



NORTH CAROLINA
**DEPARTMENT of
COMMERCE**

Josh Stein
GOVERNOR

Lee Lilley
SECRETARY

October 6, 2026

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590-001

Re: FY24-26 PROTECT Grant Program Application by the North Carolina Department of Transportation for the NC Resilient Route Project

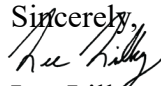
Dear Secretary Duffy,

I am writing to express the support of the North Carolina Department of Commerce (Commerce) for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) application regarding the NC Resilient Route Project for a Resilience Improvement Grant under the FY 2024-2026 Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Discretionary Grant Program.

The grant funding will be used to improve the I-85 interchange with NC 86 in Orange County, North Carolina, including the replacement of the NC 86 bridge over I-85. The project is critical to the region, as the current NC 86 bridge has the lowest vertical clearance along the entire I-85 corridor in North Carolina, and it has been struck multiple times in the last decade, causing structural damage that has been expensive to repair. Further damage or closure of this bridge would cause severe disruption to the I-85 corridor for both passenger and freight travel.

The project would replace the nearly seventy-year-old functionally obsolete bridge with one that meets interstate standards and has a vertical clearance of 17.5-feet, ensuring safe and efficient travel for all types of vehicles. The project will also include ramp and roadway improvements at the I-85/NC 86 interchange to ensure that it meets future traffic demand.

Commerce sees this project as an important step in improving transportation, mobility and resilience for the region. The project helps bring to fruition the economic development, transportation, and infrastructure goals expressed in the *First in Opportunity* strategic economic development plan.

Sincerely,

Lee Lilley
Secretary