October 6, 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 North Carolina Economic Development Association and its more than one-thousand members, 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.

NCDOT's proposed Project would improve a 5.5-mile stretch of NC 105 in Boone, Watauga County, running from Shulls Mill Road (SR 1568) to the NC 105 Bypass (SR 1107). Steep mountain terrain and the nearby Watauga River and its tributaries make this a difficult corridor to maintain and protect. Because few alternate routes exist, NC 105 is essential to the region's mobility and economy: emergency responders, patients seeking medical care, freight carriers, tourists, and daily commuters all depend on it. The corridor is also home to the region's primary suppliers of aggregate, hot mix asphalt, and ready-mix concrete.

Despite its importance, the roadway is highly exposed to severe weather. Intense rainfall, flash flooding, and winter storms undermine slope stability, strain the existing drainage infrastructure, and leave the road under water. Hurricane Helene made this vulnerability clear, triggering numerous landslides along NC 105 and damaging drainage structures throughout the corridor, including the culvert that carries Valley Creek beneath the roadway in Watauga County. In the storm's immediate aftermath, reopening NC 105 was NCDOT's number one priority in its 11th Highway Division because of the critical role the route would play in recovery operations.

Although not all our members are directly affected by this Project, supporting Western North Carolina has been a formally adopted priority for the Association since the devastation from Hurricane Helene, and we are glad to see this proposal put forward. We recognize that a more resilient NC 105 will deliver economic benefits to the families, residents, workers, and businesses of the High Country by limiting detours when closures occur, lowering travel costs and delays, and preserving dependable access

across the region. That includes access to medical care and to the construction materials needed for recovery after a natural disaster.

To improve traffic flow and reduce crashes, the Project will widen the roadway, improve intersections, add paved shoulders, and install a raised median. It will also upgrade drainage infrastructure and stabilize slopes to reduce the risks of flooding, erosion, and rockslides.

We appreciate your consideration of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application. This investment will reduce climate-related disruptions, strengthen emergency access, and safeguard a critical route for the residents, businesses, freight traffic, and visitors of Watauga County.

Sincerely,



André Lennon
2026-27 President, North Carolina Economic Development Association