



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

February 13, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Duffy,

Please accept this letter of support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) Critical Ocracoke Adaptation Strategies for Transportation Access Long-term (COASTAL, or "the Project") application to USDOT's FY 2024-2025 Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation Program (PROTECT) grant program. This Project is a critical step to secure the long-term operation of vehicle ferry service between Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands, as well as NC 12 on Ocracoke Island. To achieve this goal, NCDOT is requesting PROTECT funding to complete the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for a new ferry facility in a streamlined manner, supported by preliminary design activities and robust interagency coordination and community engagement. These activities will build consensus and support for a long-term transportation solution that addresses the vulnerabilities and challenges threatening NCDOT's ability to provide vehicle ferry service and public access between Hatteras Island and the north end of Ocracoke Island.

According to the Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE), over 750,000 residents and visitors access Ocracoke Island by ferry annually, which is the sole means to attain off-island medical care, employment and educational opportunities, and to receive supplies and goods. However, the natural wind and wave actions that shape this barrier island, along with increasingly frequent and severe storm events, are contributing to closures and damages on NC 12 during storm or high tide events and erosion at the existing South Dock ferry terminal at the north end of Ocracoke Island. The damage has led to the destruction of vehicle stacking lanes and the loss of the existing septic field for the visitor restrooms.

The North Carolina Coastal Federation has been a leader in protecting North Carolina's coastal habitats for over four decades, working to safeguard water quality, wetlands, and resilient coastal ecosystems through science-based advocacy and policy. Our efforts have led to significant environmental protections, including the establishment of water quality standards, the preservation of over 15,000 acres of threatened coastal lands, and stronger regulations to reduce impacts from industrial and coastal development.

We support the COASTAL application because of the collaborative and critical insights it will provide through further research and analysis of this dynamic coastal system. The Federation recognizes transportation infrastructure and accessibility is necessary to residents and visitors to Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands. Our priority is to ensure proposed solutions minimize environmental impacts and protect the long-term health of our coastal habitats. Thoughtful planning and strong environmental safeguards will be essential to balancing public access with habitat conservation, and we encourage a science-driven approach to this effort.

**COASTAL** 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 a resilient, long-term solution for safe and reliable access between Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands. We strongly encourage you to favorably consider **COASTAL** for PROTECT funding.

Sincerely,



Braxton Davis, Executive Director  
North Carolina Coastal Federation