



April 28, 2015

Via E-mail and U.S. Mail

Governor Pat McCrory
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The Honorable Tim Moore
North Carolina House of Representatives
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The Honorable Phil Berger
North Carolina Senate
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Re: Proposed Transportation & Infrastructure Bond and Non-Highway Projects

Dear Governor McCrory, Senator Berger and Speaker Moore:

We write to request that you consider increased investment in non-highway projects in the proposed \$3 billion transportation and infrastructure bond. Currently the proposed package allocates just 3% of funding to such projects. We urge you to stay true to the principles of the Governor’s 25-Year Transportation Vision and designate a greater percentage of funding for projects that will serve the needs of *all* North Carolinians and advance the ambitious goals the Governor has set for our growing State.

Governor McCrory’s Transportation Vision

Last fall, the Governor set out his 25-Year “Transportation Vision” for the state.¹ This “Vision” purported to “serve as a roadmap for strategic transportation investment over the next quarter century to ensure we are fully leveraging our transportation system.”² The Vision included strong statements of support for non-highway transportation, making recommendations

¹ *Governor McCrory’s 25 Year Vision: Mapping Our Future*, available at <http://www.ncdot.gov/ncvision25/> .

² *Id.*

such as expanding “access to mass–transit options” and passenger rail to “accommodate a changing demographic and address congestion issues.”³ The Vision also included the aim of enabling North Carolina to “become a premier place for walking and bicycling” and making it easier and safer for people to walk, bicycle, drive or use public transportation services.⁴ The Vision recognized that such steps would “enhance the quality of life throughout the state.”⁵

Despite these bold statements, North Carolina’s Department of Transportation (“NCDOT”), far from increasing investment in non-highway modes of transportation, has actually *cut* funding for such projects. In the draft 10-year State Transportation Improvement Program (“STIP”) recently proposed by NCDOT, a mere 2% of all transportation funds have been set aside for all non-highway projects (this encompasses not just rail, transit, bicycle and pedestrian projects, but also ferries and aviation). Such minimal funding does not represent the level of investment called for in the Governor’s Vision.⁶

The Governor’s proposed bond package likewise falls short of the aims articulated in the Vision. Rather than making robust investments in all modes of transportation, the bond is geared primarily toward highway projects. Specific highway projects were picked because they have environmental permits in hand, and did not score highly enough under the STI to be funded in the 10-year STIP. There are a vast number of non-highway projects that also meet these criteria. An initial list provided by NCDOT suggests that over 250 rail, transit, bike, and pedestrian projects are ready to be built, yet are unfunded. Compared to highway projects, these investments are relatively inexpensive and quick to build. Including a greater percentage of such projects in the bond package would instantly employ workers across the state and quickly provide innumerable benefits to North Carolina’s communities.

As such, we urge you to revisit the proposed bond package and direct a greater percentage of the proposed borrowed funds toward shovel-ready non-highway projects. We also urge that the bond include greater specificity. While the Governor’s proposal specifically designates \$50 million for “rail,” it is unclear whether this is passenger rail, freight rail, light or heavy rail. And there is even less specificity included in the designation of \$50 million for “non-highway projects.” As written, this entire amount could be directed to aviation projects, for example. Given the recognized import of public transportation, bicycle and pedestrian projects, we encourage that funding be clearly and specifically designated for such modes.

Investing in Non-Highway Projects Will Boost the Economy

It has been well documented that increasingly big businesses and major corporations are choosing to locate in areas that provide the improved quality of life that comes with walkable communities and a solid range of transportation options. Mercedes-Benz recently moved to downtown Atlanta, citing a desire to be close to a public transit station.⁷ Similarly, Kaiser

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *See id.*

⁷ Matt Kempner and J. Scott Trubey, *MARTA a sudden factor in company moves*, THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION (Jan. 16, 2015), available at <http://arcnewsmanager.atlantaregional.com/templates/?a=54102>.

Permanente picked Georgia over Colorado for its newest technology hub, which will employ 900 people, specifically because of the walkability and transit options available in Atlanta.⁸ If North Carolina wishes to keep pace and remain attractive to new residents and businesses, it must invest not only in more highways, but in a range of transportation options favored by big corporations and the younger generation of workers they seek to employ.^{9,10}

Governor McCrory's wise investment in public transportation as Mayor of Charlotte has already reaped tremendous economic development benefits. Charlotte's light rail system, the LYNX line, has revitalized Uptown by stimulating a boom in development along the transit corridor.¹¹ Since 2005, the Blue Line has generated approximately \$900 million in development projects completed within a ½ mile of the Blue Line Stations, transforming portions of Uptown from vacant or underutilized parcels to vibrant, pedestrian friendly communities including housing, restaurants, retail and small businesses.¹² Charlotte Area Transit System staff project that approximately \$500M of additional development projects are in the pipeline.¹³ Additionally, the Blue Line Extension (slated to open in 2017) is already attracting private development, with over \$200 million in new projects already announced or currently under construction.¹⁴ We encourage the Governor to extend the successful approach he employed in Charlotte to the whole state and carry on the essential investment in transportation choices.

Investing in Quality of Life for All North Carolinians

As recognized in the Governor's Vision, North Carolina's changing demographics make the availability of mobility choices increasingly critical to ensure each and every citizen can have a high quality of life. North Carolina's rapidly urbanizing population demands a range of transportation solutions to combat congestion, long commute times and wasted time spent behind the wheel.¹⁵ Providing additional active transportation options also benefits overall community physical and mental health. The environmental benefits of enhanced public transportation options are well known. Expanded non-automobile options are of particular importance in areas

⁸ Maria Saporta, *Transit and walkability key factors in Kaiser Permanente's decision to put 900 new jobs in Midtown* (Apr. 17, 2015), available at <http://saportareport.com/transit-and-walkability-key-factors-in-kaiser-permanentes-decision-to-put-900-new-jobs-in-midtown/>.

⁹ See, e.g., U.S. PIRG, *Transportation and the New Generation, Why Young People Are Driving Less and What It Means for Transportation Policy* (Apr. 2012), available at <http://www.uspirg.org/reports/usp/transportation-and-new-generation>.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Jennifer Polland, *Presenting: The 15 Hottest American Cities of the Future*, BUSINESS INSIDER (June 2012), available at <http://www.businessinsider.com/up-and-coming-cities-2012-6?op=1>.

¹¹ See, e.g., Kerry Singe, *Charlotte's light rail creates boom in apartments* (Dec. 7, 2012), CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, available at <http://www.wncn.com/news/local/Charlottes-light-rail-creates-boom-in-apartments-182546581.html>; Ely Portillo, *Uptown Whole Foods, apartments, hotels to open in 2017 on Stonewall Street*, CHARLOTTE OBSERVER (Feb. 11, 2015), available at <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/incoming/article10429886.html>.

¹² Communication from Tina M. Votaw, Transit Oriented Development Specialist at City of Charlotte, Charlotte Area Transit System (Apr. 22, 2015), on file with SELC.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Richard Stradling & David Raynor, *Triangle Counties among fastest-growing in NC, census data show*, NEWS & OBSERVER (Mar. 27, 2014), available at <http://www.newsobserver.com/2014/03/27/3737118/census-estimates-show-uneven-growth.html>.

with persistent air quality problems like the Charlotte metropolitan region, as the emissions from traffic congestion greatly deteriorate area air quality.¹⁶

Such investment is also critical to addressing the needs of North Carolina's aging population.¹⁷ Public transit options are essential to older adults, many of whom can no longer drive due to deteriorating eyesight or personal mobility.¹⁸ Without other mobility options, older adults are often left without access to important services such as grocery stores, doctors' offices, and religious organizations as well as a limited ability to visit friends and family.¹⁹ Expanded transportation options also create opportunities for low-income families that may not otherwise exist due to the prohibitively expensive nature of owning and operating an automobile. Providing a greater range of options allows these individuals access to employment centers, colleges, and other resources that will enable them to raise their standard of living.

In his 25-Year Vision, the Governor recognized the myriad benefits that a strong range of transportation choices can provide to North Carolina. We urge you to stay true to the goals he has articulated and make the funding of economy-boosting non-highway projects a priority for the State.

Sincerely,



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Staff Attorney
Southern Environmental Law Center



Karen Rindge
Executive Director
WakeUP Wake County



Shannon Binns
Executive Director
Sustain Charlotte

¹⁶ Environmental Protection Agency Office of Mobile Sources, AUTOMOBILE EMISSIONS: AN OVERVIEW (1994).

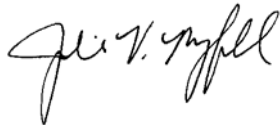
¹⁷ NCDOT 2040 Plan, at 12, 20, 23-24, available at <http://www.ncdot.gov/performance/reform/2040plan/>.

¹⁸ See Transportation for America, *Aging in Place: Stuck Without Options* (2011), available at t4america.org/docs/SeniorsMobilityCrisis.pdf.

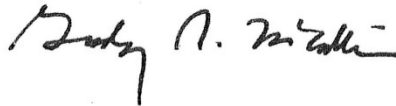
¹⁹ NCDOT 2040 Plan at 12.



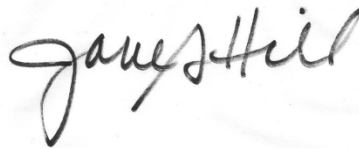
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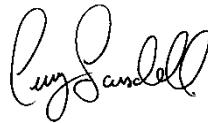
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cc (via E-mail and U.S. Mail):

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The Honorable Frank Iler, N.C. House of Representatives
The Honorable John A. Torbett, N.C. House of Representatives

The Honorable Paul Tine, N.C. House of Representatives
The Honorable Dana Bumgardner, N.C. House of Representatives
The Honorable Nathan Baskerville, N.C. House of Representatives
The Honorable Duane Hall, N.C. House of Representatives
The Honorable Carl Ford, N.C. House of Representatives
The Honorable Evelyn Terry, N.C. House of Representatives
The Honorable Grier Martin, N.C. House of Representatives
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The Honorable Wesley Meredith, N.C. Senate
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