



The Cities of Gastonia (pop. 76,600) and Lowell (pop. 4,000), in partnership with Gaston County (pop. 220,000) are seeking BUILD Transportation Discretionary Grant funds to complete the funding package necessary to implement the Lineberger Connector project between the two communities. The **Lineberger Connector** project, **completely located in a federally designated Opportunity Zone**, includes new location roadway and a new bridge over I-85 connecting both sides of I-85. This project is critical to economic recovery as Gastonia and the surrounding communities continue to struggle following devastating downturns in local economies and severe job losses as a result of **NAFTA**.

Gaston County was a textile hub in the late twenty first century, with a strong manufacturing base and was a vital part of the regional economy. These textile mills and the associated support industries also made significant contributions to the quality of life in the region. This was especially true of helping to grow a robust utility system thru rates paid for service that ultimately became the regional water and sewer provider for over 100,000 people.

The recession, following NAFTA's ratification in 1994, negatively impacted this region of North Carolina tremendously hard. Between 1995 and 1999, the NAFTA snowball started to roll resulting in the closing of the seven (7) largest industrial utility customers and a total of 54 manufacturing plants causing the **loss of more than 7,500 jobs**. In 2000, additional plant closures impacted local tax and utility revenues even more—resulting in **more than \$70 million in lost revenues** just in water/wastewater and additional losses were realized in the electric fund. At the end of 2000, Gaston County had **lost more than 13,000 jobs**. To date, as of 2017, the economic engines within Gaston County, NC have only been able to recover to 53% of its economic glory of the early 1990's.



The **Lineberger Connector** will provide a second-grade separation crossing between Exits 21 and 22 over I-85. The Lineberger Connector will complete the transportation network, braid the communities together through this overly congested area, unlocking the development potential of approximately **\$900 million in project value** for the Greater Gaston area, thus allowing these communities to begin to recover from the impact of NAFTA. Conservative estimates for the 450-acre property adjacent to the Lineberger Connector indicate between **1,500 to 4,000 potential new jobs**, depending on the development type and density.

The proposed project falls within the project limits for the widening of I-85 by NCDOT. TIP project I-5719 will widen I-85 from a six-lane facility to a minimum of an eight-lane facility. The 2020-2029 STIP has this design-build project programmed for construction beginning in FY 2024. Coordination with this TIP project will be critical, given the overlap of activity and impacts on the I-85 ROW. While this can be seen as a challenge for the project, it is also an opportunity to utilize the mitigation credits this site provides. These compensatory wetland and stream credits found on site have the potential to offset overall project costs and benefit the I-85 widening project by providing mitigation directly in the corridor.

\$18.5 million BUILD grant needed to match \$18.5 million in local and private sector funding (\$37 million total project cost). Funding the Lineberger Connector Bridge is outside traditional funding options within the local, MPO and state resources. BUILD can provide the “last leg” funding needed to allow this project to move forward by leveraging significant private investment that will be lost if project does not move forward.

### Key benefits:

- Spur new economic development, job creation and tax base (estimated at \$56.53 million annually) by opening up access to over 450 acres of infill property with superior access to I-85. (Gastonia median household income of \$40,432; national average \$59,039)



- Reduce congestion by approximately 28,000 vehicle miles and travel time by 1 minute on each road within the project network. (I-85 carries over 125,000 vehicles per day thru Gaston County.)
- Public private partnership with a federal / local match split 50/50.
- Benefit Cost Analysis is an estimated Undiscounted Net Benefit Ratio of 7.11.

***The Lineberger Connector project will be an economic transformation for the region.***

**[www.cityofgastonia.com/BUILD](http://www.cityofgastonia.com/BUILD)**

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