

September 28, 2023

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

RE: USDOT 2023 Neighborhood Access and Equity Program Regional Partnership Challenge Grant

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.

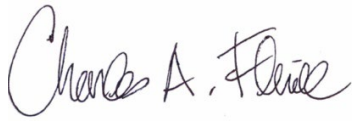
GREAT-NC will address these disparities by creating a construction-ready pipeline of approximately 147 miles of pedestrian and bicycle facilities found in the Great Trail State Plan and located in economically disadvantaged, rural communities, while building local capacity for project delivery to support 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.

NC State University's Initiative for Community Growth and Development addresses issues, challenges and opportunities facing North Carolina communities related to real estate development, economic growth, infrastructure build-out, ecosystem conservation and other associated community development matters. The work of the Initiative is grounded in NC State University's land grant mission, and we accomplish our work through three focus areas: academics, engagement, and research. The goal of the Initiative is to test various community growth and development strategies, particularly in areas that intersect with economic, social, and environmental impact and benefit. Much of our work is accomplished in rural North Carolina communities.

Becoming a recipient of the USDOT 2023 Neighborhood Access and Equity Program grant would enable our state to address urgent needs throughout rural North Carolina. 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 that reads "Chuck A. Flink". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chuck Flink, FASLA
Director, Initiative for Community
Growth and Development
NC State University
College of Design
Campus Box 7710
117B Brooks Hall
Raleigh, NC 27695-7701