



Howard Gap: Resilience After Landslides

APPENDIX I

Letters of Support



Town of Columbus

95 Walker Street • Columbus, North Carolina 28722

Phone (828) 894-8236

www.columbusnc.com

Mayor

Patrick McCool

Town Manager

Jessica Trotman

Town Council

Mayor Pro Tem Becky Kennedy

Councilman Richard Hall

Councilman Mark Phillips

Councilman Brent Jackson

Town Clerk

Daisy Trejo

Town Attorney

Jill Berry

October 2, 2026

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

Dear Secretary Duffy,

I would like to express my strong support for NCDOT's **Howard Gap Road: Resilience After Landslides Project** ("the Project") application to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program. The Project offers an opportunity to restore and stabilize a section of Howard Gap Road that has remained closed following recurring slope and roadway failures in 2018 and 2019. The closure requires affected travelers to take a 16-mile detour, adding approximately 30 minutes of travel time and reducing access to homes, emergency services, and other essential destinations.

The Project will address a longstanding transportation need in Polk County, North Carolina by rebuilding Howard Gap Road and addressing the drainage and slope instability that contributed to prior failures. The importance of restoring this connection has increased since Hurricane Helene decimated this region in September 2024 and caused extensive damage to nearby U.S. 176 between Saluda and Tryon. With U.S. 176 remaining closed during reconstruction, I-26 currently serves as the primary detour between the two communities. Restoring Howard Gap Road will provide an additional connection within a transportation network that currently has limited redundancy.

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For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support the **Howard Gap Road: Resilience After Landslides Project** and NCDOT's application for federal PROTECT Resilience Improvement Grant funding to complete this important transportation resilience project.

Respectfully,



Jessica Trotman

Town Manager

Town of Columbus

The Honorable Sean Duffy
U.S. Secretary of Transportation
United States Department of Transportation
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The **Foothills Rural Planning Organization (RPO)** is a regional transportation planning body serving McDowell, Polk, and Rutherford counties in Western North Carolina. It functions as a crucial bridge between local rural communities and the North Carolina Department of Transportation to prioritize and advocate for local infrastructure funding.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support the **Howard Gap Road: Resilience After Landslides Project** and NCDOT's application for federal PROTECT Resilience Improvement Grant funding to complete this important transportation resilience project.

Respectfully,

Signed by:

A84278C83337416...
Alan Toney

Director - Foothills RPO

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

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The **Henderson County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)** acts as the local policy and decision-making body for county-level transportation planning and infrastructure development. They review and prioritize projects, provide long-range planning, and assist with intergovernmental coordination.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support the **Howard Gap Road: Resilience After Landslides Project** and NCDOT's application for federal PROTECT Resilience Improvement Grant funding to complete this important transportation resilience project.

Respectfully,

Signed by:

6AE006646906474...
Autumn Radcliff
Planning Director - Henderson County TAC

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

Dear Secretary Duffy,

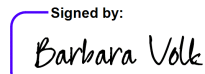
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Respectfully,

Signed by:

A6E6D36464B845C...
Barbara Volk

Mayor – City of Hendersonville

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

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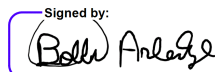
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Respectfully,

Signed by:

E9B165ED605A443...
Bobby Arledge

Fire Marshal/Emergency Management Director – Polk County

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

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Respectfully,

DocuSigned by:

292D6C50E93E4B5...
Brian Pahle

City Manager - City of Hendersonville

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

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Respectfully,

Signed by:


68478E29E0FE4A5...
Capt. Jeremy Gregg

E-911 Communications Director – Polk County

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

Dear Secretary Duffy,

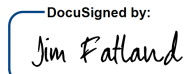
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Respectfully,

DocuSigned by:

8B647F66FD0F489...
Jim Fatland

Town Manager – Town of Tryon

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

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Respectfully,

Signed by:

C6475774B9DB44D...
John Mitchell

County Manager – Henderson County

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

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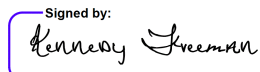
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Respectfully,

Signed by:

7B5BBA4D953F410...
Kennedy Freeman

Clerk to the Board of Commissioners – Polk County

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

Dear Secretary Duffy,

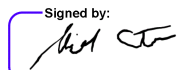
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Signed by:

38E9D6D342284A5...
Michael Crater
EMS Director – Polk County

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

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Respectfully,

Signed by:

1CED3539CC5644D...
Steven Orr

Town Manager – Town of Saluda

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

Dear Secretary Duffy,

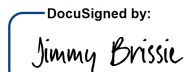
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Respectfully,

DocuSigned by:

D5A816B26A3A4B5...
Jimmy Brissie

Public Safety Director – Henderson County

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

Dear Secretary Duffy,

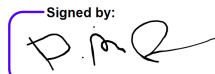
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Respectfully,

Signed by:

1DB78B2254E04C6...
Marche Pittman

County Manager – Polk County

a program of Land of Sky

FRENCH BROAD RIVER

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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

Dear Secretary Duffy:

On behalf of the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (FBRMPO), I am writing to express our strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's **Howard Gap Road: Resilience After Landslides Project** and its application for funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program.

Howard Gap Road provides an important connection between communities in Polk County and the surrounding region. A section of the roadway has remained closed following recurring slope and roadway failures in 2018 and 2019, requiring affected travelers to use a 16-mile detour that adds approximately 30 minutes to some trips. The closure has also reduced access to homes, emergency services, utilities, businesses, and other essential destinations.

The need to restore this connection has become even more significant following Hurricane Helene, which caused widespread damage throughout Western North Carolina in September 2024, including extensive damage to U.S. 176 between Saluda and Tryon. With U.S. 176 closed during reconstruction, I-26 is currently serving as the primary regional connection between these communities. In this context, restoring Howard Gap Road would provide valuable network redundancy and an additional route within a transportation system that has experienced significant disruptions from extreme weather events.

The proposed project would improve the long-term resilience and reliability of Howard Gap Road through roadway reconstruction, slope stabilization, retaining infrastructure, and drainage improvements designed to address the conditions that contributed to previous failures. Reopening the roadway would restore an existing transportation connection that

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FRENCH BROAD RIVER

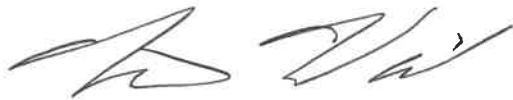
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

has been unavailable since 2019, reduce travel burdens associated with the current detour, improve access for emergency and utility services, and provide greater flexibility within the regional transportation network.

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization responsible for coordinating transportation planning and investment across the French Broad River region, FBRMPO recognizes the importance of transportation system resilience and network redundancy, particularly in a region that has experienced significant impacts from flooding, landslides, and other extreme weather events. Projects such as the Howard Gap Road improvements demonstrate how targeted investments in existing infrastructure can strengthen the reliability of the broader transportation network and improve the ability of communities to maintain access during and following disruptive events.

For these reasons, the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization strongly supports the **Howard Gap Road: Resilience After Landslides Project** and NCDOT's application for federal PROTECT Resilience Improvement Grant funding. We respectfully encourage the U.S. Department of Transportation to support this important investment in transportation resilience and connectivity in Western North Carolina.

Respectfully,



Tristan Winkler

Director

French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization

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