



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

Re: Madison Street Bridge Expansion Project – Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) Grant Application

Dear Secretary Duffy:

This letter is to express the strong support of Anthony's Italian Restaurant for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Madison Street Bridge Expansion project in the City of Whiteville, Columbus County, North Carolina.

The project will improve the Madison Street (US 701 Business) crossing over Soules Swamp by extending the existing bridge and adding a second bridge. These improvements will help the roadway better handle heavy rainfall and flooding events, keeping this important connection open for residents, businesses, emergency responders, and travelers.

As a downtown Whiteville business, we have seen firsthand the devastating impact flooding can have on our community. Hurricanes Matthew and Florence brought extraordinary flooding to Whiteville and Columbus County, but our flooding problems are not limited to record-breaking hurricanes. Flash flooding and extended periods of heavy rain can also create serious problems along Madison Street and surrounding streets in downtown Whiteville.

For Anthony's Italian Restaurant, the importance of the Madison Street Bridge Expansion project is very real:

- Access to our business can be affected even when our building itself does not flood. During significant rainfall events, Madison, Lee, and Franklin Streets can become difficult or impossible to travel from multiple directions. Customers may be unable or unwilling to navigate flooded or closed roads to reach our restaurant.
- US 701 Business and the US 701 Bypass are critical transportation routes for our customers, employees, and the larger community. When flooding affects these routes and connecting streets, the impact extends well beyond a single intersection or business. It disrupts movement into and through downtown Whiteville and affects access for people traveling throughout Columbus County.
- Reliable access is a public safety issue. One of our greatest concerns is what could happen if a customer, employee, or nearby resident experiences a medical emergency during a flood. Minutes matter in an emergency. Flooded or blocked roads should not stand between someone needing immediate medical attention and the emergency personnel trying to reach them or transport them to care.



- Flooding has a direct economic impact on our employees and their families. Anthony's employs approximately 10 to 15 people who depend on their weekly wages and tips to help support their households. When customers cannot reach downtown, or employees cannot safely get to work, the financial impact is felt immediately. In an economically challenged area, the loss of even a shift or two can matter greatly to a working family.
- Downtown businesses depend on dependable transportation infrastructure. Restaurants and other small businesses cannot thrive if customers question whether they can safely and reliably reach downtown whenever heavy rain is in the forecast. Improving the Madison Street crossing would provide greater confidence and accessibility for the businesses that continue to invest in downtown Whiteville.

This project is important not only to Anthony's Italian Restaurant or the businesses located along Madison Street. Whiteville's approximately 5,000 residents and Columbus County's approximately 50,000 residents depend on reliable transportation to reach their jobs, medical care, businesses, schools, groceries, and other necessities of daily life. They deserve transportation routes that remain as safe, accessible, and dependable as possible during periods of heavy rainfall.

The Madison Street Bridge Expansion project represents a strategic investment in transportation resilience, mobility, public safety, and the long-term vitality of downtown Whiteville and Columbus County as a region. For those of us who operate businesses here, it also represents an investment in our employees, our customers, and our ability to continue serving this community.

I respectfully urge your full consideration and support for funding that will allow the North Carolina Department of Transportation to advance and complete this important project, providing lasting benefits to the City of Whiteville, Columbus County, and southeastern North Carolina.

Thank you for your consideration of this meritorious grant application and your commitment to our nation's critical transportation system.

Sincerely,
Anthony Grippi
Owner