



May 15, 2020

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao, Secretary
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

I am writing to express MountainTrue's support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) application to the U.S. Department of Transportation's BUILD Program, "Continuing Corridor K: Connecting People, Goods, and Services." This project is the outcome of ongoing coordination between government agencies, local officials, and environmental stakeholders, including MountainTrue, to ensure a project that meets the local and broader needs for reliability and connectivity, while maintaining environmental sensitivity.

The project is located in Graham County in the Blue Ridge Mountains of southwestern NC. Residents rely on a few main roads for transportation into and out of the county. These roads wind through mountainous terrain with high amounts of annual rainfall and are susceptible to frequent landslides. 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. The improvements proposed by this project will bring about economic benefits for this rural mountain county with a declining workforce. Importantly from our perspective, NCDOT proposes to lay fiber optic cable along the proposed route, which will further enhance the economic viability of Graham County by increasing its capacity for broadband internet service.

MountainTrue is a region environmental advocacy organization that champions resilient forests, clean waters and healthy communities in Western North Carolina and parts of North Georgia. We are committed to keeping our mountain region a beautiful place to live, work and play. Our members protect our forests, clean up our rivers, plan vibrant and livable communities, and advocate for a sound and sustainable future.

MountainTrue has been working in partnership with WaysSouth, a non-profit organization focused on transportation issues within the southern Appalachians, on the Corridor K project. WaysSouth works with communities to advocate for transportation alternatives that are sensitive to the environment and minimize forest fragmentation and degradation of water quality. Collectively, we have worked for more than a decade to ensure that this route in

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WATERKEEPER ALLIANCE MEMBER

Graham County meets our sustainable transportation goals, and we are pleased to be working more closely with NCDOT and its consultants on the project at this time.

MountainTrue has long advocated for "Improve Existing" alternatives associated with the Corridor K project in Western North Carolina. We are pleased that NCDOT is proposing to improve the existing facility through the Stecoah community with this project, by providing climbing/passing lanes to increase safety and enhance travel speeds along the existing route without making significant new incursions into the landscape, some of which lies within Nantahala National Forest.

We strongly urge you to support the Corridor K Improvements (STIP Project No. A-0009C) and the NCDOT's application Continuing Corridor K: Connecting People, Goods, and Services for federal BUILD grant funding to help ensure its construction.

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