

October 11, 2022

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 Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development 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 North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), City of Brevard, Henderson County, City of Hendersonville, 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 Partnership actively creates and retains jobs in the manufacturing sector in Henderson County. One of the main drivers for successful employment, is being in a community with a thriving quality of place. The proposed rail trail will provide our corporate citizens with an asset to retain their workforce. The rail trail can also act as an additional mode of transportation, which can help widen our workforce participation. Additionally, coming off the past few years, the expanded outdoor recreational amenities will strengthen employee's physical and emotional well beings.

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



Brittany Brady, President & CEO
Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development

