High Country Rural Planning Organization (RPO)
Municipalities and Counties of
Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey

"Serving North Carolina's High Country with Continuing, Cooperative, and Comprehensive Transportation Planning"

Brenda Lyerly, RTAC Chair David Graham, Transportation Planner Jose Butron, RTCC Chair

October 5, 2026

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 High Country Rural Planning Organization, I am pleased to express our strong support for North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)'s **NC 105 Resilience, Capacity and Slope Stabilization Project** ("the Project"), submitted to the U.S. Department of Transportation's FY 2024-2026 Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) Grant Program.

The Project focuses on 5.5 miles of NC 105 from Shulls Mill Road (SR 1568) to NC 105 Bypass (SR 1107) in Boone, Watauga County. This corridor faces significant challenges due to steep terrain and proximity to the Watauga River and local tributaries. The roadway serves as a vital route for emergency response, medical access, freight movement, tourism, and daily commuting, as well as a critical role in the region's mobility and economic vitality as redundant routes of travel are limited. In addition, the region's primary suppliers of aggregate, hot mix asphalt, and ready mix concrete are located within this corridor. However, it is highly vulnerable to severe weather events, including intense rainfall, flash flooding, and winter storms, which impact slope stability and affect the existing drainage infrastructure and cause roadway inundation. This was evidenced during Hurricane Helene, which resulted in numerous landslides along NC 105 and damaged drainage infrastructure along the corridor, including a culvert carrying Valley Creek beneath the roadway in Watauga County. Immediately after the storm, the NC 105 corridor was the #1 priority for NCDOT to reopen in the Department's 11th Highway Division due to the critical role this roadway would go on to play during recovery operations.

For families, residents, workers, and businesses, a more resilient N.C. 105 corridor will enhance economic benefits by minimizing detours during closures, reducing travel costs and delays, and supporting reliable access throughout the High-Country region, including medical access and access to construction materials during natural disaster recovery operations. The Project includes roadway widening, intersection improvements, paved shoulders, and a raised median to improve traffic flow and reduce crashes, in addition to upgraded drainage infrastructure and slope-stabilization measures to address flooding, erosion, and rockslide risks.

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Thank you for your consideration of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application, which will reduce climate-related disruptions, improve emergency access, and protect this critical route for residents, businesses, freight traffic, and visitors in Watauga County.

If I can provide additional information in support of the NCDOT's PROTECT grant application, please feel free to contact me at dgraham@hccog.org or by phone at (828) 265-5434 ext. 135.

Sincerely,

David Graham

David Graham
Transportation Planner
High Country Rural Planning Organization