



Southwestern Commission
125 Bonnie Lane
Sylva, NC 28779

Phone: 828.586.1962
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regiona.org

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

August 3, 2023

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Southwestern Commission Council of Governments is writing in support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation’s (NCDOT’s) “Greater Rural Access and Highways to Accelerate Mobility” project (“GRAHAM” or “the Project”) application for USDOT Rural Program funds. 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 a new land bridge that will allow pedestrians and wildlife to safely cross NC 143. Technological 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 geotechnical failures.

Without a Rural grant, construction cost increases will delay the delivery of these improvements to ADHS Corridor K. The Project is tailored to this remote area’s specific needs through an engaged collaboration between NCDOT, FHWA, ARC, Southwestern Rural Planning Organization, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Graham and Cherokee County Commissioners and County Managers. Thank you for considering 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.

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.

Cherokee County Andrews Murphy	Clay County Hayesville	Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	Graham County Fontana Dam Lake Santeetlah Robbinsville	Haywood County Canton Clyde Maggie Valley Waynesville	Jackson County Dillsboro Forest Hills Sylva Webster	Macon County Franklin Highlands	Swain County Bryson City
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The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

August 21, 2023

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is writing in strong support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) "Greater Rural Access and Highways to Accelerate Mobility" project ("GRAHAM" or "the Project") application for USDOT Rural Program funds. 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. Through the work of a strong local, state and federal partnership, represents a significant improvement to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

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 a 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 geotechnical failures. 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, 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 delay the delivery of these improvements to ADHS Corridor K. The Project is tailored to this remote area's specific needs through an engaged collaboration between NCDOT, FHWA, ARC, Southwestern Rural Planning Organization, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Graham and Cherokee County Commissioners and County Managers, and the Graham County Economic Development Director.



The ATC has worked with this partnership since the 1980's to help meet the transportation, communication and economic development needs of our neighboring communities while ensuring appropriate protections for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. To that end, we feel that the current project not only meets the needs of our partner communities while also providing the best possible outcome for the A.T.

For the reasons outlined above, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy strongly encourages you to support the GRAHAM 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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Andrew Downs', set against a light green rectangular background.

Andrew Downs
Senior Regional Director
Appalachian Trail Conservancy



Graham County Board of County Commissioners

*12 North Main Street
Robbinsville, NC 28771*

*Natasha Williams
Vice-Chairman*

*Jacob Nelms
Chairman*

*Lynn Cody
Member*

*Phone: 828-479-7961
Fax: 828-479-7988*

*Keith Eller
Member*

*Connie Orr
Member*

*Kim Crisp
Clerk*

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

August 21, 2023

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Graham County Board of Commissioners are writing in support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) "Greater Rural Access and Highways to Accelerate Mobility" project ("GRAHAM" or "the Project") application for USDOT Rural Program funds. 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.

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Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Graham and Cherokee County Commissioners and County Managers, and the Graham County Economic Development Director.

Graham County has awaited many years for this project and our citizens deserve the reliability of good roads. Our families deserve emergency response times to be at the maximum and our citizens deserve to see the 60+ years promises fulfilled and this road to be built in its entirety.

For the reasons outlined above, the Graham County Board of Commissioners strongly encourages you to support the GRAHAM 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.

Sincerely,



Jacob Nelms, Chairman



Natasha Williams, Vice-Chair



Lynn Cody, Member

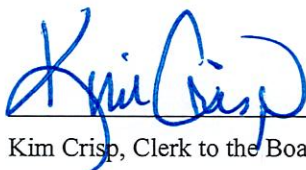


Keith Eller, Member



Connie Orr, Member

ATTEST:



Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board



CHEROKEE COUNTY

75 Peachtree Street
Murphy, NC 28906
828-837-5527

Randy Wiggins, County Manager
Maria Hass, Asst. County Manager/Clerk to Board
Candy R. Anderson, CPA, CGMA, Finance Officer
Darryl Brown, County Attorney

Board of Commissioners
Cal Stiles, Chairman
Jan Griggs, Vice-Chair
Dr. Dan Eichenbaum, Member
Randy Phillips, Member
Ben Adams, Member

August 4, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Please accept this letter of support for the GRAHAM Project and NCDOT's application for USDOT RAISE Investment Program Grant funds. The Project is the result of extensive collaboration between NCDOT, FHWA, ARC, Southwestern Rural Planning Organization, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Graham and Cherokee County Commissioners and County Managers, and the Graham County Economic Development Director to improve 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.

The Project will more safely and equitably serve all transportation modes in a remote portion of rural western North Carolina by adding climbing and passing lanes along NC 143 and NC 28 between Robbinsville and the Stecoah Valley; constructing new sidewalks and a 0.6 mile multiuse path to improve multimodal access to services, businesses and educational opportunities; and, improving Appalachian Trail access and safety, including a new land bridge to allow pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as wildlife, to safely cross NC 143. The project also includes 2 Dynamic Message Signs, 6 Dynamic Trailblazers, and a new CCTV at the intersection of US 129 and NC 143 in Robbinsville, with signal coordination at five intersections. These ITS components alert travelers to emergencies and road closures along US 19/74, which occur frequently due to flooding and geotechnical failures. US 129, NC 143, and NC 28 are vital detours, but with only a single lane in each direction and inadequate communications to travelers, the increased traffic leads to congestion and travel delays.

The Project meets the goals of the RAISE program to support projects of significant local and regional impact and will improve the safety, mobility, and quality of life for residents of this remote and Historically Disadvantaged Community. The Project accomplishes the following goals:

Safety: The Project will reduce roadway fatalities and crashes and improve response times for emergency vehicles by introducing climbing and passing lanes and widening shoulders. In Robbinsville, where there is a disproportionate number of zero-vehicle households, new sidewalks will improve safety for non-motorized travelers.

Environmental Sustainability: The Project will replace retaining walls and improve embankments to make the corridor more resilient to natural disasters and extreme weather events. The Project also improves the region's resiliency by modernizing the corridor to serve as a reliable alternative to US 19/74 during flooding, landslides, and other emergency events. The Project will reduce travel time throughout the corridor, which will lead to reduced greenhouse gas emissions. New bicycle and pedestrian facilities will promote a modal shift to active transportation. The Corridor K project won the National Association of Environmental Professionals Environmental Excellence Award in Environmental Management, Stewardship, Conservation, and Protection in 2021.

Quality of Life: The Project expands active transportation in Graham County, thereby improving public health outcomes and increasing access to healthcare, education, employment, and other essential services. Additionally, the Project's travel time savings and congestion reductions will decrease vehicle fuel and maintenance costs, lessening transportation cost burdens on local residents.

Mobility and Community Connectivity: The Project's multimodal components increase accessibility for non-motorized travelers in Historically Disadvantaged Communities. Moreover, realignments to the Appalachian Trail, including a new land bridge, will improve mobility for local residents and visitors to the region.

Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity: The Project will improve travel time reliability and freight mobility by modernizing the roadway and introducing signal coordination and other ITS components. The new land bridge and expanded parking at Stecoah Gap will draw more visitors to the scenic Appalachian Trail, increasing revenue for local businesses reliant on tourism and fostering the region's long-term economic growth.

State of Good Repair: The Project will restore and modernize the corridor while creating new multimodal infrastructure in a remote community. The Project will also mitigate system vulnerabilities by improving the reliability of this critical infrastructure asset in an underserved area.

Partnership and Collaboration: NCDOT partnered with a multitude of local, regional, and national organizations in the Project's planning and design. Representatives from environmental groups, Tribal Partners, and economic development organizations were all active participants. Robust engagement of residents and community-based organizations integrated equity considerations throughout the life-cycle of the Project.

Cherokee County values its relationship with all of these partnering agencies and understands that this project is not just a win for Graham County, but for Western North Carolina, as a whole. The support of this project is a perfect example of neighborism; because when our neighbors succeed, we all succeed. While this project area is located in Graham County, all of Western North Carolina will reap the economic benefits.

Innovation: During planning and design for the Project, several innovative technologies were used such as Quantm 3D, an alignment optimization program; Ground Penetrating Radar to avoid areas of potential archaeological and ecological importance; and innovative methods to determine travel time reliability using a 365-day simulation model.

Corridor K is critical to long-distance travel in western North Carolina to surrounding counties and is vital for local trips within Cherokee County, as well. The project will improve connectivity for local and commercial traffic that moves through the area. Increased connectivity is crucial for residents who must travel out of the county for jobs, healthcare, and other critical services, as well as for commercial traffic which must use these roads to transport goods in and out of North Carolina. These improvements will bring about economic benefits for a rural Tier 1 county.

Without this project, local and commercial traffic will continue to face uncertainty as the current road network proves to be unreliable. These improvements will increase the reliability and connectivity of the existing road network, while providing safety and economic benefits, as well the support needed for an improved quality of life.

For these reasons, Cherokee County strongly encourages you to support the GRAHAM project and NCDOT's application for USDOT RAISE Investment Program Grant funds to make the final improvements to Corridor K.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cal Stiles". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cal Stiles, Chairman
Cherokee County Board of Commissioners



GREAT
PO Box 1223
Robbinsville, NC 28771
828.735.1215

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

August 21, 2023

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Graham Revitalization Economic Action Team (GREAT) is writing in support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) "Greater Rural Access and Highways to Accelerate Mobility" project ("GRAHAM" or "the Project") application for USDOT Rural Program funds. 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 a 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 geotechnical failures. 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, 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 delay the delivery of these improvements to ADHS Corridor K. The Project is tailored to this remote area's specific needs through an engaged collaboration between NCDOT, FHWA, ARC, Southwestern Rural Planning Organization, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Graham and Cherokee County Commissioners and County Managers, and the Graham County Economic Development Director.

GREAT is a partnership of citizens that meets the health, social, economic, educational, and recreational needs of Graham County residents, while preserving its cultural heritage and natural resources and instilling pride in community and place. It is our vision to see Graham County as a place where traditional Appalachian culture lives, people flourish and businesses thrive and prosper. The Corridor K

project which passes through Graham County will help our organization to better fulfill our mission by addressing many of the key needs we seek to meet, including economic, health and social, and recreational. We feel that a well-balanced approach to the need for improvement to the highway has been taken and it will allow improvements in several sectors as noted.

For the reasons outlined above, the Great organization strongly encourages you to support the GRAHAM 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.

Sincerely,

J. Michelle Shiplet

Executive Director,

GREAT



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

August 21, 2023

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Waysouth is writing in support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) "Greater Rural Access and Highways to Accelerate Mobility" project ("GRAHAM" or "the Project") application for USDOT Rural Program funds. Waysouth is a grassroots organization, whose mission is to promote environmentally and fiscally responsible transportation in the southern Appalachians. 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 a new land bridge that will allow pedestrians and wildlife to safely cross NC 143 on the Appalachian Trail. 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 geotechnical failures. 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.

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Waysouth strongly supports this Project. We coordinate efforts across multiple environmental organizations in the southern Appalachians. We engage with the community to educate them about transportation issues and help them more effectively interact with Federal, state, and local entities. For this Project, we worked directly with NCDOT on the wildlife corridor at the Appalachian Trail crossing at



Stecoah Gap and by coordinating with community members regarding proposed alternative routes. By working closely with NCDOT and their contractors, together we found a way forward to build the new facility on the existing route and thereby minimize environmental damage and excessive cost. Together, we solved a decades-old problem of reliable and environmentally-friendly transportation needs in western North Carolina. We are grateful for the partnership formed with NCDOT on this project and we are very much looking forward to the completed result. We also support the ancillary benefits of the project, such as the greenway.

For the reasons outlined above, WaysSouth strongly encourages you to support the GRAHAM 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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melanie A. Mayes". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Melanie A. Mayes

Chair of the Board, WaysSouth



*Town of Bryson City
Municipal Office
P.O. Box 726
Bryson City, NC 28713
Telephone (828) 488-3335
Fax (828) 488-9474*

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

August 21, 2023

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Town of Bryson City is writing in support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) "Greater Rural Access and Highways to Accelerate Mobility" project ("GRAHAM" or "the Project") application for USDOT Rural Program funds. 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.

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Sam Pattillo, Town Manager Fred Moody Jr., Town Attorney Carla Passmore, Tax Collector Lynn Thomas, Town Clerk

Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Graham and Cherokee County Commissioners and County Managers,
and the Graham County Economic Development Director.

Our support for this project is for betterment of Western North Carolina. Better transportation would create a better standard of living and access to emergency response. The number of people on our mountain roads has increased dramatically over the last 10 years with no end in sight.

For the reasons outlined above, the Town of Bryson City strongly encourages you to support the GRAHAM 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.

Sincerely,

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



Town of Lake Santeetlah

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

August 21, 2023

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Town of Lake Santeetlah is writing in support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) "Greater Rural Access and Highways to Accelerate Mobility" project ("GRAHAM" or "the Project") application for USDOT Rural Program funds. 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.

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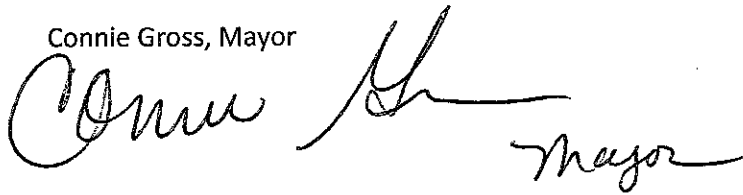
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By improving the travel patterns of this road will improve access to our town.

For the reasons outlined above, the Town of Lake Santeetlah, strongly encourages you to support the GRAHAM 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.

Sincerely,

Connie Gross, Mayor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Connie Gross", followed by a horizontal line and the word "Mayor" written below it.