

Thank you, I come before the committee today in support of designating US-74 from Columbus, North Carolina to Kings Mountain, North Carolina as a future interstate and to advocate for codifying this designation in the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill.

North Carolina's US-74 corridor passes through largely rural regions of the state and is characterized by inconsistent travel speeds, bottlenecks at signaled intersections, and a high occurrence of vehicle accidents as the corridor moves through regional centers. The highway is also a crucial evacuation route for the southeast of the state in times of severe weather events.

US-74 provides a direct route between several interstates and is a vital freight corridor, but previous studies have identified the need to upgrade the highway to an interstate status in order to move freight more efficiently and to allow for better access to the western and southern parts of the state.

In my district, US-74 cuts through Cleveland, Gaston and Rutherford Counties. While each of those counties would benefit from the proposed designation, for Rutherford County the designation is critical to the county's economic sustainability.

The county is home to more than 66,000 people and sits in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, about an hour west of Charlotte. Textile manufacturing once was an economic driver for the communities of Rutherford County, but the county has been economically challenged since thousands of textile and furniture manufacturing jobs were outsourced in the early 1990's.

In the time since, the county has made strides to redefine itself and has diversified its industrial base into sectors such as automotive suppliers, data centers and advanced materials. The county has worked to make improvements to its schools and has partnered with a nonprofit internet provider to expand broadband networks in its rural communities. Despite these efforts to attract private investments and diversify industries, Rutherford County is defined by the North Carolina Department of Commerce as an economically distressed, Tier One county and by the Appalachian Regional Commission as an economically at-risk county.

One of the major challenges facing Rutherford County in attracting outside investment is the fact that there are no interstates that run through it. That makes it difficult to attract investments from industries that often want to be located near an interstate highway.

Designating US-74 as a future interstate from Columbus to Kings Mountain would have short term, as well as long term positive impacts for Rutherford County and its neighboring counties. While future Interstate status gives no increased priority for projects or additional funding for the route, it does allow for the state to install future interstate signs immediately, which will help attract potential employers to the areas around US-74. That is why support for the project has been expressed by the communities within Rutherford County, as well as from neighboring Polk and Cleveland counties.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the committee today and ask for your support for including this future interstate designation in the upcoming surface reauthorization bill. Thank you and I yield the balance of my time.