



Mid-Carolina Council of Governments Rural Transportation Planning Organization

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RURAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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April 25, 2022

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 (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 improve the National's rural infrastructure. iBRAGG proposes to 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 designed and constructed to serve the Fort Bragg troop training functions and provide troop access to training areas but do not meet the State's design standards resulting in unsafe and inefficient travel. The Project will bring the roads into a state of good repair to enhance rural-urban connectivity, address erosion and stormwater management concerns and improve resilience, increase road safety, and improve emergency services response. The Project is an important step forward to connecting rural and urban central North Carolina by rebuilding and rehabilitating what has become a vital portion of the region's road, bicycle, and pedestrian network to benefit the region's commuters.

Fort Bragg is the core of the nation's current Global Response Force, as well as an 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 and 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, for which the base is neither an origin nor a destination, has grown in recent years as travelers use the Project roads

to avoid nearby congested arterials and reduce vehicle miles travelled. Consequently, a rising number of trips are being made on poorly maintained roads that were not originally designed to meet NCDOT standards. The Project will facilitate the upgrade of roadway 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 subject roads, which are currently owned and maintained by the Army. Pursuant to the Memorandum of Agreement signed by the USAG Fort Bragg Garrison Commander and the Secretary of NCDOT on May 2, 2019, NCDOT will accept ownership and perform maintenance on the Project roads. These agreements were developed in-tandem through a collaborative facilitation process that identified mutual benefits based on each stakeholder's needs and capacities; taken together, these agreements represent an innovative Public-Public Partnership that will create efficiencies in the repair and maintenance of all roads within Fort Bragg, including the Project roads. The transfer of operating and maintenance responsibilities from Fort Bragg to NCDOT will allow NCDOT to maintain the roads at a higher quality more efficiently. By transferring roadway repair and maintenance responsibilities to NCDOT, annual road maintenance and repair costs will be reduced by 40 percent annually, providing value to North Carolina taxpayers while the regional traveling public will enjoy well maintained roads. The iBRAGG Project will provide the needed financial resources to repair the Project roads and serve as the catalyst for NCDOT to assume responsibility for future maintenance and repair activities.

The Project will also expand the region's bicycle and pedestrian facilities to improve multimodal access to essential services. The Project will also provide an important connection for bicyclists and pedestrians along Plank Road between Raeford 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 preserved longleaf pine forest land with a wealth of plant and wildlife species. This trail is planned to eventually extend through Cumberland, Hoke, and Moore Counties — linking the Fayetteville Metropolitan Area with Southern Pines. The Project will construct 5-foot wide paved shoulders along Plank Road for a 6-mile segment of the planned extension. This investment was targeted to 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, would 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 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 and the USAG Fort Bragg commit to bringing the roads into a state of good repair consistent

with state standards, making the transfer a prudent investment that will increase the return on federal investments and proactively protect existing transportation assets.

For these reasons, we 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,

Michael A. Rutan, Director, Mid-Carolina Rural Planning Organization

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael A. Rutan", is positioned above a thin horizontal line. To the right of the signature, there is a vertical yellow bar.