



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

Bill Shuster
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

Peter A. DeFazio
Ranking Member

Mathew M. Sturges, Staff Director

October 31, 2017

Katherine W. Dedrick, Democratic Staff Director

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

I urge you to act swiftly to distribute funding and reduce the backlog under the Federal-aid Highway Emergency Relief (ER) program. I am sure you agree that providing prompt assistance to help restore and rebuild transportation facilities in the wake of a natural disaster is an important function of the U.S. Department of Transportation. Unfortunately, States and territories have recently faced delay in receiving reimbursement because the Department has failed to approve funding distributions under the ER program in a timely manner.

As of August 2017, States, territories, and Federal land management agencies have submitted **\$1.76 billion** in documented needs from past disasters to the Federal Highway Administration. The Department currently has **\$911 million** in available ER funding to reduce this backlog, yet project sponsors cannot receive the money because the Department has not taken the administrative step of allocating the funds.

States and other project sponsors specifically identified more than \$500 million in project costs that they would be able to obligate immediately— prior to the end of FY 2017— upon receipt of funds. The end of Fiscal Year 2017 has now come and gone. I am at a loss as to why you have not taken action to approve these ER funding requests, which will provide immediate infrastructure improvements to damaged facilities.

The needs estimates from States, territories, and Federal land management agencies was conducted before the devastation caused by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, as well as the raging wildfires in the western States. As States and other entities begin to identify the exact magnitude of the damage to their highway facilities from these more recent disasters, documented ER needs— and the shortfall under the program— will clearly rise.

In the coming weeks, Congress is poised to consider an additional package of relief to assist communities devastated by these recent disasters. As part of this package, it is my hope that

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Congress will provide additional funding for the ER program to address the growing shortfall. However, it is more difficult to advocate for funds to supplement a program when almost \$1 billion is sitting unused. By not approving worthy ER funding requests that are already in the pipeline and using the funds Congress has already provided, you are creating confusion and controversy around a routine Federal-aid Highway reimbursement program.

I urge you to do everything in your power to help communities struggling to recover from disasters by demonstrating that, if Congress appropriates additional funds, the Department is ready to be a conduit— not an impediment— to provide critical ER funds to these communities.

Sincerely,



PETER DeFAZIO
Ranking Member