



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Coastal North Carolina National Wildlife Refuges Complex

P. O. Box 1969

Manteo, North Carolina 27954

(252) 473-1131

August 8, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Please accept this letter of support for the Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (**SAND**, or “the Project”) application to the USDOT’s 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for a streamlined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

SAND is requesting PROTECT funding to perform comprehensive resiliency planning, alternatives development and evaluation, and extensive public and stakeholder engagement for an 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe in Dare County, North Carolina. This stretch of NC 12 is vital to the safety, quality of life, and economy of the Outer Banks. It is a critical lifeline connecting residents, tourists, and property owners in Hatteras Island to the rest of Dare County and mainland North Carolina. Moreover, it traverses areas with substantial ecological and recreational value in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore (Seashore) and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) which provide recreational opportunities, while conserving a diverse array of habitats that support migratory waterfowl and endangered species like the loggerhead sea turtle.

Storms, ocean currents, and wave and wind action are continually and dynamically reshaping the low-lying barrier islands that NC 12 traverses. Rising sea levels, coupled with the increasing severity and frequency of coastal storms are accelerating the impacts of these forces, leading to flooding, shoreline erosion, and sand and ocean overwash that damages the roadway and causes extensive repair and cleanup costs. Since 2010, NCDOT has spent more than \$72 million to keep NC 12 south of Oregon Inlet passable following storm events. These persistent challenges disrupt the lives of residents and visitors, negatively impact the Seashore and the Refuge and lead to negative impacts on the regional economy.

To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of the NC 12 Task Force to identify the range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. The Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Robust public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, ensuring that all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. These project elements will address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center Hot Spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

The Refuge is a small barrier island at the north end of Hatteras Island which, though small in size, is very popular among wildlife and people. Established in 1938 and managed by the Service, a primary mission of the Refuge is to provide nesting, resting, and wintering habitat for migratory birds, including the greater snow geese and other migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, raptors, and neotropical migrants, as well as to provide habitat and protection for endangered and threatened species, such as loggerhead sea turtles. Another purpose of the Refuge is to provide opportunities for the public enjoyment of wildlife and wildland resources, offering visitors the opportunity to experience spectacular flocks of ducks, swans, and other waterfowl, and explore dynamic beaches and dunes.

For decades now, the Service has enjoyed a cooperative and productive relationship with NCDOT on related projects along the Refuge to provide solutions to the disruptions to NC Highway 12 on the Refuge. The Refuge feels this Project will continue to accomplish this goal in ways that not only reduce threats to vulnerable wildlife environments and allow portions of the Refuge to function as a more natural barrier island, but also retain public access and availability while ensuring the health and safety of visitors thus contributing to the purpose and mission of the Refuge itself.

SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Sincerely,



Rebekah Martin  
Project Leader, Coastal North Carolina  
National Wildlife Refuge Complex



North Carolina  
Coastal Federation  
*Working Together for a Healthy Coast*

August 4, 2023

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

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To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500

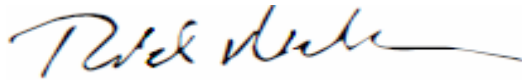


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The North Carolina Coastal Federation has worked since 1982 to protect and restore our coast. This project will significantly advance our mission by helping to address the long-term resiliency challenge Highway 12 poses to the communities and environment along our Outer Banks. We look forward to actively working to help the project succeed in its goals and objectives.

SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Todd Miller", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Todd Miller  
Executive Director



## County of Dare

### Office of the Board of Commissioners

P.O. Box 1000 | Manteo, North Carolina 27954 | 252.475.5700

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**Robert Woodard**  
Chairman

**Wally Overman**  
Vice Chairman

**Rob Ross**  
**Steve House**  
**Jim Tobin**

**Danny Couch**  
**Ervin Bateman**

**Robert L. Outten**  
County Manager / Attorney

**Skyler Foley**  
Clerk to the Board

August 7th, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

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For many years, various sections of N.C. Highway 12 on Hatteras Island have closed due to coastal storms and flooding, creating severe disruptions to the life, health, safety, and welfare of the residents and visitors to Hatteras Island recognizing the need to address the impacts associated with this vulnerable stretch of highway, Dare County officials created the N.C. 12 Task Force in 2020 – with stakeholders from multiple agencies – to formally begin the process to identify viable solutions for N.C. Highway 12. In February 2023, the Task Force released their report listing the most critical areas of concern. The 11-mile section that would be addressed in this study was identified as the top priority.

SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

The funding of this SAND grant application will build upon the work of the NC 12 Task Force and provide the road map for moving forward. The Dare County Board of Commissioners strongly recommends and supports the funding of the Solving Access for N.C. 12 in Dare County (SAND) grant application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert L. Woodard, Sr.", written in a cursive style.

Robert L. Woodard, Sr.

Chairman, Dare County Board of Commissioners



July 28, 2023

CAMDEN

CHOWAN

CURRITUCK

DARE

GATES

HYDE

PASQUOTANK

PERQUIMANS

TYRRELL

WASHINGTON

COLUMBIA

CRESWELL

DUCK

EDENTON

ELIZABETH CITY

GATESVILLE

HERTFORD

KILL DEVIL HILLS

KITTY HAWK

MANTEO

NAGS HEAD

PLYMOUTH

ROPER

SOUTHERN SHORES

WINFALL

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The ARPO works in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Transportation assisting the counties of; Currituck, Camden, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Gates, Chowan, Washington, Tyrrell, Hyde and Dare with regional and locally based short-range and long-range transportation planning.

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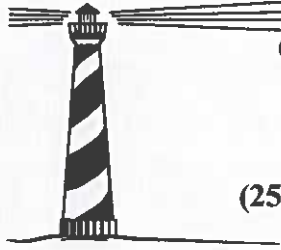
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Sincerely,

Angela M. Welsh  
Planning Director





**CAPE HATTERAS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**  
P.O. Box 9  
47109 Light Plant Road  
Buxton, North Carolina 27920-0009  
(252) 995-5616 (800) 454-5616 FAX (252) 995-4088

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

August 1, 2023

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

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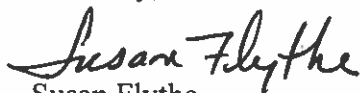
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Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative (CHEC) is a member-owned, not-for-profit distribution cooperative that delivers electricity to more than 7,900 meters on Hatteras Island. CHEC's electric system is unusual among electric cooperatives in having a considerable portion of its total dollar investment in transmission facilities, which are costlier to construct and maintain than distribution facilities. CHEC has \$27.1 million invested in transmission facilities, with a critical portion of these 115kV transmission lines running adjacent to the 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe. Continued erosion of the shoreline threatens our infrastructure and the cooperative's mission of delivering reliable and affordable electric service to Hatteras Island. This comprehensive resiliency planning is a critical step not only for securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks, but critical for CHEC's ability to deliver reliable and affordable electricity in the future.

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Sincerely,



Susan Flythe

General Manager & EVP

Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative



COLLEGE OF THE  
ALBEMARLE

Transform Your Tomorrow

August 4, 2023

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

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CAMDEN • CHOWAN • CURRITUCK • DARE • GATES • PASQUOTANK • PERQUIMANS

**COA - Currituck**  
107 College Way  
Barco, NC 27917  
252-453-3035

**COA - Dare**  
205 S Business Highway 64/264  
Manteo, NC 27954  
252-473-2264

**COA - Edenton-Chowan**  
118 Blades Street  
Edenton, NC 27932  
252-482-7900

**COA - Elizabeth City**  
1208 N Road Street  
Elizabeth City, NC 27909  
252-335-0821



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As the President of College of The Albemarle, I urge you to give due consideration to the SAND grant application and provide the necessary support through the PROTECT program. Access to reliable roads and transportation infrastructure is of paramount importance for our students and communities, and by collaboratively supporting transformative initiatives like SAND, we can not only enhance resiliency and safety but also foster sustainable growth and preserve the ecological and cultural heritage that enriches our region for generations to come.

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Sincerely,

Jack N. Bagwell, Ph.D.  
President

July 28, 2023

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Secretary of Transportation  
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### **Integrated Coastal Programs**

Office of the Dean  
850 NC-345  
Wanchese, NC 27981

**252-475-5428** office  
**252-475-3545** fax

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**Main Campus**  
**Department of Coastal Studies**  
Flanagan Building, Suite 250  
Mail Stop 169  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, NC 27858-4353  
252-328-6220 office  
252-328-4265 fax

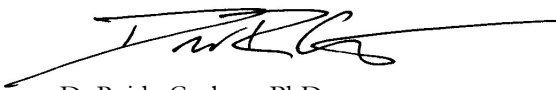
**Outer Banks Campus**  
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850 NC-345  
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252-475-3545 fax

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Our programs, Integrated Coastal Programs and the Coastal Studies Institute, have long-standing research, extension and outreach contributions that benefit individual and the broader Outer Banks. The Coastal Studies Institute (CSI) is located at the ECU Outer Banks Campus on Roanoke Island in Wanchese, NC. CSI is a multi-institutional partnership administered by East Carolina University in collaboration with UNC Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University, UNC Wilmington and Elizabeth City State University. The mission of CSI is to undertake research, offer educational opportunities, provide community outreach and enhance communication about the history, culture and environment of northeastern North Carolina's maritime counties. ECU's Integrated Coastal Programs (ICP) unit provides administrative oversight for CSI and leads the ECU coastal enterprise to advance the understanding of the complex coupled human-natural systems that affect coastal environments and the resilience of communities located within the coastal region. Northeastern NC provides a rich laboratory to investigate these systems and the interactions between human (individual and community) activities and the coastal environment. ICP provides the resulting information to the region for the development of effective public policy and for the education and benefit of its citizens. Our program's mission includes providing relevant scientific research to inform decision making in coastal regions of North Carolina and beyond. Of significant relevance to this proposal, our focus on coastal processes and changes related to climate and sea level.

SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Sincerely,



D. Reide Corbett, PhD  
Dean & Executive Director  
Integrated Coastal Programs  
Coastal Studies Institute



July 31, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND, or “the Project”)** application to the USDOT’s 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for a streamlined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

SAND is requesting PROTECT funding to perform comprehensive resiliency planning, alternatives development and evaluation, and extensive public and stakeholder engagement for an 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe in Dare County, North Carolina. This stretch of NC 12 is vital to the safety, quality of life, and economy of the Outer Banks. It is a critical lifeline connecting residents, tourists, and property owners in Hatteras Island to the rest of Dare County and mainland North Carolina. Moreover, it traverses areas with substantial ecological and recreational value in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, which provide recreational opportunities, while conserving a diverse array of habitats that support migratory waterfowl and endangered species like the loggerhead sea turtle.

Storms, ocean currents, and wave and wind action are continually and dynamically reshaping the low-lying barrier islands that NC 12 traverses. Rising sea levels, coupled with the increasing severity and frequency of coastal storms, are accelerating the impacts of these forces, leading to flooding, shoreline erosion, and sand and ocean overwash that damages the roadway and causes extensive repair and cleanup costs. Since 2010, NCDOT has spent more than \$72 million to keep NC 12 south of Oregon Inlet passable following storm events. These persistent challenges disrupt the lives of residents and visitors, negatively impact the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Pea Island Wildlife Refuge, and lead to negative impacts on the regional economy.

To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of the State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of

the NC 12 Task Force to identify the range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. The Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Robust public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, ensuring that all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. These project elements will address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center Hot Spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

We at the Rural Center work to develop, promote, and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life of rural North Carolinians. We serve the state's 78 rural counties with a special emphasis on individuals with low to moderate incomes and communities with limited resources. From our work over 30 years, the Rural Center has come to understand the opportunities and challenges faced by our rural counties and residents. We believe that the SAND application will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link in NC12.

I applaud the NCDOT and their partner's commitment to serving rural North Carolina and ask you to give their application your strongest consideration.

Sincerely,



Patrick Woodie

President, NC Rural Center





850 Main Campus Drive, Suite 105 | Raleigh, NC 27695

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August 14, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND, or “the Project”)** application to the USDOT’s 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for a streamlined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

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Mailing address: NC State University | Box 8605 | Raleigh, NC 27695

Telephone: 919-515-2454 | Fax: 919-515-7095

[ncseagrant.org](http://ncseagrant.org)



850 Main Campus Drive, Suite 105 | Raleigh, NC 27695

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National Seashore and the Pea Island Wildlife Refuge, and lead to negative impacts on the regional economy.

To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of the NC 12 Task Force to identify the range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. The Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Robust public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, ensuring that all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. These project elements will address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center Hot Spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

NC Sea Grant is supportive of this project, as it proposes to build partnerships and prioritize stakeholder engagement as we continue working to build more resilient coastal communities and ecosystems in our state. NC Sea Grant provides research, education, and outreach opportunities related to current issues affecting the NC coastal and its communities. This project proposal is very timely as coastal communities in NC are facing many challenges in protecting coastal resources and ecosystems from the continued impacts of climate change. Further, many of our communities facing the greatest risks from climate change often have the least resources to address these challenges. We are pleased to see the investment and interest in building resilience in coastal NC, and in the Outer Banks region specifically, which is vital to the economic, environmental and cultural fabric of coastal NC.

SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Mailing address: NC State University | Box 8605 | Raleigh, NC 27695  
Telephone: 919-515-2454 | Fax: 919-515-7095  
[ncseagrant.org](http://ncseagrant.org)



850 Main Campus Drive, Suite 105 | Raleigh, NC 27695

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah Spiegler".

Sarah Spiegler, NCSG Coastal Resilience Specialist  
sespiegl@ncsu.edu

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cayla Cothron".

Cayla Cothron, NCSG Coastal Planning Specialist  
cdcothro@ncsu.edu

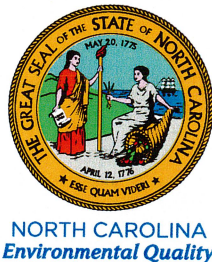
A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank Lopez".

Frank Lopez, NCSG Extension Director  
fmlopez@ncsu.edu

ROY COOPER  
Governor

ELIZABETH S. BISER  
Secretary

BRAXTON DAVIS  
Director



August 7, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

Please accept this letter of support from the N.C. Division of Coastal Management (NCDQM) for the application submitted by the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) for the 2023 PROTECT Grant program. Through a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, the grant application is seeking funding for the Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND) project to perform comprehensive resiliency planning, alternatives development and evaluation, and extensive public and stakeholder engagement for an 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

NC 12 is the only road that provides access to and from the northern beaches of the Outer Banks to the southern beaches of the Outer Banks. It is located on a narrow, low-lying barrier island with the Atlantic Ocean immediately to the east, and the Pamlico Sound immediately to the west. When NC 12 is closed due to the impacts of flooding, shoreline erosion, and overwash caused by storms, ocean currents and wave and wind actions, residents and visitors can be isolated without basic services on Hatteras Island and Ocracoke Island for extended periods of time.

NCDQM is a Division of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality. Our role is to protect, conserve and manage North Carolina's coastal resources through an integrated program of planning, permitting, education and research. NCDQM has been actively engaged with NCDOT and numerous other stakeholders for many years to develop and implement transportation projects throughout the 20 N.C. coastal counties that meet transportation needs, protect and enhance the natural and human environment, and deliver projects on time and within a realistic budget. A PROTECT grant, if awarded, will provide the resources needed to undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 while also avoiding and minimizing negative impacts to the extraordinary human and natural resources of the Outer Banks.

NCDOT has demonstrated its strong commitment over many years to making surface transportation more resilient to natural hazards, including climate change, sea level rise, flooding, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters through its programs and personnel.



NCDCM looks forward to continuing our productive partnerships with NCDOT, the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and diverse stakeholders to implement the PROTECT grant, if awarded. The right people and processes are established and in place, and the funding, if received, will be utilized effectively and efficiently. NCDCM strongly endorses NCDOT's grant application.

Very Respectfully,



Braxton Davis, Director  
N.C. Division of Coastal Management





Roy Cooper  
Governor

D. Reid Wilson  
Secretary, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

Will Summer  
Division of Land and Water Stewardship  
Executive Director, NC Land and Water Fund

August 9, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND, or “the Project”) application to the USDOT’s 2023 PROTECT Grant program will help support the mission of North Carolina’s Natural Heritage Program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for a streamlined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

SAND is requesting PROTECT funding to perform comprehensive resiliency planning, alternatives development and evaluation, and extensive public and stakeholder engagement for an 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe in Dare County, North Carolina. This stretch of NC 12 traverses areas with substantial ecological and recreational value in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, which provide recreational opportunities, while conserving a diverse array of habitats that support migratory waterfowl and endangered species.

North Carolina’s Natural Heritage Program maintains an inventory of biodiversity and maps of nature preserves throughout the state. Natural Heritage records indicate this area is of exceptional significance for Green Sea Turtle (US and NC Threatened), Salt-meadow Grass (NC Endangered), Little-spike Spikerush (NC Threatened), Winged Seedbox (NC Rare), Southern Sundrops (NC Rare), Slender Sea-purslane (NC Endangered), and Moundlily Yucca (NC Rare), as well as the Maritime Dry Grassland natural community. Many additional rare species and high quality natural communities are also found in this area. In addition, a large number of public land conservation organizations contribute to land and restoration efforts in close proximity to NC 12 in this area, including NC Department of Transportation Mitigation Sites, Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and Pea Island NWR Registered Heritage Area, NC Mountains-to-Sea Trail, and USFWS Critical Habitat for Piping Plover.

Storms, ocean currents, and wave and wind action are continually and dynamically reshaping the low-lying barrier islands near NC 12. Rising sea levels, coupled with the increasing severity and frequency of coastal storms are accelerating the impacts of these forces, leading to flooding, shoreline erosion, and sand and ocean overwash that damages the roadway and causes extensive repair and cleanup costs. To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of the NC 12 Task Force to identify the range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. The Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. These project elements will address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center Hot Spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Misty Buchanan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Misty Buchanan,  
Deputy Director for Natural Heritage

August 2, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND, or “the Project”)** application to the USDOT’s 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for a streamlined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

SAND is requesting PROTECT funding to perform comprehensive resiliency planning, alternatives development and evaluation, and extensive public and stakeholder engagement for an 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe in Dare County, North Carolina. This stretch of NC 12 is vital to the safety, quality of life, and economy of the Outer Banks. It is a critical lifeline connecting residents, tourists, and property owners in Hatteras Island to the rest of Dare County and mainland North Carolina. Moreover, it traverses areas with substantial ecological and recreational value in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, which provide recreational opportunities, while conserving a diverse array of habitats that support migratory waterfowl and endangered species like the loggerhead sea turtle.

Storms, ocean currents, and wave and wind action are continually and dynamically reshaping the low-lying barrier islands that NC 12 traverses. Rising sea levels, coupled with the increasing severity and frequency of coastal storms are accelerating the impacts of these forces, leading to flooding, shoreline erosion, and sand and ocean overwash that damages the roadway and causes extensive repair and cleanup costs. Since 2010, NCDOT has spent more than \$72 million to keep NC 12 south of Oregon Inlet passable following storm events. These persistent challenges



disrupt the lives of residents and visitors, negatively impact the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Pea Island Wildlife Refuge, and lead to negative impacts on the regional economy. To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of the NC 12 Task Force to identify the range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. The Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Robust public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, ensuring that all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. These project elements will address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center Hot Spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

North Carolina State University has supported NCDOT in the long-term monitoring of beaches adjacent to the Oregon Inlet Terminal Groin since 1990. Our role has been to assess whether there are adverse impacts from the presence of the terminal groin. We also support NC DOT in coastal monitoring of the shoreline adjacent to NC 12 on Pea Island to determine the location and extent of future phases of the B-2500 project.

SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Anarde', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Katherine A. Anarde  
Assistant Professor  
North Carolina State University  
Department of Civil, Construction, and Environmental Engineering  
858-344-7530, kanarde@ncsu.edu



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## ◊ North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission ◊

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Cameron Ingram, Executive Director

August 7, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND, or “the Project”) application to the USDOT’s 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for a streamlined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

SAND is requesting PROTECT funding to perform comprehensive resiliency planning, alternatives development and evaluation, and extensive public and stakeholder engagement for an 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe in Dare County, North Carolina. This stretch of NC 12 is vital to the safety, quality of life, and economy of the Outer Banks. It is a critical lifeline connecting residents, tourists, and property owners in Hatteras Island to the rest of Dare County and mainland North Carolina. Moreover, it traverses areas with substantial ecological and recreational value in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, which provide recreational opportunities, while conserving a diverse array of habitats that support migratory waterfowl and endangered species like the loggerhead sea turtle.

Storms, ocean currents, and wave and wind action are continually and dynamically reshaping the low-lying barrier islands that NC 12 traverses. Rising sea levels, coupled with the increasing severity and frequency of coastal storms are accelerating the impacts of these forces, leading to flooding, shoreline erosion, and sand and ocean overwash that damages the roadway and causes extensive repair and cleanup costs. Since 2010, NCDOT has spent more than \$72 million to keep NC 12 south of Oregon Inlet passable following storm events. These persistent challenges disrupt the lives of residents and visitors, negatively impact the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Pea Island Wildlife Refuge, and lead to negative impacts on the regional economy.

To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of the NC 12 Task Force to identify the range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. The Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Robust public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, ensuring that all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. These project elements will address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center Hot Spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

The NC Wildlife Resources Commission (Commission) is charged by statute with management, regulation, protection and conservation of wildlife resources and inland fisheries in North Carolina and their habitats. The Commission has participated as a member of the NC 12 Task Force Subcommittee of Stakeholders. The unique and dynamic habitats found along the barrier islands of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge are important to both resident and transient wildlife species, and it will take efforts that increase resiliency of the NC 12 highway corridor to allow these habitats to persist into the future. Therefore, the Commission strongly supports this effort to engage diverse stakeholders to find long-term solutions to transportation issues between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe.

SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cameron Ingram".

Cameron Ingram, Executive Director  
North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission



August 10, 2023

**2023 OFFICERS**

Natalie Painter  
*President*

Richard Tolson  
*President Elect*

Doug Brindley  
*Imm. Past President*

Heather Cater  
*Treasurer*

Christi Bryant  
*Secretary*

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Shelley O'Grady  
*Director at Large*

Tammy Aycock  
*Director at Large*

Rosemarie Doshier  
*Director at Large*

Richard Hess  
*Director at Large*

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

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201 West Eighth Street / Nags Head, NC 27959 252.441.4036  
[www.OuterBanksREALTORS.com](http://www.OuterBanksREALTORS.com)

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The Outer Banks Association of REALTORS®, representing over 1,300 members, is an organization of real estate industry professionals and community partners in the Outer Banks region and is affiliated with the North Carolina Association of REALTORS® and the National Association of REALTORS®. OBAR advocates for private property rights, homeowners, aspiring homeowners, and the real estate industry via constructive partnerships with local, state, and federal policymakers. Given the unique transportation challenges we face on this fragile barrier island system, we are fully supportive of SAND, recognizing that it will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link.

Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Natalie Painter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Natalie Painter, President



August, 14, 2023

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

## **RE: SOLVING ACCESS FOR NC 12 IN DARE COUNTY (SAND)**

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND, or “the Project”)** application to the USDOT’s 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for a streamlined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

SAND is requesting PROTECT funding to perform comprehensive resiliency planning, alternatives development and evaluation, and extensive public and stakeholder engagement for an 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe in Dare County, North Carolina. This stretch of NC 12 is vital to the safety, quality of life, and economy of the Outer Banks. It is a critical lifeline connecting residents, tourists, and property owners in Hatteras Island to the rest of Dare County and mainland North Carolina. Moreover, it traverses areas with substantial ecological and recreational value in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, which provide recreational opportunities, while conserving a diverse array of habitats that support migratory waterfowl and endangered species like the loggerhead sea turtle.

Storms, ocean currents, and wave and wind action are continually and dynamically reshaping the low-lying barrier islands that NC 12 traverses. Rising sea levels, coupled with the increasing severity and frequency of coastal storms are accelerating the impacts of these forces, leading to flooding, shoreline erosion, and sand and ocean overwash that damages the roadway and causes extensive repair and cleanup costs. Since 2010, NCDOT has spent more than \$72 million to keep NC 12 south of Oregon Inlet passable following storm events. These persistent challenges disrupt the lives of residents and visitors, negatively impact the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Pea Island Wildlife Refuge, and lead to negative impacts on the regional economy.

To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of the NC 12 Task Force to identify the range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. The Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Robust public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, ensuring that all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. These project elements will



address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center Hot Spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

The South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative (SASMI) brings together leaders from four states (NC, SC, GA, FL) to identify the most significant threats and opportunities to conserve the approximately 1 million acres of salt marsh that extend throughout the South Atlantic region. The SASMI Plan, entitled *Marsh Forward: A Regional Plan for the Future of the South Atlantic Coast's Million-Acre Salt Marsh Ecosystem*, outlines key strategies, objectives, and actions to achieve a goal to enhance the long-term abundance, health, and resilience of the approximately 1 million acres of salt marshes within the South Atlantic states.

SAND will help meet the SASMI's 1 million acre goal by implementing adaptation measures outlined in the SASMI Plan, including the installation of natural and nature-based features, such as oyster reefs, which serve to fortify vulnerable areas of marshes. SAND's focus on resiliency and mitigation planning likewise supports SASMI's intent to complement and build on the independent efforts of local communities, military installations, and sentinel landscapes to enhance their resilience in the face of climate change. Finally, by bringing together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions, SAND will strengthen connections and increase engagement with this network of North Carolina stakeholders and enhance SASMI's own capacity building efforts.

SASMI thanks you for considering this letter of support for the Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County project. We look forward to supporting this work through continued collaboration with NCDOT, USFWS, NPS, and the more than 300 diverse stakeholders of the SASMI Coalition to protect, restore and enhance the health and resiliency of salt marsh along the U.S. South Atlantic Coast.

Sincerely,

Amanda Gobeli, Coordinator

South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative



August 10, 2023

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

**Re: NCDOT's PROTECT Grant Application for the Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND) Project**

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

On behalf of the Southern Environmental Law Center, we are pleased to provide this letter in support of the Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County ("SAND," or "the Project") application to the USDOT's 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), with support from project partners U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for future National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

The Southern Environmental Law Center is a non-profit organization that works to protect the basic right to clean air, clean water, and a livable climate; to preserve our region's natural treasures and rich biodiversity; and to provide a healthy environment for all. Among other priorities, we have spent decades advocating for a long-term, resilient solution for NC 12 that would move threatened sections of the highway out of the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and into the sound to ensure the highway remains safe and reliable for residents and visitors while preserving the refuge at the same time.

Most recently, SELC participated in a multi-year stakeholder process led by Dare County, known as the NC 12 Task Force, whose goal was "to engage in a collaborative effort to develop a long-term, prioritized and resilient transportation plan" for an "approximately 67-mile long portion of N.C. 12, largely imbedded within" Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge in Dare and Hyde Counties, North Carolina.<sup>1</sup> In the last year, the group came to consensus on a path forward, and in its final report, it identified the portion of NC 12 within Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge as the "most critical area of concern" and developing a long-term solution for that section as "a top priority."<sup>2</sup> The report explained that, if NC 12 within Pea Island "is inaccessible" (which happens multiple times a year due to ocean

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<sup>1</sup> Dare County, Highway 12 Task Force Report (Feb. 7, 2023), <https://www.darenc.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/11865/638114401900770000>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 8.



overwash that causes “unsafe road conditions, transportation delays, and road closures”), “then all other areas become inaccessible.”<sup>3</sup> The SAND project is the first step toward implementing the Task Force’s recommendations.

We understand that NCDOT is requesting PROTECT funding for the SAND project to perform comprehensive resiliency planning, alternatives development and evaluation, and extensive public and stakeholder engagement for this 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe in Dare County, North Carolina. As the application materials explain, this stretch of NC 12 is vital to the safety, quality of life, and economy of the Outer Banks. It is a critical lifeline connecting residents, tourists, and property owners in Hatteras Island to the rest of Dare County and mainland North Carolina. Moreover, it traverses areas with substantial ecological and recreational value in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, which provide recreational opportunities, while conserving a diverse array of habitats that support migratory waterfowl and endangered species like the loggerhead sea turtle. Protecting these values and resources is a vital part of the work of Southern Environmental Law Center.

Storms, ocean currents, and wave and wind action are continually and dynamically reshaping the low-lying barrier islands that NC 12 traverses. Rising sea levels, coupled with the increasing severity and frequency of coastal storms, are accelerating the impacts of these forces, leading to flooding, accelerated shoreline erosion, and sand and ocean overwash that damages the roadway and causes extensive repair and cleanup costs. We understand that, since 2010, NCDOT has spent more than \$72 million to keep NC 12 south of Oregon Inlet passable following storm events. These persistent challenges disrupt the lives of residents and visitors, obstruct the evacuation route for a national seashore and eight villages, negatively impact the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Pea Island Wildlife Refuge, and lead to negative impacts on the regional economy.

To address these concerns, we understand the SAND project will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of the NC 12 Task Force to identify the range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. We understand the Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. We support NCDOT’s intention that resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and that the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. We expect NCDOT to use the most up-to-date and best available scientific data on sea level rise, erosion rates, and other relevant factors in their analysis and decision-making. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. We intend to fully participate in the robust public and

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 4, 8.

Secretary Buttigieg

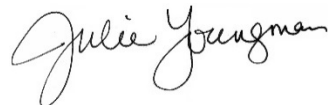
August 10, 2023

Page 3 of 3

stakeholder engagement process that we understand will occur throughout the project, ensuring all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. We support the goal that these project elements will address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center hot spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

We enthusiastically offer our strong support for this application and endorse this essential investment in North Carolina's vulnerable coastal infrastructure. SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Sincerely,



Julie Youngman  
Senior Attorney



Megan Kimball  
Senior Attorney

**Ben Cahoon**  
Mayor

**Michael Siers**  
Mayor Pro Tem

**Andy Garman**  
Town Manager



**Town of Nags Head**  
Post Office Box 99  
Nags Head, NC 27959  
Telephone 252-441-5508  
Fax 252-441-0776  
[www.nagsheadnc.gov](http://www.nagsheadnc.gov)

**M. Renée Cahoon**  
Commissioner

**Kevin Brinkley**  
Commissioner

**Bob Sanders**  
Commissioner

August 8, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND, or "the Project")** application to the USDOT's 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for a streamlined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

SAND is requesting PROTECT funding to perform comprehensive resiliency planning, alternatives development and evaluation, and extensive public and stakeholder engagement for an 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe in Dare County, North Carolina. This stretch of NC 12 is vital to the safety, quality of life, and economy of the Outer Banks. It is a critical lifeline connecting residents, tourists, and property owners in Hatteras Island to the rest of Dare County and mainland North Carolina. Moreover, it traverses areas with substantial ecological and recreational value in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, which provide recreational opportunities, while conserving a diverse array of habitats that support migratory waterfowl and endangered species like the loggerhead sea turtle. Storms, ocean currents, and wave and wind action are continually and dynamically reshaping the low-lying barrier islands that NC 12 traverses. Rising sea levels, coupled with the increasing severity and frequency of coastal storms are accelerating the impacts

of these forces, leading to flooding, shoreline erosion, and sand and ocean overwash that damages the roadway and causes extensive repair and cleanup costs. Since 2010, NCDOT has spent more than \$72 million to keep NC 12 south of Oregon Inlet passable following storm events. These persistent challenges disrupt the lives of residents and visitors, negatively impact the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Pea Island Wildlife Refuge, and lead to negative impacts on the regional economy.

To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of the NC 12 Task Force to identify the range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. The Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Robust public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, ensuring that all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. These project elements will address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center Hot Spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

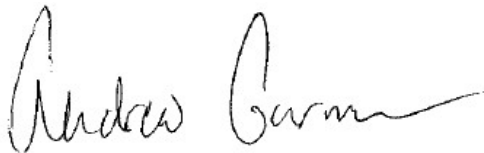
Located in Dare County, the Town of Nags Head serves as the gateway to the section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe and the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. Nags Head is a unique, coastal community built upon a legacy rooted in shared values, including our most recognized common bond - a love for the Outer Banks. We strive to preserve and protect the environment, tourism-based economy, and sense of place in order to ensure a memorable family vacation experience for present and future generations. Throughout its history, the town has been visionary in dealing with and planning for complex coastal issues including transportation and shoreline management in order to improve its resilience. Resilience means our community will be better able to withstand, respond to, and recover rapidly from disruptions due to hazards without long-term damage to our economy or environment. It means we will ideally require less government and private funding to recover, rebuild, and redevelop after a hazard occurs. Sustaining natural systems improves resilience by providing ecosystems services that directly or indirectly support our community's survival and quality of life. This encompasses planning for future impacts of sea level rise and ensuring proper practices are in place to sustain the natural environment and maintain a viable family, tourism-based economy.

Through time, Nags Head's desire to be a family beach community has not deviated. At the core of these desires are a healthy, well-maintained oceanfront beach that is both visually and physically accessible. The town recognizes the value of our coastal ecosystem and the role it plays in making the Outer Banks a great place to live, work, and visit. We uphold our legacy by protecting and promoting a sustainable local economy based on family vacation tourism and a high-quality beach experience. Fundamental to our legacy and quality of life is ensuring access to a well-protected natural coastal environment. Our ocean and estuarine shorelines need to be carefully managed in order to preserve the natural and beneficial functions of the environment while balancing the need to respect private property rights and public access.

The Town's strategic direction includes facilitating collaboration to address community wide regional issues and make progress on threatening issues for the community such as shoreline management. This grant aligns with the town's goals and would build upon the progress that has been made to protect our critical resources. In order to ensure the long-term viability and health of the ecosystem and economic vitality of the Outer Banks, the Town of Nags Head proudly supports this grant application.

SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Garman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andy Garman  
Town Manager  
Town of Nags Head



# COASTAL RESILIENCE CENTER

*A U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence*

THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL

100 EUROPA DRIVE  
SUITE 540  
CAMPUS BOX 7581  
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27517  
coastalresiliencecenter.unc.edu

T 919.962.0344  
F 919.445.9669

July 31, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND, or “the Project”)** application to the USDOT’s 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from federal project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for a streamlined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

SAND is requesting PROTECT funding to perform comprehensive resiliency planning, alternatives development and evaluation, and extensive public and stakeholder engagement for an 11-mile section of NC 12 between Oregon Inlet and Rodanthe in Dare County, North Carolina. This stretch of NC 12 is vital to the safety, quality of life, and economy of the Outer Banks. It is a critical lifeline connecting residents, tourists, and property owners in Hatteras Island to the rest of Dare County and mainland North Carolina. Moreover, it traverses areas with substantial ecological and recreational value in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, which provide recreational opportunities, while conserving a diverse array of habitats that support migratory waterfowl and endangered species like the loggerhead sea turtle.

Storms, ocean currents, and wave and wind action are continually and dynamically reshaping the low-lying barrier islands that NC 12 traverses. Rising sea levels, coupled with the increasing severity and frequency of coastal storms are accelerating the impacts of these forces, leading to flooding, shoreline erosion, and sand and ocean overwash that damage the roadway and cause extensive repair and cleanup costs. Since 2010, NCDOT has spent more than \$72 million to keep NC 12 south of Oregon Inlet passable following storm events. These persistent challenges disrupt the lives of residents and visitors, negatively impact the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Pea Island Wildlife Refuge, and lead to negative impacts on the regional economy.

To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of the NC 12 Task Force to identify a range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. The Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Robust public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, ensuring that all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. These project elements will address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center Hot Spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

The mission of the Department of Homeland Security, Coastal Resilience Center of Excellence (CRC) is to conduct research and education to enhance the resilience of the nation's people, infrastructure, economies, and the natural environment to the impacts of coastal hazards such as floods and severe storms, including the effects of future climate trends. Recently, the CRC and NCDOT have partnered to make CRC's coastal flood model forecasts available via NCDOT decision support software to help identify potential impacts of surge and wave conditions on coastal transportation infrastructure including roads, bridges and ferry terminals. The CRC is pleased to expand our collaboration with NCDOT to the proposed SAND project and its efforts to protect a critical and highly vulnerable stretch of NC 12.

If funded, SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making

and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Luetlich". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

Rick Luetlich  
Alumni Distinguished Professor  
Director, Coastal Resilience Center of Excellence





August 14, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND, or “the Project”)** application to the USDOT’s 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. This study will establish a solid foundation for a streamlined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, permitting, and construction, with the goal of securing the long-term resiliency of NC 12 in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

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negatively impact the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Pea Island Wildlife Refuge, and lead to negative impacts on the regional economy.

Since 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) has been the leading voice in safeguarding our national parks. NPCA and its more than 1.5 million members and supporters work together to protect and preserve our nation's most iconic and inspirational places for future generations. For more information, visit [www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org) and you may also wish to refer to <https://www.npca.org/articles/3537-coastal-parks-offer-climate-solutions>

To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses for phases I, IIa, and IIb of State Transportation Improvement Program project B-2500 and the efforts of the NC 12 Task Force to identify the range of reasonable alternatives for subsequent NEPA evaluation and support the identification of a preferred alternative. The Project will perform environmental screening and develop conceptual roadway and structure design for these alternatives, including preliminary hydraulic modeling, to understand their cost, constructability, and environmental impacts. Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus, and the Project will identify opportunities to incorporate innovative strategies such as oyster reef restoration and nature-based solutions for stormwater management. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Robust public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, ensuring that all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. These project elements will address vulnerabilities at projected future breach locations as well as the Canal Zone and Pea Island Visitor Center Hot Spots. At these locations, rising tides are breaching dunes, and sand and ocean overwash are a major challenge during and after coastal storms.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide future comments on this project. NPCA has been engaged at Cape Hatteras National Seashore for decades and we are committed to working toward a solution that protects the National Seashore integrity will allow safe visitation on the barrier island.

Emily Jones  
NCA Southeast Regional Director  
National Parks Conservation Association  
775 Haywood Road, Suite A  
Asheville, NC 28806  
P 865.335.4666 | [ejones@npca.org](mailto:ejones@npca.org)

August 14, 2023

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



OBX BICYCLE  
& PEDESTRIAN  
SAFETY COALITION

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Solving Access for NC 12 in Dare County (SAND, or “the Project”)** application to the USDOT’s 2023 PROTECT Grant program. This collaborative project, spearheaded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) with support from project partners US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, will undertake a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study.

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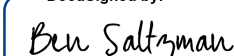
To address these concerns, SAND will build upon prior decision-making and environmental analyses and will develop conceptual roadway and structure design for alternatives, Resiliency and mitigation planning will also be a key focus. SAND will also identify permitting and resource needs required for successful implementation. Robust public and stakeholder engagement will occur throughout the project, ensuring that all diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process.

The Outer Banks Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Coalition promotes awareness of safety issues to all residents and visitors of the Outer Banks in a positive and proactive manner and looks forward to collaborating on this project for these goals. Intimately linked with the region's bicycle and pedestrian community, we would like to help serve as a channel for community conversation and help encourage input throughout the planning process.

SAND will bring together Federal and state agencies, local communities, academia, and advocacy groups to build a common framework for decision-making and advance the development of long-term solutions to enhance the resilience of this critical transportation link. Thank you for your consideration of the SAND grant application for funding through the PROTECT program.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:



Ben Saltzman, Chair of the Outer Banks Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Coalition