

Mid-Carolina Council of Governments

6205 Raeford Road • Telephone (910) 323-4191
Fayetteville, North Carolina 28304

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The program of investments outlined in the Fayetteville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's (FAMPO's) *improving Bragg Roads and Access for Greater Growth* Project ("iBRAGG" or "the Project" hereafter) application to the U.S. Department of Transportation's RAISE Program offers an opportunity for central North Carolina to Build Back Better. Implementation of iBRAGG will repair and rehabilitate approximately 47 miles of publicly accessible roadways within the U.S. Army Garrison (USAG) Fort Bragg, but outside of the cantonment and other secure areas.

These roads were originally designed and constructed to serve Fort Bragg's troop training functions and provide critical access to training areas, but they do not meet the State's design standards, resulting in unsafe and inefficient travel. The Project will bring the facilities into a state of good repair; enhance both regional and rural-urban connectivity, address erosion and stormwater management concerns, and improve resilience, road safety, and emergency service responses. The Project is an important step forward to connecting rural and urban central North Carolina by rebuilding and rehabilitating a vital portion of the region's road, bicycle, and pedestrian network to benefit commuters, the communities of the region, and enhance overall quality of life.

Fort Bragg, the core of the nation's current Global Response Force, is the major economic anchor for the Fayetteville metropolitan area. Fort Bragg has an annual economic impact of \$8.3 billion, and supports a population of over 276,000 military members, Department of Defense civilians, contract employees, retirees, and family members. Fort Bragg and the economic vitality of the region are highly integrated through a shared labor pool, contracting, regional partnerships, and coordination of public services and activities. As the region has grown, roads originally built to support the Army's training activities increasingly carry regional traffic – far exceeding the roads' original purpose.

The Project roads are used daily by the public to access essential services and employment centers around the larger metropolitan area as well as within Fort Bragg. In addition, regional cut-through traffic has grown in recent years as travelers use the Project roads to avoid nearby congested arterials. Consequently, a rising number of trips are made on poorly maintained roads. The Project will facilitate the upgrade of roadway operation and maintenance in the rural area of USAG Fort Bragg in the Fayetteville Metropolitan Area, yielding long-term travel time and cost savings, as well as reducing vehicle emissions by eliminating detour routes currently needed to circumvent unsafe roadway sections.

The Project will enable NCDOT to perform future construction, maintenance, and repair services for the Project roads, which are currently owned and maintained by the Army. Pursuant to a Memorandum of Agreement between the USAG Fort Bragg Garrison Commander and the NCDOT, once the project roads are up to State standards, the Department will add them to the State-maintained system.

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By transferring the identified roadways to NCDOT, annual road maintenance and repair costs will be reduced by 40 percent annually, allowing for higher quality, more efficient maintenance; providing savings to taxpayers while providing safer, well maintained roads for the traveling public.

The Project will also expand the region's bicycle and pedestrian facilities, improving multimodal access to essential services, providing an important connection along Plank Road between Raeford, Ft. Bragg, and Fayetteville, NC. The All-American Trail is an approximately 20-mile-long unpaved, educational, and scenic trail that follows the perimeter boundary of Fort Bragg through some of the last remaining preserved longleaf pine forest landscapes in the Nation, with a wealth of unique plant and wildlife species. The Project will construct 5-foot-wide paved shoulders along Plank Road for a 6-mile segment of the planned extension. This investment will improve walking, biking, and rolling access for predominantly minority and low-income neighborhoods adjacent to USAG Fort Bragg. This investment will improve the connectivity of these communities to activity centers in Moore County as well as essential services located within Fort Bragg's cantonment area.

While the Project addresses multiple evaluation criteria for the RAISE program, enhancing the economic competitiveness of the region through improved rural-urban connectivity is at the heart of this project. This RAISE grant, when combined with significant State investment in road improvements throughout the region, will position North Carolina to immediately move forward to improve the state of good repair, enhance commuter safety and emergency response capabilities, expand the region's bicycle and pedestrian facilities, reduce the harmful environmental effects of erosion, and improve the quality of life for civilian commuters and DoD contractors, residents, soldiers, military family members and retirees, and tourists. NCDOT's and USAG Fort Bragg's consistent commitment to bringing the Project roads into a state of good repair makes the transfer a prudent investment that will increase the return on federal investments and proactively protect existing transportation assets.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support the *improving Bragg Roads and Access for Greater Growth* Project and FAMPO's application for federal RAISE grant funding to accelerate its construction.

Sincerely,



Justin Hembree

Director

Mid-Carolina Council of Governments