

December 4, 2009

Mr. Ed Lewis  
North Carolina Department of Transportation  
Human Environment Unit  
1598 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1598

Dear Mr. Lewis:

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has learned the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NC-DOT) is proposing to construct a 4-lane, divided highway through the pristine mountain landscape of western North Carolina. Entitled Corridor K, this 10-mile segment will create a new roadway through the Stecoah Valley, tunnel under Stecoah Gap, and follow NC 143 through Sweetwater Valley to Robbinsville. As currently proposed, the new roadway will be constructed to interstate standards, irrevocably altering untouched landscape and threatening historic properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a nonprofit organization with more than 250,000 members nationwide. As the leader of the national preservation movement, we are committed to saving America's diverse historic environments and to preserving and revitalizing the livability of communities throughout the country.

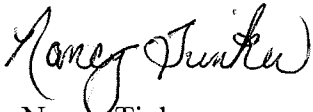
The construction of Corridor K was incepted in the mid-1960s by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) who contended that highway construction would improve transportation between Asheville, North Carolina and Chattanooga, Tennessee. Though sections of the highway envisioned by the ARC have been completed, the segment proposed for the North Carolina mountains has not been constructed.

The National Trust understands NC-DOT's desire to accommodate vehicular movement. We believe however, that the mountains of North Carolina to be a special place, one which warrants thoughtful consideration as the region's transportation future is determined. We respectfully remind NC-DOT that the recommendation designed 40 years ago was determined in a time of plentiful and low cost fuel, in an age when environmental concerns received little to no review. In the intervening years, alternate highways and a network of interstate highways have been established which provide access between Asheville and Chattanooga.

Documents prepared by the Department of Transportation project if construction of Corridor K is completed, that by the year 2030 Graham County's population will have grown by 26 percent. In addition, should the highway be completed as far as Andrews, the county's population is projected to expand by 79 percent, a level of development which threatens the integrity of Graham County's National Register-listed properties – The Santeetlah Hydroelectric Development District, Snowbird Mountain Lodge and the Tapoco Lodge Historic District. As this region of North Carolina is renowned for incomparable backcountry and an economy driven by heritage tourism, we respectfully request NC-DOT re-evaluate its desire to construct new highway through the Stecoah Valley to Cheoah Mountain, and consider instead improving the region's existing network of highways.

Thank you for your time, and the attention given these remarks. I am available to talk with you, should you have questions, or need additional information.

Sincerely:



Nancy Tinker  
Senior Program Officer

cc: Chance Finegan, WaysSouth  
Myrick Howard, Preservation North Carolina  
Don Barger, National Parks Conservation Association