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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 Vann Underwood Chrysler Jeep Dodge Ram 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 to better handle heavy rainfall and flooding events, keeping this important connection open for residents, businesses, emergency responders and travelers.

Flooding is a recurring issue along Madison Street and throughout downtown Whiteville during heavy rainfall events. Improving the bridge crossing would reduce flooding in the area and allow rainwater to recede more quickly after heavy rainfall events. As a result, the project would help reduce road closures, improve access to downtown Whiteville, and provide more reliable travel for all roadway users during and after heavy rainfall events. Specifically, for Vann Underwood Chrysler Jeep Dodge Ram, the importance of the Madison Street Bridge Expansion project can be summarized by the following:

- **Improved Access to Downtown:** The 701 Business bridge expansion would provide improved access to the downtown area, local businesses, and residential neighborhoods. Without the bridge expansion, access would remain largely dependent on the 701 Bypass, limiting traffic flow and making it more difficult for residents, customers, and visitors to access the downtown area.
- **Supporting the Local Business Community:** The 701 Business bridge expansion is critical to the continued growth and success of our local business community. The project would provide citizens and travelers with more convenient access to Madison, Lee, and Franklin Streets. Approximately two-thirds of our employees travel from the southern portion of the city and county to reach work each day, making reliable and convenient access across 701 Business particularly important to our business and employees.
- **Flood Mitigation and Emergency Access:** The project could help address flooding concerns associated with Soules Swamp during periods of heavy rainfall, tropical storms, and other significant weather events. Flooding in this area has caused substantial damage to businesses and properties surrounding downtown, negatively impacting both the number of businesses operating in the area and the customers who are able to access them. In addition to addressing flooding concerns, the bridge expansion would provide emergency response crews with an additional route between the northern and southern portions of the city. Maintaining multiple access routes is critical during severe weather or other emergencies. If the project is not completed and emergency responders are dependent on a single route, that route could become inaccessible, potentially preventing emergency personnel from reaching residents and businesses when they need assistance most.

- **Encouraging Downtown Growth and Investment:** The project would help create the conditions necessary for continued growth and revitalization in the downtown area. Business owners, developers, and investors need confidence that their businesses and investments will be accessible to customers, employees, and visitors. The 701 Business corridor and this bridge expansion are essential pieces of that infrastructure. Improving access and maintaining reliable traffic flow will help strengthen the downtown area and support its long-term economic growth.
- **A Critical Investment in Our Community:** The 701 Business bridge expansion should be viewed as more than a transportation project. It is an investment in the accessibility, safety, economic development, and long-term viability of our community. Our businesses, employees, residents, and emergency services depend on reliable connectivity, and moving this project forward is essential to maintaining that connectivity.

The Madison Street Bridge Expansion project represents a strategic investment in transportation resilience, mobility, public safety, and long-term vitality of downtown Whiteville and Columbus County as a region. I respectfully urge your full consideration and support for funding that will allow North Carolina DOT 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 and your commitment to our nation's critical transportation system.

Sincerely,

Stephen V. Underwood III, General Manager

Vann Underwood Chrysler Jeep Dodge Ram