

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

RE: FY2022 NSFLTP Grant Application – Ecusta Rail Trail: A Multimodal Gateway to the Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The French Broad River MPO strongly supports the NSFLTP grant application for the Ecusta Rail Trail: A Multimodal Gateway to the Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway which is the result of a collaboration between the City of Brevard, Henderson County, City of Hendersonville, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), Friends of the Ecusta Trail, Conserving Carolina, and other local stakeholders.

The Ecusta Rail Trail will provide an active transportation and recreation corridor that improves access to jobs, public resources, opportunities for low-income communities, and connections to the Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway. As part of a statewide and regional greenway spine identified in the NCDOT Great Trails State Plan, this project will connect to the recreational hiking and mountain biking epicenter of the Pisgah National Forest, bringing economic development, tourism, and equitable access to the region and its residents.

The French Broad River MPO includes the Ecusta Trail in its 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan as well as the Hellbender Regional Trail Plan. This trail provides an important link for non-vehicular modes and provides safe access to the outdoor recreation destinations that make our region a special place to live.

By supporting these efforts, USDOT can showcase a project that aligns closely with the Biden Administration's objectives, including enhancing access to opportunities for historically marginalized communities, creating an equitable transportation system that works for everyone, creating jobs and economic opportunity to an area where the local paper mill industry has declined, repurposing an abandoned and recently acquired rail corridor, and transitioning to a more environmentally conscience network that prioritizes non-motorized users. This project will deliver healthy, climate-friendly, resilient, and integrated transportation and recreation options for residents and visitors of Brevard, the Pisgah National Forest, and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Thank you for considering our application for NSFLTP Program funding.

Sincerely,  
  
Larry B. Harris

Chair, French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization Board