

East Coast



Greenway
ALLIANCE

September 21, 2023

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

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Executive Director

Dennis Markatos-Soriano

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

On behalf of the East Coast Greenway Alliance, 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 systematically 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.



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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.

The nonprofit East Coast Greenway Alliance (ECGA) leads the development of the East Coast Greenway, a walking and biking route stretching 3,000 miles from Maine to Florida, connecting our nation’s most populated corridor. The East Coast Greenway is designed to transform the 15 states and 450 communities it connects through active and healthy lifestyles, sustainable transportation, community engagement, climate resilience, tourism, and more. We work with hundreds of volunteers, partner organizations, and officials at the local, state, regional and national level to continue moving more of the route onto protected paths. Together, we are connecting people to nature and communities via a safe, accessible Greenway.

The East Coast Greenway Alliance enthusiastically supports GREAT-NC for its potential to be transformative for many North Carolina communities, including several along the East Coast Greenway route. Five of the proposed projects (7. Butner to Oxford ECG; 8. Johnston County ECG; 10. NC-211 ECG; 12. Washington-Greenville Greenway; and 13. Chocowinity-Washington Connector) are collocated with the East Coast Greenway route, and have gone through extensive planning and community engagement, including completed or in-progress feasibility studies. Once completed, any one of these projects taken alone will be substantial advancements for the ECG, but together will be an unprecedented leap in progress towards equitable and accessible transportation options in and between our rural and disadvantaged North Carolina partner communities. Additionally, as an executive member of the GTSC, ECGA sees GREAT-NC as particularly strategic in cultivating the statewide trail ecosystem to expand our collective capacity to not only effectively deliver on these projects, but use them as a catalyst to leverage the development of a statewide Great Trails State Network.



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ECGA strongly supports NAE funding GREAT-NC, and we look forward to participating in successful project deliver that helps advance this transformational partnership. Thank you for your consideration of the GREAT NC's application for funding through the NAE Regional Partnerships Challenge program.

Sincerely,

Dennis Markatos-Soriano
Executive Director
East Coast Greenway Alliance

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