

THE
CONSERVATION FUND

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September 15, 2023

The Honorable J. Eric Boyette
Secretary of Transportation
NC Department of Transportation
1501 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-1501

Re: Support of Growing Rural Equity & Access to Transportation (GREAT-NC) Application

Dear Secretary Boyette:

I am writing on behalf of the Conservation Fund to strongly support the NC Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) **Growing Rural Equity and Access to Transportation in North Carolina (GREAT-NC)** application to the US Department of Transportation's 2023 Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Program's Regional Partnerships Challenge Grant.

GREAT-NC is partnership between 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 like many states has invested in roads and highways in its rural areas and has underinvested in bicycling and pedestrian projects. This practice often divided rural communities with high-speed, high-traffic roadways and made walking and cycling unsafe. Unfortunately, in 2013 the NC General Assembly prohibited state funding for independent bicycle and pedestrian projects. As a result, rural and disadvantaged communities have fallen further behind.

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.

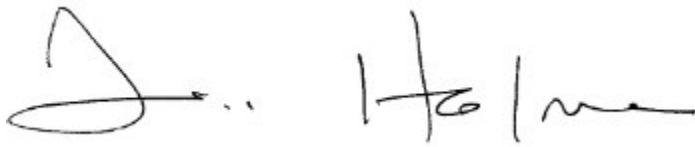
Capitalizing on the momentum generated by the Great Trails State Plan and the designation of 2023 as North Carolina's "Year of the Trail" by the North Carolina General Assembly, NCDOT and GTSC will establish a robust capacity building program that includes a statewide conference, the creation of

technical assistance positions to directly support communities implementing GREAT-NC projects, and the and the convening of the Cities, Towns and Counties for Trails Working Group to serve as a peer group for participating communities.

The Conservation Fund is proud to be an active member of the GTSC and a partner with many local governments and non-profit organizations in providing both paved and natural surface trails to connect rural and urban communities.

Thank you for NCDOT's leadership on developing the GREAT-NC proposal for consideration by USDOT.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Holman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and "H".

Bill Holman
NC State Director