



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

November 1, 2023

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Please accept this letter of support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation’s (NCDOT’s) Greater Rural Access and Highways to Accelerate Mobility (“GRAHAM” or “The Project”) application for the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects (NSFLTP) Program funds. The Project supports the overarching purpose of the NSFLTP program by rehabilitating transportation facilities of national significance within, adjacent to, or providing access to Federal or Tribal land.

The Southwestern Commission Council of Governments was formed in 1965 to serve the seven western-most counties in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina. Also in 1965, Congress dedicated funds to the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) to connect Appalachian communities to the Interstate System and generate economic opportunity. The completed sections of the ADHS have been successful at generating positive economic benefits and improving the quality of life for the residents of western North Carolina.

However, a critical section of Corridor K in Graham County, NC has yet to be completed due to the challenging topography and concerns over the environmental impacts of a multi-lane highway. Several years ago, the Southwestern Commission administered a regional visioning effort to help move beyond the impasse on Corridor K. This effort led to a truly collaborative approach between multiple state and federal agencies, tribal governments, local officials, advocacy groups, and local community members. After 60 years, NCDOT and their partners have developed a viable solution to complete this section of Corridor K. Yet rising construction costs and reduced ADHS funding mean that these hard-earned plans are sitting on the shelf. It is imperative that additional funds are awarded for this project to meet the critical connectivity needs of the region as originally intended by the Appalachian Development Act of 1965. The Southwestern Commission strongly supports the GRAHAM project and NCDOT’s application for FHWA’s NSFLTP program to make these critical improvements.

Sincerely,

Russ Harris  
Executive Director

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<b>Cherokee County</b>	<b>Clay County</b>	<b>Eastern Band</b>	<b>Graham County</b>	<b>Haywood County</b>	<b>Jackson County</b>	<b>Macon County</b>	<b>Swain County</b>
Andrews	Hayesville	<b>of Cherokee</b>	Fontana Dam	Canton	Dillsboro	Franklin	Bryson City
Murphy		Indians	Lake Santeetlah	Clyde	Forest Hills	Highlands	
			Robbinsville	Maggie Valley	Sylva		
				Waynesville	Webster		