

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 21, 2023

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

Secretary Buttigieg:

Thank you for visiting Vermont on July 17 with Federal Highway Administrator Shailen Bhatt to observe first-hand the devastating effects of the recent catastrophic flooding across the state. Your visit, and those of other federal officials, have been an uplifting show of unified federal support for all Vermonters.

As the state continues to assess the work necessary to recover from the disaster, we write in support of the State of Vermont's request for immediate and robust assistance from the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Emergency Relief (ER) program to help Vermont rebuild in a swift and resilient manner following the flooding. We are particularly interested in using the new authority provided to FHWA ER under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to fund improvements to protective features that will mitigate the risk of recurring damage or cost of future repair from extreme weather, flooding, and other natural disasters.

Specifically, we request the following forms of support for Vermont from the DOT FHWA ER program:

- Robust funding under the FHWA ER program to respond to and recover from the catastrophic flooding in Vermont, including the maximum amount possible of quick release funding.
- A longer timeline to grant Vermont 100% federal reimbursement for project costs under the FHWA ER program than the current 270-day period, given that the state cannot undergo construction in the winter season.

The FHWA ER program is a critical source of federal support for the state to repair its roads and other federal-aid infrastructure that was washed out by the torrential downpours. This includes over 50 miles of fully or partially-closed state roads, countless culverts, and the 93-mile-long Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, which has received key federal funding and serves as an important transportation corridor for Vermonters across 18 towns and which, as you saw, was ravaged by the recent flooding. In the days following the flooding, Vermont has begun to assess the cost of the damage and will provide preliminary estimates to the DOT in a detailed master summary sheet once all the necessary information has been gathered.

We appreciate that, thanks to the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, FHWA ER now provides 270 days for 100% reimbursement of emergency repair work. However, given Vermont's long winters, our state will likely need to halt repair activity well before that window closes, without having completed all necessary repairs. Therefore, we ask that FHWA does everything in its power to extend the 270-day timeline for full federal reimbursement of project costs under the ER program.

Additionally, Vermont's small and rural communities do not have the resources available to immediately and adequately respond to the recent devastation. Instead, in the days since the storms, towns across the state have relied on residents to take time away from their jobs and families to help clean up roads, downtowns, businesses, and homes. Therefore, we ask that the FHWA provide the maximum amount of quick release funding possible under the FHWA ER program so that small and rural communities have prompt access to desperately needed capital.

We are grateful for the show of support provided by your Department and the rest of the Biden Administration and urge a speedy approval of flexible FHWA ER funds requested by Vermont—so that the state and individuals impacted by the floods can begin to rebuild. We look forward to inviting you back to Vermont in the coming months and years to see the progress we are able to achieve with your help, including for the postponed grand opening of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.

We are confident that, with your support, Vermonters will come through this stronger and more resilient.

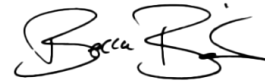
Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



PETER WELCH
United States Senator



BECCA BALINT
Member of Congress

cc: Shailen Bhatt, Federal Highway Administrator