresses the pressing need for an additional east-west route in our mountainous terrain, improving transportation options and ensuring safer travel for employees, residents, and visitors to our region.

We extend our sincere gratitude to you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. This project exemplifies the power of federal-state-local partnerships in bolstering regional economic vibrancy and enhancing transportation mobility.

If any members of the USDOT staff wish to discuss our endorsement further, please feel free to reach out to me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee E. Thomason III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "E".

Lee E. Thomason III  
Vice President  
Biltmore Farms, LLC



# Buncombe County Board of Commissioners

*Chairman*  
Brownie Newman

*District 1*  
Terri Wells  
Al Whitesides

*District 2*  
Jasmine Beach-Ferrara  
Amanda Edwards

*District 3*  
Martin Moore  
Parker Sloan

8/3/2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as Buncombe County's strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion within the Asheville / Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

We are proud of the local, regional, and state partnerships that have gotten us this far. We are proud to add this investment to the North Carolina aviation legacy and that within one single project we have been able to demonstrate a commitment to do our part in meeting three important goals for Western North Carolina: Jobs, Education, and Infrastructure.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility. USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brownie Newman".

Chairman Brownie Newman  
Buncombe County Board of Commissioners





# Buncombe County Emergency Services

## Office of Emergency Management

164 Erwin Hills Rd Asheville, NC 28806  
(828) 250-2316

08-15-23

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as Buncombe County Emergency Management's strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

I-26 stretches across the great county of Buncombe and is highly traveled. Our Emergency Service agencies respond to accidents on the interstate as well as use the interstate to respond to other emergencies in the area. I-26 is a very congested area. Furthermore, a lot of our workforce live outside of the county and travel that route daily. This project is going to enhance the safety of our first responders, citizens, and work force. As the Buncombe County industry continues to grow and bring better job opportunities to our area these projects become even more pivotal to ensure we have the infrastructure to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility.

USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

**Brittany Robinson**  
Emergency Management Division Manager  
Buncombe County Emergency Services



**City of Asheville**  
**Office of the Mayor**

P.O. Box 7148  
Asheville, NC 28802  
Phone: (828) 259-5600  
[www.ashevillenc.gov](http://www.ashevillenc.gov)

August 11, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Please accept this letter as the City of Asheville's support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and a connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill the following regional priorities, access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance economic mobility in the region.

As the largest municipality in Western North Carolina, a good and reliable transportation network is crucial to serve our residents and visitors. This project will improve traffic flow and connectivity to benefit current and future growth.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility.

USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edman E. Manheimer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Edman" being the most prominent.

Esther Manheimer  
Mayor, City of Asheville

kjp/

cc: Ms. Debra Campbell  
Mr. Tim Anderson



August 16, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as the Economic Development Coalition Asheville-Buncombe County's strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

The Asheville MSA population continues to grow and the major employers in our area, including Pratt & Whitney, draw on the workforce from Buncombe County and the surrounding counties. Current and future employees utilize I-26 on a daily basis and this project allows for a greater connectivity to the main transportation corridor. In addition, the I-26 Interchange Project will assist with decreasing traffic flow on secondary roads creating a better commuting environment for all.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility. USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clark Duncan".

Clark Duncan, Executive Director

*a program of Land of Sky*

# FRENCH BROAD RIVER

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

[August 17, 2023]

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization's strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

The interchange project on I-26, HE-0001, is programmed in the MPO's 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and is critical to help alleviate the projected impacts of the new development along the corridor, enable freight access, and provide improved connectivity to our region.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility.

USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AS', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Anthony Sutton  
Board Chair  
French Broad River MPO

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**L. KEVIN ENSLEY, CHAIRMAN  
BRANDON C. ROGERS, VICE-CHAIRMAN  
TOMMY LONG  
JENNIFER BEST  
TERRY RAMEY**



**COUNTY MANAGER  
BRYANT MOREHEAD**

**COUNTY ATTORNEY  
FRANK G. QUEEN**

August 7, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as an expression of strong support by the Haywood County Commissioners for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs; access to federal, state and county recreational resources; and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc., in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, well above the current regional median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (AB Tech) to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

Haywood County's largest employer, Pactiv-Evergreen, recently closed with little warning, displacing approximately 900 direct employees and impacting countless feeder and local businesses that relied on the spending power of mill workers. The economic impact will be felt throughout the region. Haywood County is working closely with AB Tech, Buncombe County Chamber of Commerce, Haywood Community College, and other area organizations and businesses, including Pratt & Whitney, to assist and retrain workers, hold job fairs, and address economic stabilization and recovery in the wake of the mill closure.

Many of the higher-paying jobs in manufacturing sought by displaced mill workers are located in the area that would be positively impacted by the proposed project. Reducing travel time and distance between home and work would be extremely beneficial. Currently, Haywood County residents who work in Buncombe or Henderson counties experience regular traffic slowdowns, stops and accident delays on I-26 during their

morning and evening commute. The topography of western North Carolina presents challenges to road capacity and access. I-26 is one of the few major arteries in western NC and is notorious for traffic congestion that is getting worse as travel and relocation to the desirable mountain area continues to increase. The proposed interchange and connecting road would be a great help in lowering congestion, improving the flow of traffic and the level of safety for both tourists and full-time residents.

Reducing barriers to access will also help to build the physical connectivity between locations and partners in a community and economic development approach that is increasingly regional in nature. While tourism is a major economic driver in the region, tourism-related employment is not always sufficient to provide a living wage in an era of rising housing and food costs. The proposed project would ease the transport of goods and services, making the area more desirable for business and industry relocation and expansion to help grow the local economy beyond tourism.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnerships can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility.

USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "L. Kevin Ensley", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

L. Kevin Ensley, Chairman  
Board of County Commissioners  
Haywood County



## Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization

339 New Leicester Highway

Suite 140

Asheville, North Carolina 28806

Phone: (828) 251-6622 • Fax: (828) 251-6353

Website: [www.landofskyrpo.org](http://www.landofskyrpo.org) • E-mail:

[vicki.eastland@landofsky.org](mailto:vicki.eastland@landofsky.org)

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

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Land of Sky RPO would like to express our strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

The interchange project on I-26, IIE-0001, is critical to help alleviate the projected impacts of the new development along the corridor, enable freight access, and provide improved connectivity to our region.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility. USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mathew Wechtel".

**Mathew Wechtel, Commissioner Madison County, NC,  
Chair, Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization**



# The NORTH CAROLINA ARBORETUM

AN AFFILIATE INSTITUTION OF THE UNIVERSITY *of* NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM

August 3, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

**RE: Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project**

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

It is our pleasure and honor to represent The North Carolina Arboretum (“Arboretum”) and The North Carolina Arboretum Society (“Society”) in expressing our mutual, strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the I-26 Interchange project.

This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191 at the shared entrance to the Arboretum and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Approximately six miles south of Asheville, the project addresses one of the most serious traffic problems in the Asheville-Hendersonville area. This congestion issue is of great and increasing concern for the Arboretum and Parkway as intensive vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian movements at our entrance have become increasingly complex and unsafe for our staff, stakeholders and visitors.

Currently attracting over 600,000 visitors annually, the Arboretum is the most visited state-supported attraction in Western North Carolina. As an affiliate of the 17-campus University of North Carolina System, The North Carolina Arboretum and its supporting Society are relatively recent organizations at 37 years old but now provide a heavily-utilized and diverse service mission, enjoy increasing popularity statewide, and have garnered a respected national/international reputation. Located within the 6,300-acre Bent Creek Experimental Forest, the Arboretum is integral with one of our region’s most heavily-utilized federal recreation areas and lies within the 520,000-acre Pisgah National Forest. The Arboretum also shares one of Asheville’s most popular entrances to the Blue Ridge Parkway, a facility of the National Park Service attracting 15.7 million visitors annually. Thus, this I-26 Interchange project dramatically improves access for the many hikers, bicyclists, runners, dog owners, and campers who frequent these cultural and recreational assets by the tens of thousands each year.

Due to this high concentration of multiple uses, the I-26 Interchange project will be a welcome relief to the daily traffic congestion that currently impacts the Highway 191 corridor. The highway is dramatically overloaded as it serves the Arboretum, U. S. Forest Service and Blue Ridge Parkway and connects the rapidly-growing communities of Asheville and Hendersonville. Multiple daily traffic backups along Highway 191, frequently approaching a mile in length, create unsafe and inconvenient conditions for the Arboretum’s 17,000 member households, tens of thousands of students served annually by the

Arboretum's youth programs, school and tourism buses, service vehicles and the many other vehicles and visitors who enter and exit the Arboretum and Blue Ridge Parkway.

We owe much of the Arboretum's heavy visitation to the proximity with I-26, I-40, I-240, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and National Forest lands. During peak days and popular annual events at the Arboretum, such as Winter Lights that attracts over 100,000 visitors in 45 days, the backup of vehicles on Highway 191 consistently overtaxes the highway design. While the Arboretum and UNC System are gratified to provide this level of service, the concentrated nexus of substantial cultural, recreational, tourism and commercial traffic on Highway 191 needs immediate attention. Reducing the vehicular movements along the Highway 191 corridor will mitigate the backups and accidents we regularly experience at or near the Arboretum/Blue Ridge Parkway/National Forest entrances.

The addition of this new Exit 35 Interchange and access road provides a new, alternate and direct access route, and will be enormously helpful in converting a burgeoning traffic problem into a scenic, efficient and safe system of vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian movement.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is of the highest priority. As an important facilitator of the local tourism and cultural economy, this access improvement leverages private investment, provides access to the new Pratt & Whitney manufacturing facility, and benefits the regional economy. By providing efficient access to the Arboretum, the Pratt & Whitney facility, and future development residential and commercial development, this project will foster long-term, high-quality jobs; access to federal, state and county recreational resources; and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

Secretary Buttigieg, we would greatly appreciate your positive consideration of this strategic investment serving all of Western North Carolina. The I-26 Interchange project demonstrates how federal-state-local partnership can vastly improve regional economic endeavors, cultural diversity and transportation effectiveness.

It would be our pleasure to provide USDOT staff with any further information that would be helpful.

Sincerely,



George Briggs, FASLA  
Executive Director  
The North Carolina Arboretum



Drake Fowler  
President  
The North Carolina Arboretum Society

Cc Cheryl McMurry Kaynard, Chair  
Board of Directors  
The North Carolina Arboretum

Faith Doyle, Chair  
Board of Directors  
The North Carolina Arboretum Society



**GO BEYOND**

Pratt and Whitney  
300 Pratt and Whitney Blvd.  
Asheville, North Carolina 28806

Daniel J. Field, General Manager

July 31, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

As General Manager of Pratt and Whitney's manufacturing facility in Asheville, I would like to offer my strong support for the NC DOT's Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application. This project will provide a much-needed new interchange from I-26 (future Exit 35) and a connecting road linking Pratt and Whitney Boulevard to NC-191, Brevard Road, south of Asheville, North Carolina.

In partnership with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, Pratt and Whitney is on track to train a highly skilled local workforce and to create approximately 800 well-paying area jobs. Our plans include a future 20,000 square foot educational facility to be built near our plant, in coordination with AB-Tech. Bringing students to that facility for training would be greatly eased once the I-26 exit project is completed.

The I-26 corridor between Asheville and Hendersonville is a primary route for local workers and tourists alike. Congestion on this route has been a problem for years. The proposed project will help ease that congestion, providing ease of access, not only to the manufacturing site and our planned training facility, but also to the Blue Ridge Parkway, the NC Arboretum, and to multiple local businesses, hotels, and restaurants.

Many of our employees live in outlying areas of Buncombe County and in the surrounding counties of Henderson, Haywood and Madison, necessitating use of the interstate system for their commute. Having this new interchange and quick access to their workplace will greatly assist us in employee retention. Additionally, the new interchange will aid in delivery of materials to our site from numerous suppliers.

I appreciate your consideration of this important endeavor and will be happy to speak with USDOT staff, should they have questions or feel the need to discuss our support for the project further.

Sincerely,

Dan Field  
General Manager, Pratt and Whitney, Asheville, NC



## Skyland Fire & Rescue

Phone: (828) 684-6421 Address: PO Box 640 Skyland NC 28776 Fax (828) 684-1010 [www.skylandfire.com](http://www.skylandfire.com)

August 14, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as Skyland Fire & Rescue's strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

This I-26 interchange will improve the health and safety of our citizens, increase the traffic flow of the south Asheville area, and improve the service that we provide the community by reducing response times to incidents. This interchange will also provide future business growth to the region and help with existing business retention.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility.

USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

Trevor Lance, Fire Chief  
Skyland Fire & Rescue



**Southwestern Commission**  
125 Bonnie Lane  
Sylva, NC 28779

Phone: 828.586.1962  
Fax: 828.586.1968

[regiona.org](http://regiona.org)

August 3, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project  
Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The Southwestern Commission Council of Governments is pleased to support the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income. Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility.

Sincerely,

Russ Harris,  
Executive Director

Southwestern Commission does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, marital status, color, religion, national origin, or disability.

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<b>Cherokee County</b> Andrews Murphy	<b>Clay County</b> Hayesville	<b>Eastern Band of Cherokee</b> Indians	<b>Graham County</b> Fontana Dam Lake Santeetlah Robbinsville	<b>Haywood County</b> Canton Clyde Maggie Valley Waynesville	<b>Jackson County</b> Dillsboro Forest Hills Sylva Webster	<b>Macon County</b> Franklin Highlands	<b>Swain County</b> Bryson City
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21 Aviation Way  
Fletcher, NC 28732  
(828) 687-7540  
[www.wncaviation.com](http://www.wncaviation.com)



July 31, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary, US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Letter of Support for North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Rural Discretionary Grant Application, I-26 Interchange Project

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter as WNC Aviation's strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant application for the subject project. This project includes a new interchange on I-26 (future Exit 35) and connecting road to NC 191, approximately six miles south of Asheville. This transportation investment capitalizes on private investments and will fulfill priority regional priorities: access to long-term, high-quality jobs, access to federal, state and county recreational resources, and reduced congestion and commuting times within the Asheville/Hendersonville corridor.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has shown that this project is crucial. By supporting the investment by Pratt & Whitney, a division of Raytheon, Inc, in southern Buncombe County, the USDOT Rural Grant would contribute to the creation of 800 jobs with an average salary of \$68,000, \$39,000 higher than the current median income.

Further, Pratt & Whitney is partnering with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to train the highly skilled workforce. A new 20,000-square-foot educational facility near the manufacturing plant will increase the region's educational capacity and technical knowledge. This education partnership will eliminate barriers to opportunities and continue to enhance racial equity in the region.

The educational and future employment opportunities created by the Pratt & Whitney facility are paramount to the successful growth of our program in partnership with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College. The interchange is crucial to relieve traffic and congestion in the South Asheville area and particularly for students and staff that travel to and from AB Tech's South Campus on Airport Rd. from the main campus in downtown Asheville.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for considering this strategic investment. It demonstrates how a federal-state-local partnership can greatly impact a region's economic vibrancy and transportation mobility.

USDOT staff should feel free to contact me to discuss our support for the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Thomas".

Amy Thomas  
LLC Manager  
WNC Aviation, LLC

**MPDG FFY 2023 and 2024  
GRANT APPLICATION  
AUGUST 2023**

# **GROUND TO SKY PROJECT**



**N.C. Department of Transportation**  
1 South Wilmington Street  
Raleigh, NC 27601

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