

SOUTHEAST PROPERTIES OF COLUMBUS LLC

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October 2, 2026

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 **Southeast Properties of Columbus LLC** 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 local property owner and business operating from **433 S. Madison Street**, we see firsthand the importance of Madison Street to Whiteville and Columbus County. Madison Street is an important connection between downtown Whiteville, the hospital and medical area, local businesses, residential neighborhoods, and the surrounding community.

The importance of the Madison Street Bridge Expansion Project to our company and community includes:

- **Reliable access to downtown Whiteville.** Our business is located directly on Madison Street, making dependable access important to our operations, tenants, customers, visitors, and neighboring businesses.
- **Reduced disruption from flooding.** Heavy rainfall and flooding can interrupt traffic and make access to downtown properties and businesses more difficult. Improving the Soules Swamp crossing would help reduce these disruptions and allow floodwater to recede more quickly.
- **Improved emergency and medical access.** Madison Street provides an important connection through Whiteville, including access toward the hospital and medical community. Reliable routes during severe weather are especially important for emergency responders and residents needing medical services.
- **Support for downtown economic activity.** Reliable access encourages customers, employees, visitors, and continued investment in downtown Whiteville. Resilient transportation infrastructure is important to the continued vitality and growth of our downtown.
- **Long-term community resilience.** Columbus County has experienced significant impacts from hurricanes and major rainfall events. Improving this crossing is a practical investment that will help Whiteville remain accessible and functional during future severe-weather events.

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. I respectfully urge full consideration and support for funding that will allow NCDOT to advance and complete this important project.

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

Sincerely,

Kenneth M. Barnes Jr.
Southeast Properties of Columbus LLC

