



August 1, 2018

US Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

ATTN: Office of Program Delivery, CRISI Grant

RE: Wilmington, NC Rail Realignment Project

One Estell Lee Place
Wilmington, NC 28401

P (910) 762-2611
F (910) 762-9765

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce board of directors, I would like to express strong support for the Wilmington Rail Realignment Project, which would relocate the existing rail lines that run through the heart of Wilmington to the opposite side of the Cape Fear River, creating a more direct route to the NC State Ports. Additionally, there may be additional economic development opportunities along the existing rail bed. There are numerous reasons why the realignment of the rail lines should proceed as expeditiously as possible:

- by 2025, CSX has plans to bring 10,000-foot-long trains into Wilmington, which could create a barrier through our community impeding traffic and emergency response time;
- the move will be a cost savings for CSX, as 30% of their shipping cost is in the last mile of the route through the city—and 32 at-grade crossings—on the way to the Port;
- population in the 3-county region is forecast to swell from 400,000 to 700,000 by 2040, creating the need for ways to alleviate traffic;
- the potential route for the realignment includes an existing rail bed (for one-third of the route), does not run through any habited areas that are within 1-mile (unlike the current route), and would require only 5 miles of new track;
- 10,000 housing units and 20,000 people already live within one-quarter mile of the existing rail bed, further evidence of the economic development potential;
- safety on area roads will be increased by removing the need for 32 at-grade crossings;
- the cost for other planned road improvement projects, such as Independence Boulevard Extension, will be considerably lower by removing the need for elevated road ways;
- the realignment would support growth at the Port, an economic driver for the entire state, and much more.

With the explosive growth expected in the region, projects like the Wilmington Rail Realignment must be pursued. The City of Wilmington and the Rail Realignment

Committee have conducted a feasibility study over the past three years and have strong community support both in New Hanover and Brunswick County at all levels of government and with the general public. CSX has also been open to discussing this move and has the potential to be a funding partner.

The Rail Realignment has been included in the Wilmington Chamber's legislative agenda. We ask that you consider this project as a priority and lend your support as well. Realigning the rail lines will have incalculable benefits for the entire southeastern region of North Carolina, and it is feasible and consistent with the goals of the area.

We are hopeful this project will be vigorously pursued and add to our area quality of life and thriving economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Natalie English". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Natalie English, CCE
President & CEO

cc:

Rail Realignment Committee
Wilmington City Council
Wilmington Chamber Board of Directors