North Carolina today won a grant of $23 million to replace dozens of bridges in 17 of the state's most economically distressed counties.

The U.S. Department of Transportation BUILD grant will be used to help complete a project to replace 77 bridges in Alexander, Allegheny, Beaufort, Duplin, Edgecombe, Halifax, Hyde, Iredell, Nash, Northhampton, Pitt, Sampson, Surry, Wayne, Wilkes, Wilson and Yadkin counties. Most of the bridges are more than 50 years old, including a 97-year-old bridge in Alexander County and a 98-year-old bridge in Wilson County.

The overall cost of the replacements is projected at $119.1 million, with the State Highway Bridge Fund paying for 58 of the structures and the BUILD grant covering the cost of replacing 19 weight-restricted bridges that could not be replaced using state funds.

"These extra funds will allow North Carolina to replace key bridges in rural areas to help farmers, industry, schools and communities," said Governor Cooper. "These bridges will be rebuilt better and smarter, to include flood monitoring and create more opportunities to expand broadband in areas that need it most."

The bridges included in the project serve communities with significant agriculture and agribusiness interests. Many of the bridges scheduled for replacement are weight-restricted which limits use by large trucks which often serve the agriculture industry as well as buses that take students to school.

"Good infrastructure is a critical lifeline for our rural communities and agriculture as ag products move from the field to consumers and overseas markets," said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. "Improving these bridges will help reduce costs for agricultural haulers, which will help our farmers save money and be more competitive."

The new bridges will be constructed to include weather and/or flood monitors to help provide better data and warnings about potential hazards. The sensors will provide critical information regarding weather conditions around the bridges to FIMAN, North Carolina's Flood Inundation and Alert Mapping Network. North Carolinians can sign up for alerts from FIMAN at

fiman.nc.gov.

Each bridge replaced will also include conduit to allow for future expansion of broadband fiber, decreasing the cost to provide broadband service to rural and underserved areas

Contracts to perform the bridge replacements will be awarded during the next two years and most projects will less than a year to complete.

Bridge Replacement Program Fast Facts:

* 77 Bridges will be replaced in 17 counties: Alexander, Allegheny, Beaufort, Duplin, Edgecombe, Halifax, Hyde, Iredell, Nash, Northhampton, Pitt, Sampson, Surry, Wayne, Wilkes, Wilson and Yadkin

* 63 of the bridges are more than 50 years old, and two are nearly 100 years old

* 19 of the bridges are weight-restricted