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House of Representatives

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September 14, 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.

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.

I represent District 93 (Ashe, Alleghany and Watauga Counties) in the North Carolina House of Representatives. In 2021, I was proud to vote for House Bill 554, which, as noted above, designated 2023 as North Carolina's "Year of the Trail." This bill passed with broad bipartisan support and was eventually signed into law by Governor Roy Cooper. Trails play a big part in my district's communities, where residents and visitors enjoy of the scenic beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the charm of our small towns.

West Jefferson, located in Ashe County, is one of the jewels of District 93. Funding from GREAT-NC would be beneficial to West Jefferson. Funds would cover the design (and potentially help fund construction) of the of a 1.2 mile sidewalk going from downtown West Jefferson to the Ingles Grocery Store and CVS Pharmacy located on US Hwy 221. This project falls under the 148 miles of pedestrian and bicycle facilities identified in the Great Trails State Plan and is identified as #4 West Jefferson Sidewalk Connector: GTSP Segment 11J – Virginia Creeper Trail to Banner Elk. This connection would help increase West Jefferson's walkability and build on a variety of other improvements also being made in the area that help to foster accessibility and revitalization.

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, appearing to read "Ray Pickett", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rep. Ray Pickett  
District 93 (Ashe, Alleghany and Watauga Counties)  
North Carolina House of Representatives