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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-4007

September 25, 2018

The Honorable Henry D. McMaster  
Office of the Governor  
1205 Pendleton Street  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Governor McMaster,

Thank you for your leadership during Hurricane Florence. Your decisive actions before and immediately after this natural disaster have saved lives and helped to minimize disruption and begin the recovery process. I write to focus your attention on the glaring and immediate need for improved access to the Grand Strand and Pee Dee and hope to work with you to mitigate against inevitable future natural disasters.

Over 250,000 residents live on the Grand Strand. Currently, Horry and Georgetown County officials are trying to deal with the continuing crisis. Flood waters threaten to close the only remaining lifelines to the Grand Strand, US-501 and US-17. The South Carolina Department of Transportation is desperately trying to preserve two lanes of these arteries by placing sandbags along the routes.

If they are successful, a quarter of a million South Carolinians will have only four lanes to access the rest of the state. If they are not successful, 250,000 of my constituents will be cut off completely from the outside world for 10 to 15 days. Over 400 truckloads of MREs and bottled water have been shipped in by the National Guard. Swift water rescue teams await orders to evacuate people out of homes.

This situation is clearly untenable.

Every year more than 14 million tourists visit the Grand Strand. During peak tourist season, the population swells to nearly 1 million people. These tourists, and the local businesses they support, are the driving engine behind our state's leading industry. The \$21.2 billion tourism industry supports one in every ten South Carolina jobs. Georgetown and Horry Counties account for almost half of the state's total admissions tax collections and more than one-third of accommodations tax collections. These revenues fund various initiatives throughout the state. This vital segment of the state's economy has ground to a halt.

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PEE DEE REGIONAL OFFICE:  
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Further, the Grand Strand is the second fastest growing metropolitan area in the United States, yet its citizens are further from an interstate and evacuate more slowly than residents of any other area in South Carolina. Tourists and residents have one primary evacuation route, and it is a four-lane highway built before World War II.

While South Carolina has made improvements to hurricane evacuation planning, the inadequate and outdated road system exacerbates the impacts of a natural disaster. The primary evacuation route for Grand Strand residents and tourists is US-501, followed by SC-9. While lane reversals on US-501 have modestly reduced evacuation times, multiple sections of SC-9 have been closed due to flooding.

The Grand Strand requires an adequate evacuation route to quickly and safely move individuals from natural disasters, and back home, when the disaster subsides. Interstate 73 will fulfill this need. Studies show that the portion of I-73 from the Grand Strand to I-95 will reduce evacuation times by 11 to 15 hours. Current engineering methods, which have improved since World War II, will allow for I-73 to withstand severe flooding. Horry County, realizing the importance of this evacuation route, has dedicated \$25 million annually to its construction. President Trump has repeatedly indicated his unqualified support for the project.

Over and over, the Grand Strand has warned of this glaring need. In the wake of devastation of Hurricane Florence, it is impossible to deny. South Carolinians lost their lives trying to evacuate on inadequate roads. Imagine the consequence if Florence had come ashore as a Category 4 storm as predicted, and all of our roads were now closed. We can no longer ignore the danger.

Your support for this effort is needed. Construction of this road will require significant investment from both the state and federal governments. I request that you amend your application to the federal government for disaster relief from Hurricane Florence to include immediate funding for I-73 as an adequate evacuation route.

Thank you for all you do for South Carolina, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to advance the state's priorities.

Sincerely,



Tom Rice  
Member of Congress