

CHUCK EDWARDS
11TH DISTRICT, NORTH CAROLINA



COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND ACCOUNTABILITY
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
& INFRASTRUCTURE
COMMITTEE ON BUDGET

WASHINGTON OFFICE
1505 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3311
(202) 225-6401

DISTRICT OFFICE
200 NORTH GROVE STREET, SUITE 121
HENDERSONVILLE, NC 28792
(828) 435-7310
FAX: (771) 200-5795

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3311

August 22, 2023

The Honorable Secretary Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I write this letter in strong support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant application entitled "*Bridge Longevity Upgrades to Enhance Resiliency, Increase Dependability, and Grow Equity (BLUE RIDGE)*" for a total of \$12.443 million in funding to rehabilitate or replace five bridge structures in Buncombe and Madison Counties.

These bridges serve as a primary access point for residents in the Appalachian Region, a historically underserved region known for poorly developed infrastructure and complicated by a susceptibility for reoccurring natural hazards, including flooding. Over the past five years, the project area has experienced over 14 flood events, causing significant corrosion and structural deficiencies in each of the five bridges. Two of the bridges are functionally obsolete and the remaining three are structurally deficient. Each structure is in critical need of rehabilitation or replacement to promote safety and mobility for travelers.

Due to limited viable detours, failure of a bridge in the project area would severely restrict the nearby communities' access to vital resources, such as employers, schools, grocery stores, and medical services, and dangerously complicate emergency responders' access to residents in need. Not all detours are viable for freight traffic and the average local travel distance is increased by 17 miles when taking a detour. NCDOT's BLUE RIDGE project would provide these at-risk populations with more reliable transportation access and increase regional resiliency.

Last year, I toured Bridge No. 100154 in Barnardsville, NC. Upon inspection of the site, it became very clear to me that the bridge routinely fails to meet the needs of the community it was built to serve. Rehabilitating or replacing each of the five bridges proposed by NCDOT is the first step in providing nearby rural community members with accessible certainty. As a statewide transportation priority, the improvements to the five structures will provide reliable connectivity and increase the resiliency of the region, while repairing the surrounding natural environments.

On behalf of Western North Carolina, thank you for your continued partnership and dedication to building strong communities. As you consider the North Carolina Department of Transportation's application, know I stand in support of their efforts. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if I may provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Chuck Edwards
Member of Congress