



BRUNSWICK
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

September 13, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Growing Rural Equity and Access to Transportation in North Carolina (GREAT-NC)** application to the USDOT's 2023 Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Program's Regional Partnerships Challenge Grant. GREAT-NC is partnership between North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and the Great Trails State Coalition (GTSC), a diverse coalition of 87 agencies, municipalities and organizations advocating for increased state investment in all forms of non-motorized trails in North Carolina. GREAT-NC will address the persistent regional mobility challenge that North Carolina's rural, disadvantaged communities face in accessing federal funding to retrofit roads with safe biking, walking, and crossing infrastructure.

Historically, North Carolina's pattern of rural road development has systemically favored automobile travel at the expense of access for pedestrians and cyclists. This practice divided rural communities with high-speed, high-traffic roadways which typically excluded facilities for biking and walking. Compounding this challenge, in 2013 North Carolina lawmakers prohibited state funding for independent bicycle and pedestrian projects. As a result, rural and disadvantaged communities have fallen further behind communities with more resources when it comes to the design and construction of biking and walking facilities.

GREAT-NC will address these disparities by creating a construction-ready pipeline of approximately 148 miles of pedestrian and bicycle facilities found in the Great Trail State Plan and located in economically disadvantaged, rural communities, while building local capacity for project delivery to support the creation of safe and equitable bicycle and pedestrian access to daily destinations in rural North Carolina. GREAT-NC will create context-sensitive transportation solutions that are more affordable, safe, and accessible for all.

Capitalizing on the momentum generated by the Great Trails State Plan and the designation of 2023 as North Carolina's "Year of the Trail" by the North Carolina General Assembly, NCDOT and GTSC will establish a robust capacity building program that includes a statewide conference, the creation of technical assistance positions to directly support communities implementing GREAT-NC projects, and the convening of the Cities, Towns and Counties for Trails Working Group to serve as a peer group for participating communities.

Brunswick Community College serves the fastest growing county in the state of NC and one of the fastest growing counties in the United States, ranking 7th in the U.S. Census 2022 Vintage Report. This growth has been steady through the years, illustrated by an increase of more than 40% since 2010 (from 107,431 in 2010 to 153,064 in 2022). Rural Brunswick County is increasingly a choice for business investment due to factors such as our proximity to key transportation resources. We are known as a premier tourist destination with our stunning beaches, and as a preferred location for second homes, relocation, and retirement. In our rural community we have an overwhelming number of two-lane roads with little to no opportunity for safe biking, walking, or crossing infrastructure. As our population continues to increase, the need for regional mobility in our rural community will persist in order to provide safe and equitable bicycle and pedestrian access to our local destinations, which includes our institution and places of employment for our commuter students, which make up every student that attends Brunswick Community College.

Thank you for your consideration of the GREAT NC's application for funding through the NAE Regional Partnerships Challenge program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "S".

Dr. Gene Smith, President
Brunswick Community College