North Carolina General Assembly
House of Representatives

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October 9, 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,

On behalf of NC House District 113, 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.

The Project will improve the long-term resilience and reliability of Howard Gap Road through roadway reconstruction, slope stabilization, retaining infrastructure, and drainage improvements designed to address conditions associated with previous failures. Reopening Howard Gap Road will

eliminate a 30-minute detour for affected trips, restore an existing local roadway connection that has been unavailable since 2019, improve access for emergency and utility services that depend on access to this roadway, and increase redundancy while nearby U.S. 176 remains closed. These improvements will benefit residents, businesses, emergency responders, utility providers, and others traveling through this portion of Polk County.

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,



Representative Jake Johnson
NC House District 113