

October 21, 2024

Via E-mail

David Miller, Transportation Planner
david.miller@dchcmpo.org
Madeline Galliano, Transportation Planner
mgalliano@dchcmpo.org
Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO

Re: Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO Draft Wildlife Crossings Plan

Dear David and Madeline:

The Southern Environmental Law Center (“SELC”) submits these comments in support of the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (“MPO”) draft Wildlife Crossings Plan. SELC has long advocated for the rich biodiversity and natural treasures of the South, including working with a wide variety of local, state, and national groups. SELC also has a long history of advocating for transportation policy that that fosters compact, mixed-use development with infrastructure supporting all modes of transportation—including walking, bicycling, and public transportation.

The MPO’s Wildlife Crossings Plan is an impressive step forward in encouraging transportation planning that will benefit human and animal communities alike. As thoroughly documented in the MPO’s draft plan, wildlife-vehicle collisions have serious human and environmental consequences. These crashes can be deadly to both humans and wildlife, and they also come with serious financial costs. We applaud the MPO’s ambitious vision to eliminate wildlife vehicle collisions by integrating improved wildlife crossing infrastructure into projects in its jurisdiction.

Improving wildlife crossing infrastructure would also reap huge benefits for habitat connectivity in the Triangle, and we appreciate how the MPO has considered how improved wildlife crossings in certain areas may contribute to connecting broader habitat corridors. Habitat destruction and fragmentation are primary contributors to species declines and extinctions. As such, how we plan and build out our transportation network has significant implications for wildlife: projects that encourage sprawling development that results in clearcutting forests and paving over wetlands destroys habitat and harms the species dependent on those areas. Roads that are built through corridors of habitat act as barriers to natural movement of animals and can contribute to dwindling populations of species. Conversely, projects that promote dense development, and that include infrastructure designed to facilitate natural movement of animals, can help conserve both common and rare wildlife.

We note that the MPO’s Wildlife Crossing Plan is an important and necessary step, but much more needs to be done to ensure such wildlife considerations are incorporated into transportation project designs. We appreciate that the MPO is thinking about how to incorporate these wildlife crossings considerations into other planning processes, including working with the

North Carolina Department of Transportation during the SPOT and STIP processes, as well as the MPO's own CTP and MTP. Continuing to explore and secure funding for these wildlife improvements will also be essential to making the recommendations in this plan a reality.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to support improving our transportation network for the benefit of wildlife and people alike.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ramona H. McGee", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ramona H. McGee
Senior Attorney and Wildlife Program
Leader