

September 22, 2023

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

Re: Growing Rural Equity and Access to Transportation in North Carolina application

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

I write on behalf of the Southern Environmental Law Center to express our support for the **Growing Rural Equity and Access to Transportation in North Carolina (GREAT-NC)** application for 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.

The Southern Environmental Law Center is a non-profit organization that works to protect the basic right to clean air, clean water, and a livable climate; to preserve our region's natural treasures and rich biodiversity; and to provide a healthy environment for all. Among other priorities, we advocate for equitable land use and transportation solutions that reduce carbon emissions and other air pollution and promote better connected communities.

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.

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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.

SELC strongly supports active transportation infrastructure as a necessary component of a clean transportation future. Thank you for your consideration of the GREAT NC's application for funding through the NAE Regional Partnerships Challenge program.

Sincerely,



Megan Kimball
Senior Attorney