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**October 10, 2022**

**The Honorable Pete Buttigieg Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE  
Washington, DC, 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 Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization, (LOSRPO) 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 be an active transportation and recreation corridor that improves access to jobs and public resources. The Ecusta Rail Trail will provide opportunities for low-income communities, and new 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 LOSRPO recognizes the need for a safe non-highway network for residents and visitors of Western North Carolina to access natural resources like the Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Once completed, the Ecusta Rail Trail will connect to the existing City of Brevard path entering the Pisgah National Forest on the Estatoe Trail. The Estatoe Trail connects to several miles of trails and forest roads in the Pisgah National Forest connecting to the Blue Ridge Parkway. There are many recreation destinations located nearby. By providing non-motorized access to this area, it will help reduce the number of vehicles entering the area and the need for additional parking at key destinations and the strain on natural resources.**

By supporting these efforts, USDOT can showcase a project that aligns closely with the objectives of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, 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 disappeared, repurposing a railbanked 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, Hendersonville and Henderson County the Pisgah National Forest, and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Thank you for considering our application for NSFLTP Program funding.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Wechtel', written in a cursive style.

Matthew Wechtel, Commissioner, Madison County NC  
Chair Land of Sky RPO