



Southwestern Commission

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regiona.org

February 20, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Southwestern Commission Council of Governments was formed in 1965 to serve the seven western-most counties in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina. Also in 1965, Congress dedicated funds to the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) to connect Appalachian communities to the Interstate System and generate economic opportunity. The completed sections of the ADHS have been successful at generating positive economic benefits and improving the quality of life for the residents of western North Carolina.

However, a critical section of Corridor K in Graham County, NC has yet to be completed due to the challenging topography and concerns over the environmental impacts of a multi-lane highway. Several years ago, the Southwestern Commission administered a regional visioning effort to help move beyond the impasse on Corridor K. This effort led to a truly collaborative approach between ARC, FHWA, NCDOT, EPA, state natural resource agencies, tribal governments, local officials, advocacy groups, and local community members. After 60 years, NCDOT and their partners have developed a viable solution to complete this section of Corridor K. Yet rising construction costs and reduced ADHS funding mean that these hard-earned plans are sitting on the shelf. It is imperative that additional federal funds are awarded for this project to meet the critical connectivity needs of the region as originally intended by the Appalachian Development Act of 1965. The Southwestern Commission strongly supports the GRAHAM project and NCDOT's application for federal RAISE grant funding to make the final improvements to Corridor K.

Sincerely,

Russ Harris
Executive Director

Southwestern Commission does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, marital status, color, religion, national origin or disability

Cherokee County
Andrews
Murphy

Clay County
Hayesville

Graham County
Robbinsville
Lake Santeetlah
Fontana Dam

Haywood County
Canton
Clyde
Maggie Valley
Waynesville

Jackson County
Dillsboro
Forest Hills
Sylva
Webster

Macon County
Franklin
Highlands

Swain County
Bryson City

**Eastern Band
of Cherokee
Indians**