

September 28, 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.

The Carolina Thread Trail is a regional trail network and a 501(c)(3), with a vision and mission to connect towns and cities to nature and to each other, throughout the region surrounding Charlotte, NC. Our master-planned footprint covers 15 counties. Almost 400 miles of the planned 1630 miles are on the ground, as a result of 15 years of partnerships with other non-profits, local governments, and state agencies. Much of our footprint is rural, as distance from Charlotte increases. However, most of the completed parts of our trail network are in urban areas. Our rural partners have difficulty providing the staff and funding to help create the Thread Trail routes that their officials adopted during our collaborative planning process. Our own grants to these partners can rarely cover the full cost of design and construction, but sometimes serve as matching funds. The USDOT Neighborhood Access and Equity Program's Regional Partnerships Challenge Grant would go a long way to start filling the active transportation gaps for our rural areas. This is why we enthusiastically support the GREAT-NC application to your program.

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 147 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.

Sincerely,



Bret Baronak,  
Director