

October 2, 2026

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

Dear Secretary Duffy,

Dear Secretary Duffy,

On behalf of North Carolina State University, 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.

North Carolina State University has supported NCDOT in the long-term monitoring of beaches adjacent to NC 12 since the 1980s. Along the eastern Outer Banks (Hatteras and Pea Islands), our role has been to assess whether there are adverse impacts from the presence of coastal structures (terminal groins) and support decision making about roadway retrofits. On Ocracoke Island, in collaboration with researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University, we developed a computer model that can simulate potential future landscape changes over many decades associated with different roadway retrofit decisions, including relocation of the ferry terminal and partial abandonment of the road. Our modeling was used to seed conversations between many stakeholders (community members, county representatives, the National Park Service, and NCDOT) about how changes to roadway management may play out over many decades to reshape Ocracoke Island in ways that influence its livability. This work was also intended to seed planning efforts like ANCHOR by providing scientific evidence on potential futures.

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,

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

Katherine A. Anarde
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