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September 28, 2023

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

RE: Growing Rural Access and Equity to Transportation in North Carolina Grant Application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

Please accept this letter of support for the **Growing Rural Access and Equity to Transportation in North Carolina Grant Application (GREAT-NC)** application to USDOT's 2023 Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Program's Regional Partnerships Challenge Grant. GREAT-NC is a 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 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.

We hope to be lucky enough to work on a GREAT-NC project if USDOT selects this project for investment. Thank you for your consideration of GREAT NC's application for funding through the NAE Regional Partnerships Challenge program.

Sincerely,

Michael L Holder, PE
Gannett Fleming, Inc.
VP, Transportation Services