



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR

DANIEL H. JOHNSON
SECRETARY

February 16, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

I appreciate your patience in waiting for a response to your letters and emails concerning project U-5710, the Eastwood Road Overpass at Military Cutoff Road. During my review of this project, I scrutinized the development and design, reviewed the history of public engagement, and conferred with the North Carolina Department of Transportation's ("NCDOT") most senior engineers about all aspects of this project. That review is now complete. Based on that review, I see no basis to intervene with the NCDOT's construction of U-5710.

As you may know, the selection of projects for construction by NCDOT follows a statutorily prescribed, data-driven process that ensures the allocation of funds to projects that will provide the most benefit to the people of North Carolina. This process also relies on the priorities established by local planning organizations. Planning organizations take into account local needs, long-range transportation plans, and public input when prioritizing projects. The result of this process is an apolitical plan that is not controlled by the preferences of members of the Board of Transportation, the Secretary of Transportation, or other public officials. Disruption of a project by the Secretary of Transportation would only be warranted upon a finding that a project did not properly follow this process, that NCDOT or the relevant planning organization did not consider public feedback, that funding is unavailable to complete a project, or that some other extraordinary set of circumstances exists. No such findings exist in relation to U-5710.

Like all significant transportation projects, the development of U-5710 began years ago. In 2014, due largely to increasing congestion and safety concerns at the intersection of Eastwood Road and Military Cutoff Road, U-5710 ranked 52 out of 514 projects considered for construction in the statewide mobility category. Based on this high ranking, U-5710 received funding and was programmed for construction in the State Transportation Improvement Program ("STIP"). Since that time, the explosive growth in New Hanover County and the surrounding areas has only exacerbated the congestion and safety issues that led to U-5710 being funded and programmed. The STIP is updated every two years. U-5710 remained programmed for delivery through five rounds of prioritization and continues to be identified by local officials on the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization ("WMPO") as a high priority project.

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Delivery of this project is already underway. Though construction of the project is not scheduled to begin until 2027, right-of-way acquisitions and utility relocations began last year and continue today. Forty-seven of the seventy parcels of land necessary for construction have already been acquired by NCDOT.

As part of my review of this project, I examined the level of public engagement by NCDOT. My findings are that the NCDOT has engaged in robust public engagement throughout the development of the project. Each round of programming of the STIP includes public input periods. Though not required by law or policy for a project of this type, NCDOT conducted three public meetings – in 2015, 2017, and 2018 – that were devoted to addressing U-5710. These meetings provided the public the opportunity to review the study area, evaluate alternative plans for the project, and review modified designs that stemmed from public feedback.

Following the formal public meetings and into 2025, NCDOT continued to receive feedback from the public and address concerns about U-5710. NCDOT staff met with representatives from the Landfall Council of Associations, Progress Point, Eastport, property and business owners along Commonwealth Drive, and other concerned citizens who reside near the project area. Feedback from these meetings led to many changes to the project plans. Members of the Board of Transportation and the WMPO have met with concerned citizens to receive feedback and discuss the project. In addition to these in-person meetings, NCDOT staff have provided substantive responses to dozens, if not hundreds, of phone calls, emails and letters concerning this project. Based on my review of the public engagement regarding this project, I find that the level of engagement is more than sufficient and that further public meetings are not warranted.

During my review, I have conferred with multiple engineers about the designs for this project and am confident that the selected design provides the most cost-effective and least impactful design for the purpose of improving traffic flows and increasing safety at this intersection. The elevated design minimizes the number of residences and businesses that will be impacted by the project. While there is no difference in elevating Eastwood Road over Military Cutoff Road with regard to improving traffic flows, the choice to elevate Eastwood Road minimizes the impacts on homes and businesses and reduces the cost of right-of-way – nineteen additional homes, four banks, and two restaurants would have to be relocated if the design were to elevate Military Cutoff Road.

Some people have raised concerns about the project driving excessive traffic to Wrightsville Beach. Others have raised concerns about the ability of NCDOT to manage both this project and the ongoing bridge replacement projects at Wrightsville Beach. While this project may alleviate congestion for those traveling to Wrightsville Beach and make such travel easier, alleviating that congestion and increasing traffic to Wrightsville Beach is not the purpose of this project. Traffic counts now and as projected in the future are greater along Military Cutoff Road – improving traffic flows along that route and through this intersection and reducing crash rates at this intersection are the primary reason for this project. While both the bridge replacement projects at Wrightsville Beach and the elevation of Eastwood Road are significant projects in proximity, I am confident that NCDOT can manage any conflicts and minimize disruptions to traffic during the construction of these projects.

The \$81 million estimated cost of this project is significant but within expectations for projects of this type. Suggestions that NCDOT simply redirect these funds to other projects ignore the law and process governing how projects are selected for construction and

funds allocated. As I noted earlier, projects are selected and funded via an apolitical, data-driven process. NCDOT cannot simply redirect these funds to other projects and will not do so.

Questions have been raised regarding an economic study that was done to show the economic benefits of this project. While this supplementary study did show economic benefits derived from the completion of this project, such studies are not relevant to NCDOT's programming and construction of projects. As such, I did not consider the findings of this study in my review.

The Department of Transportation has carefully considered the concerns raised about the construction of U-5710 and has conducted an extensive review of this project based on those concerns. While U-5710 is a significant project, it is not an extraordinary project regarding expense, design, or impact of construction on the adjacent community. Nevertheless, this project has now been reviewed by multiple Division Engineers in Division 3, the Eastern Deputy Chief Engineer, the Chief Engineer, the Chief Operating Officer, and two Secretaries of Transportation. All have concluded that U-5710 was properly planned, programmed and designed. None have found reason to delay or otherwise disrupt this important statewide mobility project. Project U-5710 will be delivered as planned; no further review of the propriety of this project will be conducted by the NCDOT.

Additional information about this project and updates during the construction of U-5710 can be found at www.ncdot.gov/projects.

Sincerely,



Daniel Johnson
Secretary of Transportation

cc: Hon. Michael Lee, North Carolina State Senate, District 7
Hon. Deb Butler, North Carolina State House, District 18
Hon. David Rouzer, U.S. House of Representatives, 7th District of North Carolina
Hon. Tony Lathrop, Chairman, North Carolina Board of Transportation
Hon. Landon Zimmer, North Carolina Board of Transportation
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