



Buncombe County Commissioners

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December 1, 2014

Secretary Anthony Tata
North Carolina Department of Transportation
1550 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1550

RE: I-26 Connector Project through Asheville

Dear Secretary Tata:

Once again, many thanks for your ongoing focus and efforts around seeing the I-26 Connector become a successful project for Asheville, Buncombe County and the region. We especially appreciate your speaking with us and embracing the principles laid out in the resolution jointly adopted soon thereafter by our City Council and County Commission (attached).

We are happy to report that our ad-hoc "Working Group" has remained active and cohesive through the year and is staying in touch with your staff as well as other stakeholders and the community. We write today to ask your assistance in bringing focus to two of the items addressed in our resolution that are of concern to us and the Working Group.

The first is that of scale through the "A" section of the project, referenced in the fifth paragraph of our resolution. There remains significant public concern as to number of lanes to be included through this section. We believe that in order for the community to have confidence in the project and ultimately support it, it must understand the drivers behind the size and see that all options are being fairly and thoroughly considered. To that end, we ask you to take these three important steps:

- 1) Please ensure that the project plan/design team communicates thoroughly with the local community and stakeholder groups on this matter.
- 2) Please request that FHWA work with your staff to help Asheville/Buncombe County leaders better understand the current design requirements placed on the project (level of service, design speed, etc.) as well as explore options for flexibility of those standards under FHWA guidelines. We understand that new traffic modeling is currently yielding additional data that may influence the scale of Section A, but there is likely more for us to understand. We ask for your help here specifically because FHWA has so far been unwilling to engage in this dialogue without a specific request from NC DOT that it do so.
- 3) Please ensure that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) encompasses a broad array of alternatives as to project scale in the "A" section so that the public has confidence that a proper array of alternatives are being fairly considered.

The second is in regard to neighborhood connections, sound walls, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities to be integrated into the project. We think that inclusion of these key elements is necessary in order for the community to accept the impacts that come with the project otherwise. The final paragraph of our resolution lays out our request that planning and design for these elements be clearly incorporated into the draft EIS. While our Working Group has had productive general conversations with DOT staff regarding feasibility and conceptual approaches, and we have provided DOT with relevant parts of our master plans, we do not yet have the sense that DOT plans to include the proper amount of detail for these aspect of the project in the draft EIS. We hope you will ensure their proper inclusion in the EIS.

Again, we appreciate your interest in this project. We continue to believe that with continued collaboration, the state and local community can together advance this project in a unified way. Please let us know how we can help ensure that it is as successful as possible.

Sincerely,

David Gantt, Chair
Buncombe County Commission

Esther Manheimer, Mayor
City of Asheville