Buncombe County Board of Commissioners

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Amanda Edwards	Al Whitesides	Martin Moore	Parker Sloan
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May 19, 2026

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy:

On behalf of the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners, we write in support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's application for the Western North Carolina Rail Safety Modernization Program – Phase I through the Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program for Fiscal Years 2025–2026.

For Buncombe County and communities across our region, this project represents an important step toward restoring passenger rail service to Western North Carolina and building a more connected regional transportation network for the future. NCDOT's Western North Carolina Passenger Rail Feasibility Study highlighted the transformative potential of reconnecting Asheville and Western North Carolina to the state's passenger rail network through the Salisbury-to-Asheville corridor.

The proposed program will enhance rail and vehicle safety by upgrading highway-rail grade crossing signals. The Program consists of capital projects in Rowan, Iredell, and Catawba Counties in western North Carolina and will enhance at-grade crossings by replacing more than 40 highway-rail grade crossing signals across more than 50 miles of track.

While these specific improvements are not located in Buncombe County, they are foundational investments in the long-term success, safety, and reliability of rail infrastructure serving the broader Western North Carolina corridor. These at-grade crossing safety enhancements will not only decrease vehicle exposure and improve public safety but also provide greater operational efficiency for freight rail providers.

The Western North Carolina Rail Safety Modernization Program – Phase I will create safer movements through rural and urban communities and business centers alike, contributing to the continued economic revitalization of Western North Carolina while helping prepare the corridor for future passenger rail service connecting our region to Charlotte, the Piedmont Triad, and beyond.

Passenger rail has the potential to strengthen economic opportunity, support tourism, improve regional mobility, and provide a safer and more resilient transportation option for

residents and visitors alike. Investments like these help move Western North Carolina toward a more interconnected future.

The Buncombe County Board of Commissioners strongly supports this application and respectfully urges the U.S. Department of Transportation to fund the Western North Carolina Rail Safety Modernization Program – Phase I.

Thank you for your consideration.

Thank you,

Amanda Edwards
Chair, Board of Commissioners