BOONE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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Connect, Advocate, Educate

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

Dear Secretary Duffy:

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, we write to express our strong support for the North Carolina Department of Transportation's application to the U.S. Department of Transportation's FY 2024-2026 PROTECT Grant Program for the NC 105 Resilience, Capacity and Slope Stabilization Project.

NC 105 is a critical lifeline through North Carolina's High Country. Watauga County is served by no Interstate highway, rail line, or commercial airport, which means every resident, visitor, and shipment that reaches Boone and the surrounding areas arrives by road. NC 105 is one of our most heavily trafficked routes into the area and the primary connection to Avery County and the communities to our southwest.

Approximately 10,000 people commute into Boone each day for work, and a significant share of them travel NC 105 from Avery County. This workforce sustains Appalachian State University, UNC Health Appalachian, Watauga County Schools, and the hundreds of small businesses the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce represents.

Tourism is the largest economic driver in North Carolina's High Country. In 2025, visitors spent $531.8 million in Watauga County and $259 million in Avery County, according to data from Visit NC. Together, that is more than $790 million in annual visit spending and more than 4,500 jobs in the two counties this corridor connects. Annual fall events, including the Woolly Worm Festival in Banner Elk and the Valle Country Fair in Valle Crucis, drew 125.5k out-of-town visitors to Watauga County in mid-October 2025, according to our data sets through Placer.ai.

Hurricane Helene demonstrated the vulnerability of this corridor, and I write this letter as our region anxiously watches the path and impact of Hurricane Isaias. Helene severely damaged drainage infrastructure along NC 105, including the washout of significant culverts that compromised the entire width of the roadway in multiple spots between Boone and Banner Elk. Mountainous terrain offers few alternate routes when a highway of this importance closes. The resulting detours are lengthy, and the costs fall on workers, employers, emergency responders, and visitors alike.

The proposed widening, intersection improvements, drainage upgrades, and slope stabilization associated with this project would improve safety under normal conditions and strengthen the corridor's ability to remain open during severe weather.

We respectfully request your full and favorable consideration of NCDOT's application. Please feel free to reach out to me directly if we can provide any further information.

Sincerely,



David Jackson
President/CEO
Boone Area Chamber of Commerce