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September 10, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of myself and the community I was born in, I enthusiastically support the City of Greensboro and North Carolina Department of Transportation's collaborative application for a planning grant under the U.S. Department of Transportation's Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Program, in partnership with the Greensboro Metropolitan Planning Organization.

I understand the Plan will study the seven-mile segment of US 29 between I-40 and I-785 in East Greensboro, an access-controlled highway bisecting a historically Black community. Its construction destroyed important community assets, and this physical barrier continues to limit mobility and community connectivity. The neighborhoods impacted by the construction of US 29 have an ongoing legacy of Environmental Justice concerns related to poverty, vehicle access, and air pollution.

The Plan will be developed through a process to gauge the issues, envision the future, build solutions, and measure success. Local stakeholders will be engaged in each step, and I believe this focus on community involvement will help rebuild community trust and provide valuable insight into the lived experience of local residents. A shared vision for the roadway will help to identify mobility needs and appropriate multimodal solutions to meaningfully address the historical inequities created by US 29. I hope this Plan can serve as a template for future transportation planning efforts in Greensboro as the City and State partner to create a safer, more equitable, and sustainable transportation system.

The incursion of US 29 into the segregated, oppressed, but resilient and proud African American community of Greensboro, NC, caused additional disruption to an area that was already being (or would be) impacted by redlining, urban renewal, civil rights, educational, and other challenges. US 29 bisected our community. Neighborhoods were cut off from each other. A main access route to go to downtown Greensboro on Gorrell Street was taken away for many, further changed with the addition of Murrow Blvd. North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University became blocked from eastward expansion. Access to Nocho Park became challenged by both US 29 and Gate City Blvd. Lincoln Junior High School and Dudley High School became isolated to westward communities. And so much more but let me stop with this. At a time when walking was the main mode of transportation, walks became longer. Development over the years has not eased these woes, but in many ways made them worse. This can easily be seen during a drive on US 29 with an observant glance to the left and right. It will reveal the impact. Much needs to be done to mitigate these wrongs!

Greensboro has a deep, nationally significant history of activism dating back to its central role in the civil rights movement. This Plan will build on this legacy by creating a multimodal blueprint to retrofit this critical corridor, mitigate past harm, and serve the community it once marginalized. Due to this rich history, the project is titled “Accelerating Greensboro Growth by Increasing Equity and Safety” or “AGGIES” for short.

Of note, people connected to North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University in Greensboro are also called “Aggies” and use the slogan “Aggies Pride!” For a campus hemmed in and bisected at a certain point by US 29, this project title (if used) will carry an important mission to get it right and become an additional source of pride!

I hope you will favorably consider this funding request.

Sincerely,

B. Bernetae Reed

Oral Historian

Conversations in Black: African American History and Heritage, Greensboro, N.C.

An overlay of 1951 aerial view of Greensboro

