



October , 2026

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

Dear Secretary Duffy,

On behalf of the UNC Coastal Studies Institute, I am pleased to express our strong support for North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) Adaptation for North Carolina's Critical Hatteras-Ocracoke Route (ANCHOR, or "the Project") application to USDOT's Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation Program (PROTECT) grant program. ANCHOR is a vital step to securing viable, long-term access to Ocracoke Island, which is located within the 70-mile Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Ferry service from Hatteras is the Island's primary means of access, making it a lifeline for both residents and visitors. According to the Institute for Transportation Research and Education, over 750,000 residents and visitors access Ocracoke Island by ferry annually. Ferry service is not simply for convenience and recreation; it is an essential transportation link that enables access to essential services like off-island medical care while also supporting key economic needs like the movement of freight, commercial goods, and service vehicles to and from the island. However, the natural wind and wave action that shape this barrier island along with increasingly frequent and severe storm events are contributing to closures and costly repetitive damage to 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.

To address this urgent concern, NCDOT is requesting PROTECT funding to complete an alternatives analysis and a streamlined environmental review to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Environmental approvals for a resilient, long-term, multimodal solution for Ocracoke Island access is a critical milestone, and needs to be supported with the detailed analyses, interagency coordination, and public engagement necessary to advance a viable solution in this complex coastal environment. A successful project will position NCDOT and its federal, state and local partners to pursue future construction funding and quickly move toward project delivery.

The Coastal Studies Institute has long-standing research, extension and outreach contributions that benefit individuals 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, and provide community outreach to enhance communication about the history, culture, and environment of northeastern North Carolina's maritime counties. Northeastern NC provides a rich laboratory to investigate these systems and the interactions between human (individual and community) activities and the coastal environment. CSI 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 is our focus on coastal processes and coastal changes related to extreme weather events.

ANCHOR will bring together Federal and State agencies, local communities, academic institutions, and advocacy organizations to establish a streamlined framework for decision-making and advance a resilient, long-term solution for safe and reliable access between Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands. We strongly encourage USDOT to favorably consider ANCHOR for PROTECT funding.

Sincerely,

Michael Muglia, PhD
Interim Executive Director
UNC Coastal Studies Institute

