



THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20590

October 23, 2024

The Honorable Brian Schatz, Chair  
The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Steve Womack, Chair  
The Honorable Mike Quigley, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs Schatz and Womack, Ranking Members Hyde-Smith and Quigley:

I am writing to request urgent action from Congress upon its return in November to replenish emergency relief programs that help states recover from disasters. The funding that the Biden-Harris administration delivered to multiple states in recent weeks has been critical to reopening roads and clearing debris in the aftermath of Hurricanes Helene and Milton, but without Congressional action, the federal government cannot continue to offer states emergency resources when they need it most.

The failure to provide additional funds has already set back the long-term recovery efforts of states around the country that have been diligently rebuilding from previous disasters. After being on the ground in western North Carolina last week, hearing directly from residents, small business owners, and first responders about short-, medium, and long-term needs, I have become even more vividly aware of why it would be unconscionable to allow disaster relief programs to run dry.

When disaster strikes—which could happen to any community at any time—it is vital for them to have readily-available resources to prevent any delay to restoring transportation networks. Over the past few weeks, the Biden-Harris administration has provided robust and well-coordinated federal support for the ongoing response and recovery efforts. We have partnered with state and local governments, non-profit organizations, and volunteers to meet the needs of our fellow Americans who are reeling from a disaster that left hundreds of people dead and destroyed a massive number of homes and businesses. I am glad to say the Department of

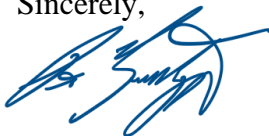
Transportation has been able to act on all state emergency funding requests within hours of receiving them, sending a total of \$144 million to date to South Carolina, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia. This “quick release” funding is made possible by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Emergency Relief (ER) Program, which funds emergency repairs to restore access for essential services and enable first responders to reach and provide aid to victims. With these Emergency Relief funds, the State DOTs are making great progress in repairing and reopening roads and bridges. However, today I am deeply concerned that the Department will soon lack funds to even provide this quick release emergency function for future storms and incidents that may arise.

Hurricane Helene recovery alone will require significant and sustained investment in the billions of dollars to permanently rebuild roads and bridges washed out by significant flooding brought by this storm. Here, inaction has already had impacts. FHWA provides funds to states for permanent rebuilding of roads and bridges, but has been forced to reduce the amount of funds towards projects around the country. Projects in Alaska, Nevada, Florida, Hawaii, and others did not receive the full funding for rebuilding from storms, floods, and fires. Going forward, the Department will not even be able to provide partial funding for eligible projects like Teton Pass in Wyoming, the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Maryland, roads damaged by wildfires, floods, or tornadoes in places like California, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. These critical projects and many more will not receive funding until Congress acts.

The best reason for optimism is that Congress has repeatedly risen to the challenge before, stepping in to provide the funds to rebuild transportation infrastructure after communities and regions were devastated by disaster. In 2005, Congress appropriated \$2.75 billion for FHWA ER in response to Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. Congress acted again in 2018, providing \$1.4 billion for ER following Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. With your leadership, Congress can answer the call again, for the people of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida.

The Department of Transportation is working expeditiously on needs estimates from the recent hurricanes, and I urge you to act with all appropriate speed and provide necessary funds so that the people, families, businesses, and communities affected by Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton—as well as those still recovering from past disasters—are not only made whole, but can proceed in a way to make them more resilient in the face of future extreme weather events and other disasters. Rebuilding the transportation network in these areas is just one facet of the support needed—relief will be needed for farmers and ranchers with crop losses, impacted schools, rebuilding housing, and much more. I look forward to working with you as we support these communities through their recovery.

Sincerely,



Pete Buttigieg