



October 2, 2026

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy:

On behalf of the Ocracoke Access Alliance, I am pleased to express our strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT's) Adaptation for North Carolina's Critical Hatteras-Ocracoke Route (ANCHOR, or "the Project") application to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant program. ANCHOR represents an important step toward securing viable, long-term access to Ocracoke Island, a community located within the 70-mile Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Ferry service from Hatteras is Ocracoke Island's primary means of access, making it a lifeline for both residents and visitors. According to the Institute for Transportation Research and Education, more than 750,000 residents and visitors access Ocracoke Island by ferry annually. Ferry service is not simply a matter of convenience or recreation; it is an essential transportation link that enables island residents to reach off-island medical care and other critical services while supporting the movement of freight, commercial goods, service vehicles, and other essential supplies to and from the island.

At the same time, the natural wind and wave action that shape Ocracoke and the surrounding barrier islands, combined with increasingly frequent and severe storm events, are contributing to closures and costly repetitive damage along NC 12 during storms and high-tide events. These conditions are also accelerating erosion at the existing South Dock ferry terminal at the north end of Ocracoke Island. This erosion has already resulted in the destruction of vehicle stacking lanes and the loss of the existing septic field serving the visitor restrooms.

As an organization dedicated to protecting and improving reliable access to Ocracoke Island, the Ocracoke Access Alliance sees the need for a long-term, resilient transportation solution as an increasingly urgent priority. Ocracoke is a ferry-dependent community, and the reliability of its

transportation connection directly affects the daily lives of residents, the delivery of essential services and goods, emergency response, and the island's visitor-based economy. Repeatedly repairing transportation infrastructure in locations increasingly vulnerable to storm damage is not, by itself, a sustainable long-term strategy. A comprehensive examination of alternatives is therefore essential to identifying a solution that can provide safe and reliable access while accounting for the unique environmental, transportation, and community considerations of the Outer Banks.

To address these challenges, 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. Advancing environmental approvals for a resilient, long-term, multimodal solution for Ocracoke Island access is a critical milestone. The process should be supported by the detailed technical analyses, interagency coordination, stakeholder engagement, and public involvement necessary to identify and advance a viable solution in this complex coastal environment. Successful completion of this work will position NCDOT and its federal, state, and local partners to pursue future construction funding and move efficiently toward project delivery.

The Ocracoke Access Alliance believes ANCHOR provides an important opportunity to move the conversation beyond recurring emergency repairs and toward a comprehensive, forward-looking approach to transportation resilience. By bringing the relevant agencies, communities, technical experts, and stakeholders together to evaluate alternatives, the Project can help establish a durable framework for addressing the transportation challenges facing Ocracoke and the broader Hatteras-Ocracoke route. We particularly value an approach that recognizes the needs of the year-round Ocracoke community while also accounting for the hundreds of thousands of visitors who rely on the route each year.

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. The Ocracoke Access Alliance strongly encourages the U.S. Department of Transportation to favorably consider NCDOT's ANCHOR application for PROTECT funding.

Sincerely,

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