



CITY OF MARION
P.O. Drawer 700
Marion, North Carolina 28752

OFFICE OF THE
CITY MANAGER

September 19, 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.

The City of Marion is an economically disadvantaged community with a 22% poverty rate according to the U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Our community's natural topography is a limiting factor for building affordable, safe, and accessible pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. The City does not have the financial capacity to build paved non-motorized transportation corridors when also confronted with other critical infrastructure and social needs, but it does not make the need for these facilities any less important to the health and well-being of the community. As a beneficiary of the NAE program, construction of a non-motorized side path along our Main Street would also support economic growth within the community. Approximately, twenty percent of the county's land area is owned and managed by the Pisgah National Forest. Visitors come to the area to take advantage of the natural environment and recreational pursuits. This funding would directly connect our Main Street to public lands, and would serve as a catalyst for even greater economic revitalization.

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

Sincerely,



J. Robert Boyette, City Manager
City of Marion