Fiscal Years 2024 through 2026 Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation Competitive Grant Program, Resilience Grant Application, PROTECT



The NC 88 Mountain Corridor Resilience and Stabilization Project

Letters of Support

Applicant:
North Carolina Department of Transportation

October 9, 2026

Letters of Support

North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) PROTECT Grant

NC 88 Mountain Corridor Resilience and Stabilization Project

The following letters of support for the Project were provided by:

North Carolina State and Federal Agencies

North Carolina Elected Officials

Regional and Local Stakeholders

Ashe County Economic Development

Economic Development Partnership of NC

Ashe County Emergency Management

High Country Rural Planning Organization

NC Rural Center

North Carolina Alliance for Safe Transportation (NCAST)

Ashe County Chamber of Commerce

North Carolina General Assembly
Senate Chamber
State Legislative Building
Raleigh, NC 27601-2808

SENATOR RALPH E. HISE, JR.
47TH DISTRICT

October 8, 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 Senate District 47, I am pleased to express our strong support for North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)'s **NC 88 Mountain Corridor Resilience and 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 will modernize and fortify a highly vulnerable 3.76-mile mountainous section of NC 88 stretching from the NC 194 intersection in Smethport to the NC 194/NW School Road intersection in Warrensville. Located in the flood-prone Blue Ridge Mountain region, this critical corridor suffers from sharp curves and severe structural vulnerabilities to flooding along Buffalo Creek. The proposed project will replace two critically at-risk bridges over Buffalo Creek which were built in 1949 and are now rated as in poor condition (4 out of 10). The Project will also implement curve realignments, construct systemic drainage improvements, and add 5-foot paved shoulders along with a modern roundabout.

The NC 88 corridor serves as a primary logistics, economic, and emergency service spine for northern Ashe County. It serves rural residents, agricultural commerce, and local school bus routing. However, the existing infrastructure is not equipped to handle the intensified, severe weather events impacting the Appalachian high country. This was evidenced during Hurricane Helene, when full and partial closures of the roadway reduced the redundancy and reliability of the emergency transportation network serving the community. In rural mountainous areas, where alternate routes are limited, the loss or degradation of this primary transportation corridor could substantially increase emergency response times and create additional operational risks for both responders and the public. Widening the road, improving the horizontal alignment and providing paved shoulders will improve safety. The project also involves numerous rock cuts with soil nail walls that will stabilize the mountains above the road.

As the state senator representing nine counties in Western North Carolina, I have spent many years traveling through Ashe County and working closely with its communities. I have seen firsthand how vital NC 88 is to daily life in the High Country. This roadway is more than a connector between towns. It is a lifeline for families, farmers, educators, and first responders who rely on safe and dependable access in all seasons. The beauty of our mountain region also brings unique challenges, and even routine weather can quickly transform travel conditions. The recent impacts of Hurricane Helene only underscored how fragile this corridor has become and how urgently these improvements are needed to protect both residents and the essential services they depend on.

Thank you for your consideration of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application, which will transition a crucial rural artery into a storm-resilient corridor engineered to withstand severe inland precipitation and safeguard mountainous supply lines.

Sincerely,

County of Ashe
150 Government Circle, Suite 2500
Jefferson N. C. 28640

DEPARTMENT OF
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Phone: 336-846-5502
Fax: 336-846-5516

Sep 30, 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 Ashe County, I am pleased to express our strong support for North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)'s **NC 88 Mountain Corridor Resilience and 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.

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County of Ashe
150 Government Circle, Suite 2500
Jefferson N. C. 28640

DEPARTMENT OF
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Phone: 336-846-5502
Fax: 336-846-5516

From Ashe County's perspective, the resilience of NC 88 is particularly important because of the corridor's role in connecting the communities of northern Ashe County to the countywide transportation and emergency response network. The impacts experienced during Hurricane Helene demonstrated how quickly damage to a single mountain corridor can affect residents, businesses, agricultural operations, school transportation, and the ability of emergency personnel to move throughout the community. With limited alternative routes in this rural portion of the county, maintaining reliable access along NC 88 is essential not only during severe weather events, but also for the day-to-day movement of people, goods, and services. Strengthening this corridor will provide greater reliability for northern Ashe County while improving the county's ability to maintain access and emergency connectivity when other portions of the transportation network are disrupted.

Thank you for your consideration of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application, which will transition a crucial rural artery into a storm-resilient corridor engineered to withstand severe inland precipitation and safeguard mountainous supply lines.

Sincerely,

Nick Farmerie
Assistant County Manager/ Community Development Director
Ashe County

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP of NORTH CAROLINA

October 2, 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 Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC), I am pleased to express our strong support for North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)'s **NC 88 Mountain Corridor Resilience and 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.

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Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina
150 Fayetteville Street | Suite 900 | Raleigh NC 27601
Christopher.Chung@EDPNC.com | 919 447 7788 O | 919 724 7943 C

The EDPNC is tasked with economic development functions on the state's behalf – including business recruitment and foreign direct investment attraction, existing industry expansion, international trade and export assistance, and tourism promotion. Our efforts benefit greatly from increased transportation connectivity and capacity, not to mention improved resiliency in our physical infrastructure. The requested funding would aid significantly in bolstering the region and state's competitiveness for both corporate investment and travel visitation.

Thank you for your consideration of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application, which will transition a crucial rural artery into a storm-resilient corridor engineered to withstand severe inland precipitation and safeguard mountainous supply lines.

Sincerely,



Christopher Chung
Chief Executive Officer

Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina
150 Fayetteville Street | Suite 900 | Raleigh NC 27601
Christopher.Chung@EDPNC.com | 919 447 7788 O | 919 724 7943 C

County of Ashe

150 Government Circle Suite 2400
Jefferson, North Carolina 28640

DEPARTMENT OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
Phone: 336-846-5521
Fax: 336-846-5523
Patty.gambill@ashecountygov.com

September 29, 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 Ashe County Emergency Management, I am pleased to express our strong support for North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)'s **NC 88 Mountain Corridor Resilience and 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.

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For Ashe County Emergency Management and our partner emergency service agencies, the reliability of NC 88 is directly tied to our ability to protect lives and property. Emergency calls in the northern portion of the county routinely require coordinated response from fire departments, EMS, rescue squads, law enforcement, and emergency management personnel, many of whom must travel this corridor to reach residents and critical facilities. During Hurricane Helene and other severe weather events, flooding, slope instability, roadway damage, and closures along NC 88 have significantly constrained those response operations and reduced the availability of dependable alternate routes. When a primary route is compromised in a mountainous, rural area, emergency responders can face longer travel distances, delayed access, and increased operational hazards at the very time when rapid response is most critical. Strengthening this corridor will provide Ashe County's emergency services with a safer and more reliable transportation route, improve response and evacuation capabilities, and enhance the county's overall resilience to future flooding, landslides, and severe weather events.

Thank you for your consideration of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application, which will transition a crucial rural artery into a storm-resilient corridor engineered to withstand severe inland precipitation and safeguard mountainous supply lines.

Sincerely,
Patty Gambill

Patty Gambill,
Director

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 High Country Rural Planning Organization, I am pleased to express our strong support for North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)'s NC 88 Mountain Corridor Resilience and 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.

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468 New Market Blvd, Boone, NC 28607 * Phone – (828) 265-5434 * Fax – 828-265-5439 * E-mail-dgraham@hccog.org

Thank you for your consideration of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application, which will transition a crucial rural artery into a storm-resilient corridor engineered to withstand severe inland precipitation and safeguard mountainous supply lines.

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
Transportation Planner
High Country Rural Planning Organization

NC RURAL CENTER

October 2, 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 NC Rural Center, I am pleased to express our strong support for North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)'s **NC 88 Mountain Corridor Resilience and 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.

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Paula Benson
Chair
919.250.4314
ncruralcenter.org
Patrick N. Woodie
President & CEO
4021 Carya Drive
Raleigh, NC 27610

The NC Rural Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Our Tax ID is 56-1552375. Please consult with your tax professional for specific instructions.

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The NC Rural Center plays a vital role in strengthening economic opportunity across rural North Carolina by supporting infrastructure that connects markets, businesses, governments, farms, and households to each other. Safe and reliable roadways are especially critical for business and rural economies, which serve as a backbone of rural supply chains—moving agricultural products, timber, manufactured goods, and other locally produced commodities to distribution hubs and consumers. Approval of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application will ensure a critical stretch of the NC 88 corridor that connects a vital rural region in the northwest corner of North Carolina.

Thank you for your consideration of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application, which will transition a crucial rural artery into a storm-resilient corridor engineered to withstand severe inland precipitation and safeguard mountainous supply lines.

Sincerely,

Patrick N. Woodie

Patrick Woodie
President & CEO

The NC Rural Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Our Tax ID is 56-1552375. Please consult with your tax professional for specific instructions.

Paula Benson
Chair

Patrick N. Woodie
President & CEO

919.250.4314
ncruralcenter.org

4021 Carya Drive
Raleigh, NC 27610



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 Alliance for Safe Transportation and the Independent Insurance Agents of North Carolina, I am pleased to express our strong support for North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)'s **NC 88 Mountain Corridor Resilience and 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.

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Thank you for your consideration of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application, which will transition a crucial rural artery into a storm-resilient corridor engineered to withstand severe inland precipitation and safeguard mountainous supply lines.

Sincerely,

Joe Stewart
Executive Director, NC Alliance for Safe Transportation
Chief Advocacy Officer, Independent Insurance Agents of North Carolina

101 Weston Oaks Court Cary, NC 27513
www.iianc.com www.besafebnc.org

October 7, 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 Ashe County Chamber of Commerce, I am pleased to express our strong support for North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)'s **NC 88 Mountain Corridor Resilience and 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.

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This corridor is a critical part of connection from the northern area of the county, which is home to a larger number of our economically challenged residents to the larger towns where they are employed, have medical visits, and shop for supplies. Having safer access on these necessary travels is most necessary.
Thank you for your consideration of NCDOT's PROTECT grant application, which will transition a crucial rural artery into a storm-resilient corridor engineered to withstand severe inland precipitation and safeguard mountainous supply lines.

Sincerely,

Kitty Honeycutt
Executive Director
Ashe County Chamber of Commerce

01 N. Jefferson Ave, Ste. C, West Jefferson, North Carolina 28694
6) 846-9550 www.AsheChamber.com

