

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 24, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE,
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

We write to request that the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) adopt an initiative requiring equitable geographic distribution among recipients of the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) grant program.

The INFRA Program, established under the Fixing Americas Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, seeks to provide federal assistance for nationally and regionally significant freight and highway projects. INFRA is designed for states to complete large-scale projects that address national and regional highway and bridge infrastructure issues – beyond the scope of other discretionary programs. Investments in paved roads and other critical transportation infrastructure is critical to providing the groundwork for economic development and recovery by creating jobs, increasing accessibility, and boosting our freight capabilities. U.S. DOT programs are important for rebuilding our country's economy and supporting hardworking families. Therefore, equitable federal assistance is critical to helping local governments and community groups meet the needs of all Americans.

Since the program has been implemented, nine states have not received funding to address crucial transportation projects, including Alaska, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, and Vermont. Under the FAST Act, The Secretary of Transportation is required to consider contributions to geographic diversity among grant recipients. Yet, unlike the BUILD/RAISE grant program, there is no requirement to ensure equitable geographic distribution under the INFRA program. Without this requirement, INFRA grants have not been distributed diversely to each state. With no guarantee of surface transportation reauthorization, it is possible our states may never have access to such a large and critical source of federal funding.

The Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act of 2021, recently passed through the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, includes an amendment, which would grant priority for INFRA projects “located in States in which neither the State nor an eligible entity in that

State has been awarded a grant.” This bill advanced through committee unanimously, displaying the bipartisan support that exists for equitable distribution among the INFRA grant recipients.

Further, the 2019 GAO-19-541 report highlights that DOT has not been transparent in its decision making process for discretionary programs. For example, GAO found that the Department did not adequately document why it contacted some applicants over others. There has been a lapse in providing reliable rationale for award decisions, discrediting the assurance of fairness, especially for our states. We respectfully request that DOT incorporate GAO’s recommendations into discretionary awards this year and beyond. In addition, DOT should ensure geographic diversity among all discretionary grant programs, including the INFRA program. We respectfully request priority be granted to these nine states in the next round of INFRA funding, with an emphasis on ensuring geographic diversity among future award decisions.

We appreciate your attention to this request and hope that you will work to incorporate much-needed diversity and transparency initiatives in your future award decisions.

Sincerely,



MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator



KEVIN CRAMER
United States Senator



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



DAN SULLIVAN
United States Senator




BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



ROGER MARSHALL, M.D.
United States Senator


BEN RAY LUJÁN
United States Senator


STEVE DAINES
United States Senator


BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator


JOHN HOEVEN
United States Senator


LISA MURKOWSKI
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Thomas R. Carper, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

The Honorable Shelley Moore, Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works