

Rolling Penns Food Inc

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 — PROTECT Grant Application

Dear Secretary Duffy:

I am writing to urge your strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Madison Street Bridge Expansion Project in Whiteville, Columbus County. As the owner of Penn's Grill, a downtown Whiteville restaurant, and a former member of the Whiteville City Council, I have seen firsthand how essential dependable transportation access is to our businesses, residents, visitors, and emergency services. This project is not simply a future improvement; it is an urgent investment in the safety, resilience, and economic vitality of our community.

The project would extend the existing bridge and add a second bridge where Madison Street (U.S. 701 Business) crosses Soules Swamp. This critical connection provides access to downtown Whiteville and serves people traveling throughout the area. Heavy rain and flooding can quickly disrupt that access, forcing closures, creating lengthy detours, delaying emergency response, and making it more difficult for residents and workers to reach their destinations. These disruptions place an immediate burden on families, businesses, first responders, and anyone who depends on Madison Street as a reliable route.

For Penn's Grill and other downtown businesses, dependable access is essential every day. Customers must be able to reach downtown, employees must be able to get to work, deliveries must be completed, and visitors must feel confident that they can travel safely through the area. When flooding or bridge closures interrupt those connections, the effects are felt throughout the local economy. A resilient bridge system would help keep businesses open, protect jobs, support downtown investment, and reduce the economic losses caused by avoidable disruptions.

The project's benefits would extend well beyond individual businesses. Improved transportation reliability would strengthen access for residents, schools, healthcare providers, public safety agencies, and emergency responders. It would provide a safer and more dependable route for the entire community while helping Whiteville and Columbus County prepare for increasingly severe weather and future transportation challenges.

As a former council member, I understand that local resources alone are not sufficient to address a project of this importance and scale. The PROTECT grant is essential because it would provide

the federal partnership needed to move this long-awaited resilience improvement forward. Without this funding, the community may face continued vulnerability, recurring closures, and escalating costs associated with delays, emergency repairs, and lost economic activity. Federal support now would help prevent those future costs while delivering lasting benefits to the people and businesses of Whiteville.

I respectfully urge the U.S. Department of Transportation to give NCDOT's PROTECT grant application its strongest consideration and to help advance the Madison Street Bridge Expansion Project without delay. This investment would protect a vital transportation connection, strengthen our local economy, improve public safety, and enhance the long-term resilience of our entire community.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to transportation improvements that protect communities and support economic opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen B. Holden', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Helen B. Holden

Owner and Operator
Penn's Grill