

**Fiscal Years 2024 through 2026
Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects Program
Application Template**

This is the Application Template for Fiscal Years (FY) 2024 through 2026 Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects (NSFLTP) Program.

Submission of this Application Template is required as part of a complete application package. The Application Template, in conjunction with the allowable attachments and standard forms, must provide all information necessary for the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to determine if the project meets the eligibility requirements described in Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Section B and to evaluate the criteria specified in NOFO Section F. DOT will consider applications submitted without the completed template as incomplete and will not review the submission. DOT encourages applicants to review the NOFO in its entirety to ensure that their project is eligible and includes all required information and documentation.

Expand the response blocks as necessary but limit the total application template to a total of 20 pages not including attachments. [***Applicants:*** Delete instructions shown below in italic prior to submittal.]

I. Summary

Project Name:	(UWHARRIE) Utilizing Woodlands and Highways to Accelerate the Rebuilding of Rural Infrastructure and Economies Project (R-2527) – Widening of NC 24/27 from NC 73 to the Troy Bypass
Eligible Entity Applying to Receive Federal Funding:	North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)
Entity Type: <i>(Entity types marked with an * must attach a sponsor letter from an eligible federally recognized Indian Tribe or FLMA. See Section B of the NOFO for more details)</i>	☐ Tribal Government ☐ Federal Land Management Agency (FLMA) ☐ County or unit of local government* ☒ State*
Total Project Cost: <i>(from all sources)</i>	\$153,660,760
NSFLTP funding request amount:	\$45,000,000
State(s) in which the project is located:	North Carolina
Lead Applicant Point of Contact information <i>(name, address, phone number, email):</i>	Brittany Wilborn Federal Discretionary Grants Coordinator bnwilborn@ncdot.gov (919) 707-2854

Project Abstract: <i>Summarize project work to be completed under the project and succinctly describe how the NSFLTP funds would be used to complete the project.</i>	
The UWHARRIE Project will modernize approximately 8.25 miles of NC 24/27 in Montgomery County, North Carolina, between NC 73 (35.30718, -80.07572) and the Troy Bypass (35.33260, -79.93140). The project will reconstruct the existing two-lane highway as a four-lane divided facility featuring a 46-foot depressed median, 10-foot paved shoulders, use of unsignalized reduced conflict intersection treatments, improved access management, replacement of the Norfolk Southern Railway bridge crossing, wildlife connectivity enhancements, and improvements to recreational access associated with Uwharrie National Forest. The project together with the Troy Bypass (R-0623/U-0623), will create a higher-capacity regional transportation corridor that improves mobility, safety, freight efficiency, and economic competitiveness across central North Carolina. Grant and State funding will be applied to the construction of the project.	
Attachments: <i>Please list any attachments to this form, including letters of support. This includes any applicable State Department of Transportation support letters as described in Section B.4 of the NOFO.</i>	Supporting documentation is provided at the following link: Utilizing Woodlands and Highways to Accelerate the Rebuilding of Rural Infrastructure and Economies (UWHARRIE). Provided here is support information for each Merit criterion and each Project readiness factor.

II. Project Information

1	Project Name:	(UWHARRIE) Utilizing Woodlands and Highways to Accelerate the Rebuilding of Rural Infrastructure and Economies Project (R-2527) – Widening of NC 24/27 from NC 73 to the Troy Bypass
2	Location of facility and project area:	Montgomery County, NC
3	Facility Type: <i>(The facility does not need to be included in an inventory described in 23 United States Code (U.S.C.) Sections 202 or 203.)</i>	☐ Federal lands transportation facility ¹ ☒ Federal lands access transportation facility ² ☐ Tribal transportation facility ³ ☐ None of the above
4	Is the project a single, continuous project?	☒ Yes ☐ No
5	Is National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review	☐ Yes-Record of Decision ☒ Yes-Finding of no significant impact

¹ A Federal lands transportation facility means a public highway, road, bridge, trail, or transit system that is located on, is adjacent to, or provides access to Federal lands for which title and maintenance responsibility is vested in the Federal Government (23 U.S.C. 101(a)(8)).

² A Federal lands access transportation facility means a public highway, road, bridge, trail, or transit system that is located on, is adjacent to, or provides access to Federal lands for which title or maintenance responsibility is vested in a State, county, town, township, Tribal, municipal, or local government (23 U.S.C. 101(a)(7)).

³ A Tribal transportation facility means a public highway, road, bridge, trail, or transit system that is located on or provides access to Tribal land (23 U.S.C. 101(a)(33)).

	complete? <i>(see NOFO Section B)</i>	☐ Yes-Determination that categorically excluded ☐ No
6	Are requested NSFLTP funds only for construction, reconstruction or rehabilitation of eligible transportation facilities?	☒ Yes ☐ No
7	Is the project in a unit of the National Park System with not less than three million annual visitors?	☐ Yes ☒ No
8	Project Background	<i>NCDOT Project R-2527 involves widening an 8.25-mile segment of NC 24/27 in Montgomery County (from NC 73 to the Troy Bypass) from two lanes to a four-lane divided facility.</i> <i>The R-2527 improvements work in tandem with the Troy Bypass (Project R-0623) to the east and westward to Albemarle (Project R-2530B) as referenced in the Environmental Assessment for TIP projects R-2530B, B-4974, and R-2527 (Environmental Assessment Date December 2011). The project's (R-2527) preliminary engineering, right-of-way consultations and NEPA requirements have been finalized.</i> <i>The project is a single continuous project providing significant access to Federal land, specifically the Uwharrie National Forest.</i> <i>Incurred costs include: \$10,316,629 was spent completing the preliminary engineering phase, \$5,552,321 was spent for ROW, \$62,427 was spent on utilities, and an additional \$501,625 was spent on mitigation activities, for a total of \$16,433,002</i>

III. Budget and Funding

1	Program Request Amount:	Exact NSFLTP Program request amount in year-of-expenditure dollars: <u>\$45,000,000</u>
2	Other Federal Funding:	Estimated total of other planned Federal funding, excluding NSFLTP Program requested funding, for project activities that are eligible for NSFLTP in year-of-expenditure dollars: <u>\$77,928,608</u> Other Federal programs and estimated amounts: <i>(add lines as needed)</i> Program: Surface Transportation Block Grant Amount: <u>\$77,928,608</u>

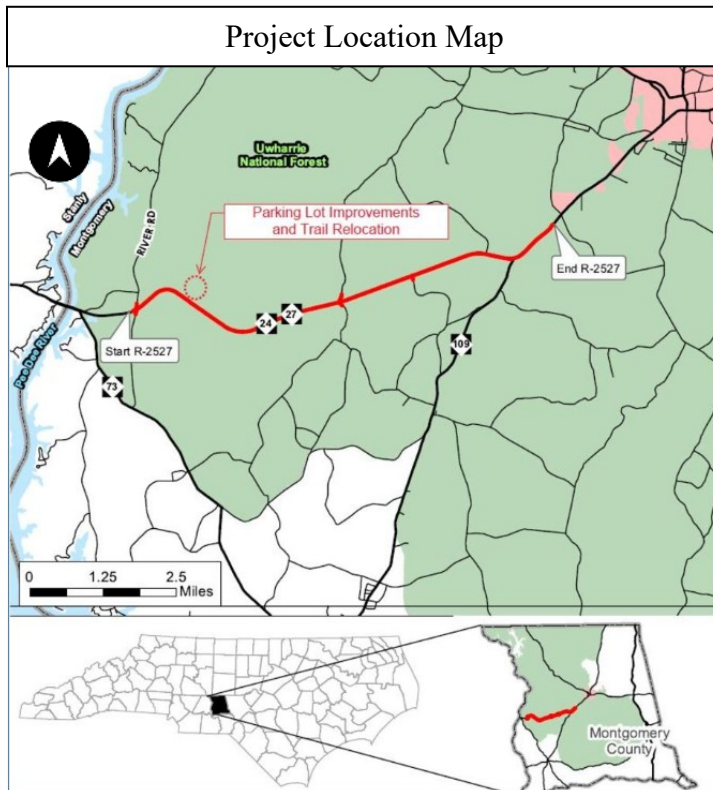
3	Other non-Federal Funding:	Estimated total of other planned non-Federal funding for project activities that are eligible for NSFLTP in year-of-expenditure dollars: <u>\$30,732,152</u> Other non- Federal programs and estimated amounts: (<i>add lines as needed</i>) Program: State Highway Trust Funds Amount: <u>\$30,732,152</u>																																												
4	Future Project Cost:	Provide the sum of NSFLTP Program request, other planned Federal funds, and planned non-Federal funds for NSFLTP eligible project activities as an estimate in year-of-expenditure dollars: <u>\$153,660,760</u>																																												
5	Previously incurred project costs:	<i>[Instruction: If costs have already been incurred for project development, such as planning, NEPA or design costs provide the amount here]</i> Amount: <u>\$16,433,002</u>																																												
6	Total Project Cost:	Estimate in year-of-expenditure dollars (sum of ‘previously incurred project costs’ and ‘future project cost’ for NSFLTP eligible and non-eligible activities): <u>\$173,683,002</u>																																												
7	Statement of Work (SOW):	As part of project development, NCDOT has prepared detailed plans, quantities and cost estimate using its pay item bidding history. This provides a highly accurate statement of project funding requirements. ☒ A detailed schedule is attached separately. The file is named: Project Schedule.pdf																																												
8	Grant Funds, Sources and Uses of Project Funds (Detailed Budget):	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Funding Use</th> <th>Funding Source</th> <th>Amount</th> <th>Percent</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td colspan="4"><i>FUTURE ELIGIBLE COST</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Construction and CEI</td> <td>NSFLTP Grant</td> <td>\$45,000,000</td> <td>29.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Construction and CEI</td> <td>Other Federal: Surface Transp. Block Grant</td> <td>\$77,928,608</td> <td>50.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Construction and CEI</td> <td>State: State Highway Trust Funds</td> <td>\$30,732,152</td> <td>20.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Total</td> <td>\$153,660,760</td> <td>100.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td><i>Total Federal Share</i></td> <td><i>\$122,928,608</i></td> <td><i>80.0%</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4"><i>FUTURE INELIGIBLE COST</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Construction Utility Relocation</td> <td>Other Federal: Surface Transp. Block Grant</td> <td>\$2,871,392</td> <td>80.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Construction Utility Relocation</td> <td>State: State Highway Trust Funds</td> <td>\$717,848</td> <td>20.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Total</td> <td>\$3,589,240</td> <td>100.0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> ☐ A detailed budget is attached separately. The file is named:	Funding Use	Funding Source	Amount	Percent	<i>FUTURE ELIGIBLE COST</i>				Construction and CEI	NSFLTP Grant	\$45,000,000	29.3%	Construction and CEI	Other Federal: Surface Transp. Block Grant	\$77,928,608	50.7%	Construction and CEI	State: State Highway Trust Funds	\$30,732,152	20.0%		Total	\$153,660,760	100.0%		<i>Total Federal Share</i>	<i>\$122,928,608</i>	<i>80.0%</i>	<i>FUTURE INELIGIBLE COST</i>				Construction Utility Relocation	Other Federal: Surface Transp. Block Grant	\$2,871,392	80.0%	Construction Utility Relocation	State: State Highway Trust Funds	\$717,848	20.0%		Total	\$3,589,240	100.0%
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IV. Merit Criteria

In the space below, describe how the project will meet the merit criteria, and the associated objectives as found in [Section F](#) of the FYs 2024 through 2026 NSFLTP NOFO. Where appropriate, reference attachments or other sections of the application.

Criterion #1: Statutory Selection Criteria § 1123(f)(1)-(3) of the FAST Act and in support of Addressing Core Infrastructure, Economic Competitiveness and Reinvesting in the American Family

Project Overview



Corridor	NC 24/27
Length	Approximately 8.25 miles
Existing Facility	Two-lane rural highway
Proposed Facility	Four-lane divided highway
Median	Approx. 46-ft depressed grass median
Design Speed	60 mph
Access Control	Partial control of access
County	Montgomery County, NC

The UWHARRIE project will modernize approximately 8.25 miles of NC 24/27 in Montgomery County, North Carolina, between NC 73 and the Troy Bypass. The project will reconstruct the existing two-lane highway as a four-lane divided facility featuring a 46-foot depressed median, 10-foot paved shoulders, use of unsignalized reduced conflict intersection treatments, improved access management, replacement of the Norfolk Southern Railway bridge crossing, wildlife connectivity enhancements, and improvements to recreational access associated with Uwharrie National Forest. Together with the Troy Bypass (R-0623/U-0623), the project will create a higher-capacity regional transportation corridor that improves mobility, safety, freight efficiency, and economic competitiveness across central North Carolina. Transportation studies identified existing and future deficiencies related to capacity, safety, and operational performance along the corridor. Existing traffic volumes range from approximately 12,200 to 13,000 vehicles per day and are projected to increase substantially to 20,500 by the year 2035. Without improvement, congestion, travel delays, and reliability concerns are expected to worsen, with future Level of Service (LOS) expected to operate at LOS F. The proposed improvements address these deficiencies while supporting long-term economic growth, recreational access, and environmental stewardship.

A. Improving State of Good Repair and Advancing Safety Rehabilitating a Critical Transportation Asset

The UWHARRIE project represents a significant investment in the state of good repair of a transportation corridor that serves regional, statewide, and national transportation functions. NC 24/27 currently operates as a rural, two-lane highway despite carrying traffic volumes that increasingly exceed the practical operating comfort levels associated with similar facilities. Existing transportation deficiencies have been documented through NCDOT planning and environmental studies, which concluded that mobility, congestion, and safety conditions would continue to deteriorate without substantial improvements.

The project will replace aging infrastructure with a modern divided highway facility designed to serve projected traffic demands through at least the 2045 planning horizon. Capacity improvements, roadway reconstruction, upgraded drainage systems, replacement of the railroad crossing structure, and implementation of modern design standards collectively restore the corridor's long-term functionality and improve transportation system resilience.

Safe System Approach

The UWHARRIE project strongly applies the U.S. Department of Transportation's Safe System Approach by recognizing that roadway users will make mistakes and by designing infrastructure that minimizes the likelihood that those mistakes result in serious injury or fatal crashes. According to NCDOT's Statewide Fatal and Serious Injury Crash Database, the project corridor experienced three (3) fatal crashes and five (5) serious injury crashes during the most recent five-year period, demonstrating a clear need for safety improvements.

The project incorporates numerous proven safety countermeasures, including:

- Physical separation of opposing traffic streams.
- Access management treatments.
- Wider shoulders.
- Improved recovery zones.
- Modern roadway geometry.
- Improved railroad infrastructure.
- Enhanced sight distance and operational predictability.
- Corridor-wide reduction of conflict points.

These design elements reduce crash exposure while creating a roadway environment that is more forgiving of driver error.

Median Separation and Head-On Crash Reduction

One of the most significant safety improvements associated with the project is the conversion of the existing undivided two-lane highway into a divided four-lane facility with a 46-foot depressed grass median. Numerous national safety studies have demonstrated that median-separated highways substantially reduce severe crashes by eliminating opportunities for head-on collisions and crossover events.

Currently, motorists traveling along NC 24/27 share opposing traffic lanes with mostly no separation. The proposed divided highway design removes this risk by creating a substantial physical separation between travel directions, dramatically reducing the potential for some of the most severe crash types.

Shoulder Improvements and Roadside Safety

The addition of 10-foot paved shoulders represents a major advancement in corridor safety. On the existing facility, roadside recovery opportunities are limited, increasing crash severity when vehicles leave the travel lane.

Wider shoulders provide:

- Recovery areas for errant vehicles.
- Space for emergency maneuvers.
- Accommodation for disabled vehicles.
- Improved access for emergency responders.
- Reduced secondary crash risk.

These improvements contribute directly to reductions in fatal and serious-injury crash potential.

Access Management and Conflict Reduction

The project incorporates partial control of access to improve safety and traffic operations. Access management is a proven safety strategy that reduces crash exposure by limiting unnecessary driveways, closely spaced intersections, and turning conflicts.

By reducing the number of conflict points, the project:

- Improves traffic flow.
- Reduces turning-related crashes.
- Improvement of drivers' expectancy.
- Increase travel reliability.
- Enhances freight operations.

These improvements are particularly important in a corridor expected to experience continued traffic growth over the next several decades.

Railroad Crossing Safety Improvements



The project includes replacement of the Norfolk Southern Railway crossing over NC 24/27, as the current structure can only accommodate the existing two-lane roadway and is currently less than minimum required height of 16'-6" and desirable clearance of 17'-0" versus the existing 14'-1" vertical clearance. This improvement modernizes a key infrastructure component while reducing long-term maintenance needs and improving operational reliability.

The rail crossing serves freight movements for Norfolk Southern and Aberdeen Carolina & Western Railway operations. Modernizing this structure improves both highway and rail reliability while reducing future infrastructure-related safety risks.

Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction

Wildlife collisions have been documented as a significant safety concern within the corridor.

NCDOT identified 122 wildlife-vehicle collisions occurring within the project limits between January 1, 2000, and March 31, 2023, including crashes resulting in injuries and substantial property damage.

Planned wildlife accommodations and proposed fencing improvements represent a targeted safety investment consistent with the National Roadway Safety Strategy. Wildlife fencing and crossing enhancements reduce opportunities for large-animal roadway conflicts, protecting both motorists and wildlife while reducing economic losses associated with vehicle damage, emergency response, and traffic disruption.

This component demonstrates how the project combines transportation modernization with innovative safety practices that address locally significant crash risks. Much of the corridor traverses environmentally sensitive areas adjacent to Uwharrie National Forest where wildlife movement is common. The project seeks to address these concerns while maintaining ecological connectivity.

Flood Resiliency and Monitoring Technology

As part of the UWHARRIE project, NCDOT will enhance corridor resiliency and traveler safety through the installation of a flood monitoring gauge at the NC 24/27 crossing of Lick Fork Creek. This location is particularly critical because roadway overtopping occurs during approximately the 25-year storm event, creating potential safety hazards and travel disruptions during significant rainfall events. The flood monitoring gauge will be integrated into NCDOT's Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network (FIMAN) system, allowing real-time monitoring of water levels and flooding conditions along the corridor. By providing timely and reliable data, the system will support improved situational awareness for transportation operators, emergency responders, and the traveling public. The deployment of this technology will enable NCDOT to monitor flood conditions more effectively, provide advance warning of hazardous roadway conditions, and implement proactive traffic management measures when necessary. Integration with the statewide FIMAN network also strengthens NCDOT's ability to respond to extreme weather events, minimize roadway closures, and improve overall transportation system resilience.

B. Improving Critical Infrastructure and Access to Significant Resources and Destinations

NC 24/27 functions as a major east-west Regional Mobility Corridor and the route supports the movement of people, freight, agricultural products, forest products, and recreational travelers across central North Carolina.

The corridor serves multiple transportation functions including:

- Regional freight movement.
- Rural mobility.
- Emergency response.
- Military and strategic connectivity.
- Tourism access.
- Recreation-oriented travel.
- Daily commuter traffic.

Failure to modernize this corridor would constrain transportation system performance and limit future economic development opportunities throughout the region.

Trailhead Parking Lot Improvements



As part of the UWHARRIE project, NCDOT, in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service, has committed to expanding the existing NC 24/27 Trailhead Parking Lot located east of River Road near Uwharrie National Forest. The parking lot expansion is intended to improve public access to the Uwharrie Recreational Walking Trail and surrounding recreational resources. Construction of the expanded parking facility requires a limited realignment of a portion

of the Uwharrie Recreational Walking Trail; however, NCDOT determined that impacts to the trail

will be minimal and will not adversely affect the recreational, cultural, or environmental attributes protected under Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act.

Multimodal Benefits

Although principally a highway project, the project includes improvements that benefit multiple transportation modes which include:

- Enhanced trailhead access.
- Recreational connectivity improvements.
- Safer crossings for users accessing Uwharrie National Forest.
- Improved access to tourism destinations.
- Improved rail infrastructure.

The project therefore supports multimodal transportation objectives while preserving important recreational and environmental resources.

C. Corridor Need and Transportation Performance

The UWHARRIE project addresses documented capacity deficiencies and increasing transportation demand on a corridor that currently operates as a two-lane rural highway.

Key transportation benefits include:

- Increased corridor capacity through widening to a four-lane divided facility.
- Improved travel-time reliability for passengers and freight traffic.
- Reduced congestion and operational bottlenecks.
- Improved level of service through the planning horizon.
- Enhanced freight efficiency and network performance.
- Improved emergency response reliability.
- Creation of a continuous high-capacity corridor from Albemarle to Troy.

Together, these improvements enhance the mobility and connectivity functions of the NC 24/27 corridor.

D. Supporting Economic Competitiveness and Rural Economic Revitalization Through UWHARRIE

The UWHARRIE project is a transformative, multi-benefit infrastructure investment that strengthens economic competitiveness by improving access to jobs, markets, freight networks, natural resources, and tourism destinations throughout central North Carolina. The corridor supports key regional industries, including agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, commercial development, and outdoor recreation, while serving as a critical east-west transportation route connecting rural communities with regional and statewide markets. By widening NC 24/27 and improving travel reliability, freight mobility, and corridor efficiency, the project will reduce transportation costs, enhance supply-chain performance, improve workforce access, and increase the attractiveness of the region for future business investment and economic development.

In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, the project includes trailhead parking improvements, enhanced access for recreation, emergency response, and forest management activities, and wildlife connectivity enhancements that support both transportation and conservation objectives.

Tourism and outdoor recreation represent particularly important economic drivers for the region. Uwharrie National Forest attracts approximately two million visitors annually and supports local lodging establishments, restaurants, retail businesses, recreational outfitters, campgrounds, and tourism-related employment. Improvements to the NC 24/27 corridor, including expansion of trailhead parking facilities and enhanced access to recreational resources, will strengthen the visitor experience, support continued growth in outdoor recreation tourism, and generate long-term economic benefits for surrounding communities.

By integrating transportation infrastructure with natural-resource assets and recreational destinations, The Uwharrie project provides a model for how strategic transportation investments can strengthen rural economies, improve quality of life, support environmental stewardship, and create sustainable economic opportunity at the local, regional, and statewide levels.

E. Reinvesting in American Families

The UWHARRIE project improves quality of life for residents and visitors by providing safer, more reliable, and more efficient access to employment, healthcare, education, recreation, and essential services.

The project will:

- Improve access to Uwharrie National Forest and its outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Improve roadway safety.
- Reduce travel time and delays.
- Increase travel reliability.
- Enhance emergency response capabilities.
- Support economic opportunities in rural communities.

By strengthening transportation access and reducing mobility barriers, the project directly benefits families, workers, businesses, and visitors throughout the region.

F. Environmental Stewardship and Sustainable Access

The project demonstrates a strong commitment to environmental stewardship through extensive coordination with the U.S. Forest Service and resource agencies during project development.

Project commitments include:

- Protecting environmental resources adjacent to Uwharrie National Forest.
- Maintaining recreational access.
- Minimizing habitat fragmentation.
- Supporting wildlife movement and ecological connectivity.
- Preserving water-resource functions and aquatic habitat.

The project's wildlife connectivity improvements represent a particularly innovative feature by integrating transportation safety objectives with ecosystem conservation goals. Wildlife accommodations and crossing enhancements will help reduce wildlife mortality while improving habitat connectivity and reduced wildlife collisions across the corridor.

Additionally, expansion of the NC 24/27 Trailhead Parking Area improves public access while preserving the long-term functionality and value of recreational assets.

Criterion #2: Statutory Selection Criteria § 1123(f)(6) of the FAST Act and in support of Innovation

A. Innovative Multi-Benefit Infrastructure Design



Badin Lake with popular walking trails

The project transforms a traditional highway widening project into a multi-benefit transportation investment that simultaneously advances mobility, safety, environmental stewardship, wildlife connectivity, recreation access, and infrastructure resilience. While the project widens approximately 8.25 miles of NC 24/27 from a two-lane roadway to a four-lane divided facility, its most innovative component is the integration of transportation and ecological objectives through the UWHARRIE project, which will include important wildlife connectivity across the corridor.

As part of project development, NCDOT evaluated alternatives to conventional drainage culvert infrastructure such as the Rocky Creek East crossing as part of the project, including bridge-based and large culvert solutions that provide improved wildlife passage opportunities while maintaining natural stream connectivity and hydrologic function, and planned improvements for Clarks Creek culvert. This approach recognizes transportation infrastructure as an opportunity to restore ecological connectivity and improve safety rather than merely minimizing environmental impacts. The project supports wildlife movement, reduces habitat fragmentation, preserves aquatic resources, and creates a model for future transportation investments in environmentally sensitive landscapes. The Uwharrie project also applies a data-driven approach to infrastructure design. Between January 2000 and March 2023, NCDOT documented 122 wildlife-vehicle collisions within the project corridor. This documented crash history informed the development of wildlife accommodation measures that simultaneously improve motorist safety, reduce wildlife mortality, decrease incident-related delays, and strengthen ecosystem connectivity. By addressing transportation safety and environmental objectives through a single investment, the project maximizes public benefits while advancing the principles of the Safe System Approach.

B. Innovative Context-Sensitive Design and Federal Land Coordination

The UWHARRIE project demonstrates innovation through extensive collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service and other resource agencies. Because the corridor traverses and serves lands associated with the Uwharrie National Forest, NCDOT developed design solutions that balance transportation performance with recreational access, environmental stewardship, forest management, emergency response, and public land access.

Project commitments developed in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service include:

- Preservation and realignment of the Uwharrie Recreational Walking Trail.
- Construction of an improved driveway and parking area at the USFS Wood Run Trailhead.
- Paving of existing Forest Service access roads currently used for fire management, emergency response operations, and timber management activities.
- Enhanced access to recreational, forestry, and emergency-management facilities located within the National Forest.

These improvements extend the value of the transportation investment beyond roadway operations by supporting federal land management objectives, improving access to recreational resources, strengthening emergency response capabilities, and supporting sustainable forest management activities.

C. Innovative Project Development and Delivery

The project reflects NCDOT's commitment to innovation through proactive project management, value engineering, and interagency coordination.

In 2022, the project underwent a formal **Value Assessment (VA)** process to identify opportunities to reduce project costs, improve constructability, and maximize the return on public investment without compromising project performance or safety. The assessment resulted in seven recommendations that were incorporated into project development. These recommendations included refining the alignment of roadway segments to improve efficiency, modifying parking lot designs to reduce construction costs, consolidating cross-drainage structures and utilizing roadside ditches where feasible, optimizing embankment designs through steeper fill slopes, replacing trenchless steel pipe installations with more cost-effective open-cut concrete pipe construction where appropriate, utilizing fillet weld connections in bridge girder fabrication to simplify construction and reduce fabrication costs, and implementing off-site detours in lieu of on-site temporary traffic control measures where practical. Collectively, these recommendations improved project value by reducing

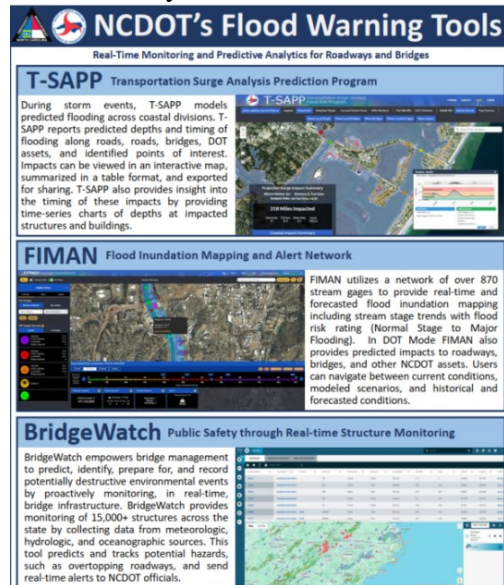
construction complexity, lowering costs, enhancing constructability, and maintaining the project's transportation, safety, and environmental objectives.

The project also benefits from NCDOT's collaborative environmental review and permitting processes. Through North Carolina's NEPA/Section 404 coordination framework, transportation agencies, environmental resource agencies, and project stakeholders work collaboratively to resolve issues early in project development. This process promotes informed decision-making, reduces permitting risks, and supports efficient project delivery.

To ensure accountability and implementation of project commitments, NCDOT utilizes a project commitment tracking system that monitors environmental, design, and construction commitments throughout project delivery and operation. This integrated project management approach improves transparency, reduces implementation risk, and helps ensure project objectives are achieved throughout all phases of delivery.

D. Innovative Technology, Materials, and Infrastructure Resilience

Project incorporates innovative approaches that support long-term infrastructure performance, sustainability, and resilience.



NCDOT will evaluate the use of recycled materials and innovative bridge construction techniques with the goal of reducing lifecycle costs, improving durability, and enhancing long-term system performance. The Department has demonstrated leadership in deploying advanced infrastructure technologies through previous Accelerated Innovation Deployment (AID) initiatives, including the use of glass fiber reinforced polymer bridge deck systems that offer corrosion resistance, reduced maintenance requirements, and opportunities for embedded structural health monitoring.

The project also leverages advanced hydraulic and flood-management practices and will add a flood gauge on the corridor at Lick Ford Creek with cost of \$50,000. The Department has invested considerable time and funds into the Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network (FIMAN)

and BridgeWatch. These resources help NCDOT better understand the roadway conditions and better inform and communicate extreme rain and flooding events to the public and local community.

FIMAN, a web-based tool, provides NCDOT officials and emergency management stakeholders with real-time and forecasted flood inundation depths along roads, bridges, and other NCDOT assets. FIMAN pulls from various datasets to provide visualization and metrics for roadway inundation, bridge hydraulic performance, and identification of potentially impacted NCDOT assets.

BridgeWatch is also an online application service that allows NCDOT to proactively monitor floor levels and rainfall conditions conducive to flooding at valuable bridges and culverts. These internal tools, in combination with DriveNC.gov, allow DOT staff to send customized electronic alerts via cell phones, emails, application dashboards, etc. when roadways and bridges are experiencing dangerous or critical conditions.

In combination with the improved ability to communicate flooding conditions and hazards to residents in real time, these technologies also improve NCDOT's system resilience and advanced disaster preparedness. Collectively, these efforts demonstrate a commitment to modern infrastructure

management practices that improve asset performance while supporting long-term resiliency objectives.

E. Innovative Financing and Resource Leveraging

North Carolina faces significant transportation funding challenges associated with maintaining one of the largest state-maintained highway systems in the nation while simultaneously responding to infrastructure recovery needs resulting from major natural disasters, including Hurricane Helene. To address these challenges, NCDOT has successfully utilized innovative financing strategies to accelerate transportation investment and leverage available resources. BUILD NC Bonds were used for the ROW portion of the project. BUILD NC, which became effective Jan. 1, 2019, is a financing tool that will ensure the N.C. Department of Transportation can continue strong delivery of critical road projects at the regional and division tiers that do not qualify for a similar federal funding tool. Those projects will benefit residents across North Carolina by providing the infrastructure to better access jobs, health care facilities and educational opportunities.

<https://www.ncdot.gov/about-us/how-we-operate/finance-budget/Pages/build-nc.aspx>

Project similarly reflects NCDOT's broader commitment to maximizing the value of transportation investments by integrating multiple funding opportunities, environmental objectives, safety improvements, federal land coordination, and infrastructure modernization within a single project. This multi-benefit strategy demonstrates how transportation agencies can leverage limited resources to achieve mobility, safety, economic, recreational, and environmental outcomes simultaneously.

F. Every Day Counts (EDC) Implementation

The UWHARRIE project incorporates several Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Every Day Counts (EDC) initiatives that enhance project delivery, improve safety, reduce utility conflicts, and minimize construction impacts. These innovations demonstrate the project's commitment to implementing proven practices that accelerate transportation improvements while maximizing public benefit.

- **EDC-1: Flexibilities in Utility Accommodation and Relocation**

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) utilizes Utility Agreements on the majority of its transportation projects including R-2527, to establish clear expectations and responsibilities for utility owners throughout project development and construction. Through proactive coordination and formal agreements, utility relocations are scheduled and managed to minimize project delays and construction conflicts. Particular emphasis is placed on ensuring that “dry” utilities, such as electric power and telecommunications facilities, are relocated prior to construction activities. This process improves schedule reliability, reduces contractor disruptions, and supports efficient project delivery.

- **EDC-2: Intersection and Interchange Geometrics**

The UWHARRIE project incorporates Reduced Conflict Intersections (RCIs) to improve operational efficiency and roadway safety along the corridor. By reducing direct left-turn and crossing movements, these innovative intersection designs significantly decrease the potential for severe angle crashes while maintaining traffic mobility. The use of RCUTs aligns with FHWA's EDC initiative promoting proven geometric design solutions that enhance safety and improve traffic operations on high-volume corridors.

- **EDC-5: Reducing Rural Roadway Departures (FoRRRwD)**

Consistent with FHWA's Focus on Reducing Rural Roadway Departures (FoRRRwD) initiative, the Uwharrie project modernizes this section of NC 24/27 through the incorporation of wider paved shoulders, improved roadside recovery areas, and enhanced corridor design features. These improvements provide motorists with additional maneuvering space and clearer recovery zones,

reducing the likelihood and severity of roadway departure crashes. The project's safety-focused design supports long-term reductions in rural crash rates while improving overall travel reliability.

- **EDC-8: Subsurface Utility Engineering (SUE)**

NCDOT routinely applies Subsurface Utility Engineering (SUE) practices on major transportation projects such as R-2527, to identify and accurately locate existing underground utilities that could be affected by construction activities. By collecting utility information early in project development, SUE reduces uncertainty, minimizes utility conflicts, lowers the risk of construction delays, and supports more efficient design and construction processes. The implementation of SUE on R-2527 exemplifies the project's commitment to risk reduction and effective project management.

Criterion #3: Statutory Selection Criteria § 1123(f)(4), (5) and (7)-(9) of the FAST Act

A. Non-NSFLTP Funding Participation Project demonstrates a strong commitment of non-NSFLTP funding through substantial investments by NCDOT in planning, environmental review, design, right-of-way acquisition, permitting, and project development. The project has advanced through multiple stages of development using State and Federal transportation resources and is an established component of North Carolina's long-range transportation investment strategy. NSFLTP funding would leverage these existing commitments and accelerate delivery of a regionally significant transportation improvement rather than replace existing funding sources.

NCDOT's continued financial participation demonstrates the State's commitment to project delivery and provides assurance that the resources necessary to complete the project will remain available. The combination of State funding utilizing the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and requested NSFLTP assistance represents a strong public investment partnership that maximizes project benefits and improves the return on Federal investment.

Funding Sources	Amount	Non-Federal Funding	Totals
NSFLTP Grant \$	\$45,000,000	\$11,250,000	\$56,250,000
NSFLTP Grant %	80%	20%	100%
STBG \$	\$77,928,608	\$19,482,152	\$97,410,760
STBG %	80%	20%	100%
Federal Total \$	\$122,928,608	\$30,732,152	\$153,660,760
Federal Total %	80%	20%	100%

B. Historic and Cultural Resource Considerations

The project has undergone NCDOT's standard environmental review in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), including evaluation of cultural, historic, and community resources. Coordination with Federal and State resource agencies was conducted throughout project development to identify and address potential impacts to historic and cultural resources.

Historic resource considerations identified through Section 106 consultation or related environmental studies have been addressed through the environmental review process. The project's environmental documentation demonstrates compliance with applicable Federal historic preservation requirements and supports advancement of the project consistent with resource protection objectives.

C. Long-Term Operations, Maintenance, and Preservation

The improved NC 24/27 corridor will remain part of the North Carolina Highway System and will continue to be owned, operated, and maintained by NCDOT. The Department manages one of the largest state-maintained transportation systems in the nation and has established asset management, maintenance, and preservation programs that provide long-term funding and institutional support for transportation infrastructure. Because North Carolina maintains substantially more roadway mileage

than many peer states, available maintenance funding is distributed across a significantly larger network on a per-centerline-mile basis. Funds are primarily generated through motor fuel taxes, vehicle registration and licensing fees, highway use taxes, and state sales tax transfers. This stable, user-funded revenue structure provides a reliable source of funding for roadway maintenance. Following construction, routine maintenance activities, including pavement preservation, bridge inspections, drainage maintenance, vegetation management, traffic operations, and roadway repairs—will be funded through NCDOT's existing maintenance and preservation programs. Because the project modernizes an existing State-owned facility, no extraordinary maintenance obligations are anticipated. Additionally, replacement of aging infrastructure, improved roadway geometry, and upgraded railroad crossing infrastructure are expected to reduce lifecycle costs and improve long-term system performance.

D. Multi-State Connectivity

Although the project is located entirely within North Carolina and does not physically span multiple states, it supports a broader regional transportation network that facilitates interstate commerce, freight movement, tourism, and economic activity throughout the Southeast.

NC 24/27 provides important connections between rural communities, regional employment centers, manufacturing and agricultural areas, and major transportation corridors. Improvements to the corridor will strengthen regional mobility and support the movement of goods and travelers that contribute to interstate economic activity.

E. Service to Federal Lands and Interagency Coordination

The project provides direct access to federally managed lands within the Uwharrie National Forest and was developed in close coordination with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The project supports both transportation objectives and federal land management priorities through a series of jointly developed commitments that enhance access, safety, recreation, and operational capabilities within the forest.

Key project commitments include:

- Expansion of the NC 24/27 Trailhead Parking Area serving Uwharrie National Forest visitors.
- Realignment and continued accommodation of the Uwharrie Recreational Walking Trail.
- Construction of an improved driveway and parking area at the USFS Wood Run Trailhead.
- Improvements to Forest Service access routes used for wildfire response, emergency management, and forestry operations.
- Paving of existing gravel access roads utilized by emergency vehicles and timber-management activities.

These improvements enhance public access to federally managed recreational resources, improve emergency response capabilities within the National Forest, and support sustainable forest management activities. Through this coordinated approach, the project delivers transportation benefits while strengthening stewardship of nationally significant public lands and recreational assets.

V. Project Readiness

In the space below, describe how the project will meet the Readiness Considerations and the associated elements as found in [Section F](#) of the FYs 2024 through 2026 NSFLTP Program NOFO. Where appropriate, reference attachments or other sections of the application.

Readiness: Technical Assessment

The NC 24/27 Improvement Project (R-2527) demonstrates a high level of technical readiness and an exceptionally low delivery risk. The project has advanced through planning, environmental review, engineering design, right-of-way acquisition, permitting, and construction preparation, positioning it for successful and timely implementation. As a long-standing priority within NCDOT's State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the project benefits from extensive technical analysis, agency coordination, and established funding commitments. Documentation supporting project readiness is in a group of attachments included in the Environmental Documentation, Permitting, Project Schedule, and Funding Commitment attachments.

A. Technical and Staffing Capacity

NCDOT possesses the technical expertise, staffing resources, and project management capabilities necessary to successfully deliver the project. The Department with an annual budget of \$5 billion dollars routinely manages large-scale federally funded transportation projects across one of the largest state-maintained highway systems in the nation and maintains experienced staff in roadway design, environmental analysis, right-of-way acquisition, permitting, construction management, utilities coordination, and transportation operations.

The project has benefited from coordinated involvement across multiple NCDOT business units, including Project Development and Environmental Analysis, Roadway Design, Hydraulics, Right-of-Way, Construction, Traffic Engineering, and Project Management. In addition, NCDOT has successfully coordinated with the Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and other resource agencies throughout project development. This institutional experience and multidisciplinary support provide confidence that the project can be delivered efficiently and in accordance with all applicable requirements.

B. Compliance with Federal Requirements

The project has undergone extensive environmental review and agency coordination and will comply with all applicable Federal requirements. Environmental studies have evaluated transportation, natural resources, cultural resources, community, recreational, and water-resource impacts associated with the proposed improvements. Required coordination has occurred with Federal and State regulatory agencies, and environmental commitments have been incorporated into project development and design.

Project has also advanced through multiple environmental permitting actions and regulatory reviews, demonstrating continued compliance with applicable Federal and State environmental requirements. Environmental documentation permitting approvals, and agency coordination efforts substantially reduce regulatory risk and support timely project implementation.

C. Commitment to Timely Project Delivery

NCDOT has demonstrated a strong commitment to timely project delivery through sustained investment in project development activities and continued advancement of the project through key milestones. The project has progressed beyond conceptual planning and has completed major development activities including environmental review, engineering design, permitting, and right-of-way coordination.

The project schedule has been developed using established NCDOT project management procedures and reflects a realistic path to completion. Early coordination with resource agencies, completion of environmental studies, and resolution of key design issues have reduced schedule uncertainty and positioned the project for efficient implementation. NCDOT's track record of delivering major transportation projects and its established project controls provide additional confidence in the Department's ability to meet proposed schedule commitments.

D. Technical Feasibility

Project is technically feasible and relies on proven transportation engineering practices routinely implemented by NCDOT throughout North Carolina. The project consists of widening approximately 8.25 miles of NC 24/27 from a two-lane roadway to a four-lane divided facility, including construction of a depressed median, shoulder widening, roadway geometric improvements, railroad crossing enhancements, drainage upgrades, and associated transportation infrastructure improvements.

Because the project is located within an established transportation corridor and utilizes conventional roadway design and construction methods, technical risks are limited and well understood. Engineering analyses, environmental studies, traffic forecasts, and corridor evaluations have validated both the need for and feasibility of the proposed improvements. The project scope is clearly defined, constructible, and supported by substantial technical documentation.

In addition, the project incorporates context-sensitive design solutions developed in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service and environmental resource agencies, ensuring that transportation improvements can be implemented while maintaining access to recreational resources and protecting environmental assets within the Uwharrie National Forest area.

Readiness: Financial Completeness Assessment

The NC 24/27 Improvement Project (R-2527) demonstrates strong financial readiness and satisfies the Financial Completeness Assessment criteria identified in the FY 2024–2026 NSFLTP NOFO. The project has advanced through planning, environmental review, design, right-of-way acquisition, permitting, and construction development, resulting in a well-defined scope, mature cost estimate, and established funding strategy. NCDOT has committed significant resources to project development and has the financial management systems, oversight procedures, and long-term maintenance programs necessary to ensure successful delivery and sustained operation of the facility.

A. Reasonableness of Project Costs

The project cost estimate is based on a clearly defined scope of work that includes roadway widening, grading, drainage improvements, railroad crossing enhancements, utility coordination, right-of-way acquisition, environmental commitments, traffic control, and construction administration. Costs have been refined through multiple phases of engineering, environmental analysis, permitting, and project development, providing a high degree of confidence that the estimate accurately reflects the resources necessary to complete the project.

Because the project has progressed through extensive design development and agency review, cost assumptions have been thoroughly evaluated through NCDOT's established project management, estimating, budgeting, and procurement processes. The resulting estimate reflects a mature project scope and is considered reasonable and necessary to achieve the project's transportation, safety, and mobility objectives.

B. Management of Potential Cost Overruns

NCDOT maintains comprehensive project management and financial oversight procedures that are routinely applied to major transportation investments statewide. Potential cost risks are actively managed through ongoing schedule monitoring, cost tracking, contingency planning, and construction oversight. Should unforeseen conditions arise during delivery, including utility conflicts, market fluctuations, or construction-related issues, NCDOT has established procedures and has incorporated a 15% contingency into the project cost to evaluate available funding sources and implement appropriate cost-management strategies to maintain project delivery. The project's advanced development status—including completed environmental review, permitting activities, right-of-way coordination, and detailed engineering—substantially reduces the likelihood of significant unforeseen costs compared to projects in earlier stages of development. In addition, the

project's long-standing inclusion in NCDOT's transportation improvement program has allowed for continuous refinement of cost estimates and identification of project risks throughout development, further reducing financial uncertainty.

C. Availability of Funding

Project demonstrates a credible and well-supported funding strategy. NCDOT has already invested \$16,433,002 and substantial State resources in project planning, environmental documentation, engineering, permitting, right-of-way acquisition, and project advancement, reflecting a long-term commitment to corridor modernization. NSFLTP funding will supplement these existing investments and provide the resources necessary to complete the remaining eligible components. The combination of requested Federal assistance and committed State funding provides a reliable funding framework for project completion. Given the project's advanced stage of development and NCDOT's ongoing financial commitment, there is a high degree of confidence that all funding required to complete the project will be available as programmed following award.

D. Long-Term Operations, Maintenance, and Preservation

Upon completion, the improved NC 24/27 corridor will remain part of the North Carolina State Highway System and will be owned, operated, maintained, and preserved by NCDOT. The Department manages one of the largest state-maintained transportation systems in the nation and has established asset management, maintenance, and preservation programs supported by dedicated transportation funding sources.

Routine maintenance activities, including pavement preservation, bridge inspections, roadway repairs, drainage maintenance, vegetation management, traffic operations and safety improvements will be funded through NCDOT's existing maintenance and preservation programs. Because the project upgrades an existing State-owned facility using modern design standards and replaces aging infrastructure elements, no extraordinary long-term maintenance obligations are anticipated. Future operation and preservation costs will therefore be supported through existing State transportation funding mechanisms and incorporated into NCDOT's established asset management framework.

Readiness: Permitting Risk Assessment

Project demonstrates a low permitting and delivery risk profile due to its advanced stage of development, completed environmental review, active regulatory coordination, ongoing public engagement, and established project management framework. Environmental approvals, permitting actions, right-of-way activities, and interagency coordination have progressed substantially, positioning the project for timely implementation and reducing uncertainty associated with project delivery.

A. Permits and Regulatory Approvals

The project has completed extensive environmental review and regulatory coordination. NCDOT and the Federal Highway Administration prepared an Environmental Assessment in December of 2011 evaluating transportation, natural resources, cultural resources, recreational, and community impacts associated with the proposed corridor improvements and a Finding of No Significant Impact in April 2017. The project has subsequently obtained and maintained the major Federal and State environmental permits required for construction activities, including approvals associated with waters of the United States and water quality certifications. Recent permit renewals and modifications demonstrate continued coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality and confirm that environmental compliance activities remain current. The project's advanced permitting status substantially reduces regulatory risk and provides confidence that all remaining approvals will be maintained in accordance with the project schedule.

B. Public Engagement and Stakeholder Coordination



Public outreach and stakeholder engagement have been integral components of project development. NCDOT has conducted public involvement activities throughout planning, environmental review, design, and permitting, including outreach related to corridor improvements, recreational trail accommodations, and access modifications

associated with Uwharrie National Forest. A "Citizen Informational Meeting" was held on Sept. 7, 2004 and an additional Citizen Informational Meeting was held Nov. 18, 2010. A public hearing with design maps was held June 21, 2012 at the Stanley County Commons in Albemarle, NC. The Department has coordinated closely with local stakeholders, property owners, resource agencies, recreational users, and the U.S. Forest Service to identify concerns and incorporate appropriate mitigation measures into project design. This collaborative process resulted in commitments that preserve recreational access, improve trailhead facilities, accommodate U.S. Forest Service operational needs, and minimize impacts to environmental and community resources. Through continued engagement and coordination, potential concerns have been addressed during project development, reducing the likelihood of significant stakeholder opposition during implementation.

C. Project Delivery Risks and Mitigation

NCDOT has substantially reduced delivery risk through completion of key project milestones, including environmental review, engineering design, permitting, funding programming, and right-of-way activities. The Department has identified and actively manages risks associated with environmental compliance, utility coordination, property acquisition, and construction implementation through established project controls and oversight procedures.

Right-of-way acquisition needs were identified and completed during project development, and funding was programmed to support acquisition activities through State and Federal requirements. In addition, the project benefits from significant State investment and long-term inclusion within NCDOT's transportation improvement program, providing confidence in the availability of resources needed to maintain the project schedule.

The project utilizes proven engineering methods within an existing transportation corridor and has advanced beyond the conceptual planning stage, significantly reducing technical and implementation risks when compared to projects in earlier phases of development.

D. Known Risks and Controversies

NCDOT is not aware of any unresolved litigation, agency opposition, or significant public controversy that would materially affect project delivery. Through environmental review, agency coordination, and public involvement efforts, potential concerns have been identified and addressed through project design refinements, mitigation commitments, and ongoing stakeholder engagement. Continued coordination with Federal and State resource agencies further minimizes the likelihood of permitting or regulatory delays.

VI. DOT Priority Considerations

In the space below, describe how the project will meet the DOT priority considerations in Section F of the FYs 2024 through 2026 NSFLTP NOFO. Where appropriate, reference attachments or other sections of the application.

DOT Priority Considerations: Briefly describe below how the project responds to the following DOT priority considerations from Section F of the FYs 2024 through 2026 NSFLTP NOFO:

- *DOT may provide awards to projects that decrease roadway traffic congestion without proposing limits on roadway capacity for motor vehicles or creating artificial chokepoints for motor vehicles.*
- *DOT may provide awards to projects that show a high responsiveness to reinvesting in the American family through beautification of transportation infrastructure, improvements to the travel experience for American families, or expansion or modernization of transportation in rural communities.*

FHWA will determine responsiveness to the other DOT priority considerations based on the application readiness assessment and past awards.

Reducing Roadway Traffic Congestion Without Limiting Roadway Capacity

Project directly advances the Department's priority of reducing roadway congestion through strategic capacity expansion rather than traffic restrictions or artificial chokepoints. The project will widen approximately 8.25 miles of NC 24/27 from a two-lane rural highway to a four-lane divided facility featuring a 46-foot depressed median, 10-foot shoulders, and access management improvements designed to improve traffic flow and operational efficiency. These improvements address existing and forecast capacity deficiencies while accommodating future travel demand along a critical east-west corridor serving passenger vehicles, freight traffic, agricultural operations, emergency responders, and recreational users.

By increasing corridor capacity, improving roadway geometry, and enhancing travel-time reliability, the project reduces congestion and improves mobility without limiting motor vehicle access or reducing roadway throughput. Together with the Troy Bypass to the east and westward connection to Albemarle, the project creates a higher-capacity transportation corridor that supports regional mobility, freight movement, and economic activity throughout central North Carolina.

Reinvesting in the American Family Through Rural Transportation Improvements

Project demonstrates strong responsiveness to the Department's goal of reinvesting in American families through the modernization of critical transportation infrastructure in a rural region. The project will improve safety, reliability, and accessibility for residents who depend on NC 24/27 for daily access to employment, healthcare, education, commercial services, and community resources. By reducing travel delays and improving roadway performance, the project enhances quality of life and expands economic opportunity for rural communities throughout Montgomery and Stanly Counties.

The project also enhances the travel experience through improvements associated with Uwharrie National Forest, including expansion of the NC 24/27 Trailhead Parking Area and continued accommodation of the Uwharrie Recreational Walking Trail. Developed in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service, these improvements strengthen access to outdoor recreation, support tourism, and improve visitor experiences while preserving important recreational resources.

Through its combination of rural infrastructure modernization, enhanced safety, improved mobility, and expanded access to recreational and community assets, the project delivers lasting benefits to residents, businesses, and visitors while supporting the long-term vitality of rural North Carolina.