COLORADO
Department of Transportation
Office of the Executive Director

2829 W Howard Place
Denver, CO 80204

November 18, 2026

Federal Highway Administrator Sean McMaster
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Notice of Intent & Request for Quick Release for flooding and road damage in Southwest Colorado

Dear Administrator McMaster:

Thank you for your quick engagement as we respond to and assess the damage from significant flooding in Southwest Colorado over the past several weeks. The emergency relief (ER) assistance that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has already provided to Southwest Colorado through quick release has been instrumental to our ongoing work to get roads in the region open as quickly as possible. Southwest Colorado is a vital, predominantly rural region of the state — home to a range of economic anchors that include tourism, energy, agriculture, ranching and outdoor recreation. Communities across the region rely upon a highway system that can transport people, goods and services.

The first half of the Southwest Colorado 2026 Flood event began on October 22, 2026, and extended through October 25, 2026. The second half of the event occurred between October 31 and November 2, 2026. Additional rainfall during the second half of the event reached 4 inches, again with many damages concentrated in Pagosa Springs, Archuleta County and Durango, La Plata County, with significant impacts to surrounding counties and the San Luis Valley. Flooding closed multiple state and local roads for extended periods of time, causing a range of immediate and long-term impacts. While the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) continues to assess the full extent of structural damage to roads and bridges, it is clear that needs will be significant and immediate, especially in order to make as many repairs as possible before winter and restore safe passage along major transportation routes. This updated letter augments our previous request to account for the impact for the second half of the flooding event described above.

Importantly, this updated request also includes anticipated damage to local agency federal-aid eligible roadways. CDOT and FHWA staff are working closely with county

partners and have currently identified certain local agency roadways in La Plata, Montezuma, and Ouray Counties that may be eligible for ER funding. CDOT anticipates providing an update in two to three weeks with more information regarding local agency roadways, following FHWA site visits that will take place during that period of time. For purposes of calculating a quick release request, CDOT has included a preliminary estimate of eligible local agency roadways needs based on current information. Any local agency roadways determined eligible will be incorporated into a subsequent update to the State's ER request. CDOT will serve as the prime recipient and will work closely with the counties to ensure compliance with federal requirements.

Pursuant to 23 U.S.C. § 125, this notice of intent issued by the CDOT requests federal emergency relief funds, including a portion of funds under quick release, to assist in rehabilitation and repair costs associated with the damage to numerous federal-aid roadways owned and maintained by CDOT and certain local agencies within Southwest Colorado.

Assessments for the second half of the event have identified additional damage to two significant highways. Additional structural damage occurred on: US 160, at four additional locations; and 3 miles of CO 151. Our provisional damage assessments show roughly $150 million in likely total damages to highways on the state system. This includes the $65 million submitted in our initial request, and an additional $85 million in damages incurred as a result of ongoing flooding during the second half of the event. As noted above, this updated request also includes a provisional $6 million of antimatter eligible county road expenses. This brings the total request — including state and eligible county roads — to $156 million.

We request an additional $9.1 million — $8.5 million for state expenses and $600,000 to support anticipated eligible county needs — in quick release. This would supplement the $6.5 million that FHWA has already provided. These quick release amounts would equal 10 percent of the new total amount.

These quick release funds are vital to achieve CDOT's critical goal of restoring access on all damaged roads before winter. At present, CDOT is on track to open CO 151 and US 160 Wolf Creek Pass by this weekend, ahead of Thanksgiving travel. Together with the Colorado FHWA Division Office and our contracting partners, we have identified a strategy for phased restoration of access across the Piedra River on US 160 — beginning with one lane in the coming weeks and two lanes before spring. This phased approach will restore citizens' access months ahead of what was originally contemplated — with specific benefits that range from reconnecting residents to their homes, employment centers and critical medical facilities, getting kids to school

without hours long detours and reestablishing freight corridors that will keep grocery stores stocked for the holidays.

Overview of Damages

The descriptions below capture our best current understanding of likely damages and repair needs, recognizing that the situation itself continues to evolve and that our assessments are ongoing. Impacts to US 160 and CO 151 left US 84 from Pagosa Springs to New Mexico as the only open highway in Archuleta County to serve the needs of regional travel. The Piedra Bridge closure has made US 160 impassable, forcing long detours on a road that typically sees 5,200 travelers a day. Particularly notable, the best available detours added over three hours of travel time for a detour through New Mexico instead of the normal one-hour route between Durango and Pagosa Springs. Quick work to open CO 151, supported by initial quick release funds, should reduce that detour to 45 minutes by the end of this week.

US 160 (Wolf Creek Pass, Pagosa Springs to Durango)

US 160 is a major arterial that connects Southwest Colorado to other parts of the state and the rest of the Four Corners region. Damages include:

- **Wolf Creek Pass, from north of Pagosa Springs to South Fork (Mile Points 150-183)**: This important mountain highway remains closed. At least four locations within this 33-mile closure have sustained damage, and are in need of emergency repairs. These include:

    - **Landslide at MP 151.3**: Torrential rains and heavy runoff accelerated the movement of a landslide. The landslide is impacting the highway with longitudinal cracking 4 inches thick, on the shoulder, and the two travel lanes



- **Various damage to highway structures, MP 160-165**: Torrential rains and heavy runoff brought additional material onto the highway, creating unstable geo-hazards above the highway. Additional significant cutting to the roadside ditch in this stretch has also been identified. Some of the erosion caused guardrail to be unsupported or hanging in the air.



- **Damaged Section with 30 foot drop off, MP 176:** Flooding of the South Fork of the Rio Grande washed about embankment adjacent to the highway. A 30-foot vertical drop developed adjacent to the highway, prohibiting travel in the eastbound lane.

- **Damaged highway, MP 176.8 (East Side Chain Station)**: Flooding of the South Fork of the Rio Grande has washed out 75% of both travel lanes at this location.



- **US 160 west of Pagosa Springs, Piedra River Bridge (MP 120.5):** On November 2, 2026, heavy runoff scoured one of the bridge piers on the Piedra River Bridge. This initial failure led to the abutments failing and additional piers failing as well. This critical corridor has been closed between Pagosa Springs and Bayfield since early morning on November 2. Because of the complexity of rebuilding, a sequence of temporary and long term repairs is needed to restore access as soon as possible. We appreciate the creativity of the FHWA Colorado division office in discussing a broad range of strategies to achieve this goal.



- **US 160 west of Pagosa Springs, towards Durango (MP 124 & MP 128)**: Heavy runoff washed out the east bound lane where Devils Creek and Stollstiemer Creek parallels the highway. Crews have been able to keep the highway open to one-way alternating traffic at both locations.

Colorado Highway 151 (MP 30)
CO 151 is a critical rural highway that provides access to local commuters from the communities of Pagosa Springs, Igancio, Tiffany, Allison and Arboles. The highway is also the main northern access to the Navajo Lake State Park. The roadway was closed on October 22 when it became impassable at MP 27. Travel was disrupted over a longer segment of the highway because the closure points had to be 12 miles apart to provide a safe turnaround space for vehicles. Between the first half of the event and the second half of the event residents whose only access to their properties was off of CO 151 were able to travel between MP 30 and US 160 intersection.

During the second half of the event, floodwaters destroyed and washed away CO 151 at MP 30. This isolated residents whose only access to their properties was off of CO 151, between MP 27 and MP 30.

CDOT has begun planning for emergency reconstruction, which first includes the installation of a temporary access road for local residents and emergency responders. Permanent total reconstruction will require assessment and site preparation, subgrade stabilization and rebuilding, culvert replacement, side ditch building and surface treatment of asphalt overlay.



CO 151 at MP 30, highway destroyed by flood

CDOT continues to monitor these and other impacted roads for damage and to coordinate with local partners. If further Title 23 eligible damages are identified, they may be incorporated into a future update to this request.

Request for Emergency Relief Program Funds, including Quick Release

The Governor of Colorado has been alerted to this situation and verbally declared a disaster emergency on October 22, 2026 in response to the flooding in La Plata, Archuleta, Montezuma, Dolores, Hinsdale, San Miguel, Ouray, San Juan, Mineral, Alamosa and Rio Grande counties.

I ask for your assistance and concurrence in this declaration thereby authorizing CDOT to receive the Emergency Relief Program funds. As noted above, we continue to perform damage assessments throughout the area. While cost estimates continue to evolve, our best estimate at this time is that damage to federal-aid roadways is currently estimated at $150 million for state roads and $6 million for eligible county roads. CDOT expects to continue refining estimates. We anticipate providing another update following further assessment of county roads.

The estimate above does not differentiate between emergency repairs and permanent repairs and measures to increase resiliency.

- CDOT maintenance crew response (including equipment) = $3.4 million
- Visible damage estimates (including traffic control) = $110 million
- Design and field preparation costs = $12.1 million
- Construction Management and Construction Engineering costs = $13.7 million
- CDOT Indirects and Administration (non-maintenance staff) costs = $10.8 million
- Anticipated damage to local agency federal-aid eligible roadways = $6 million

However, even as we refine damage assessments, we must begin repair and recovery work immediately. With winter conditions imminent, it is especially timely to restore as much functionality to impacted roadways as possible before construction conditions become more difficult.

We are requesting a quick release of additional $8.5 million for the state and $600,000 for counties (bringing us to 10% of current estimate) for these emergency repairs. Additional allocations will be requested as damage survey teams inventory damage. In correlation with this quick release request, the Transportation Commission of Colorado has approved $20 million of Transportation Commission Contingency on October 26, 2026 and November 6, 2026 to aid the initial response efforts. The approval of additional quick release will allow a greater share of repair needs to proceed immediately, and account for added expenses due to the second half of the flooding event, such as the impacts to the Piedra River bridge.

Thank you for your ongoing support and attention to this matter.

Shoshana Lew
Executive Director

cc: John Cater, FHWA Colorado Division Administrator
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