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# Appendix C Gunnison Valley TPR Federal Lands Access

## Gunnison Valley 2045 Regional Transportation Plan

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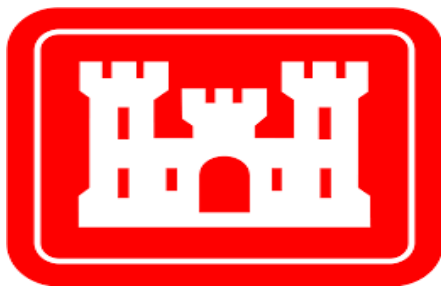
**October 2020**



# Appendix C: Enhancing Federal Lands Access



— BUREAU OF —  
RECLAMATION



### Enhanced Quality of Life and Economic Vitality Through Improved Federal Lands Access

As referenced on page 6 of this plan and in conjunction with the RTP considerations described for other TPRs, this 2045 plan update is taking a closer look at the needs and priorities associated with the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP) and Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP). Like the bigger pot of federal funds allocated to CDOT on an annual basis, the FLTP and FLAP are also funded by the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). The HTF is funded by a federal tax that collects 18 cents per every gallon purchased nationwide. The Federal Lands Highway Division (FLH) of the FHWA administers the FLTP and FLAP in close partnership with the following federal agencies:

- National Park Service (NPS)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)

**Table 1** shows a breakdown of FLTP funding amongst these agencies nationwide. The NPS, FWS, USFS are non-competitive partners while the remaining three partners have to compete annually for their portion of the FLTP. For the non-competitive partners, the funds are further sub-allocated based on agency processes.

*Table 1: Breakdown of FLTP funding among agencies*

	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	Total
<b>NPS</b>	\$268M	\$276M	\$248M	\$292M	\$300M	\$1.420B
<b>FWS</b>	\$30M	\$30M	\$30M	\$30M	\$30M	\$150M
<b>USFS</b>	\$15M	\$16M	\$17M	\$18M	\$18M	\$85M
<b>BLM, USACE, BOR and IFAs</b>	\$22M	\$23M	\$24M	\$25M	\$26M	\$120M
<b>Total</b>	\$335M	\$345M	\$355M	\$365M	\$375M	\$1.775B

It is important to recognize that the FLTP is stretched very thin when compared to the amount of road miles each agency has to manage for public access. For example, the USFS has approximately 65,000 miles<sup>1</sup> of road it maintains as primary public access and it will only receive \$18M in 2020. Similarly, the

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<sup>1</sup> There are 370,000 miles of FS roads, 267,000 miles of which are open to public motorized use. 65,000 miles are open and maintained for use by low clearance (passenger car) vehicles, and thereby considered “public roads” as defined by 23 CFR 460.2(c) or 660.103. Of those 65,000 miles of public roads only 29,000 miles are designated as FLTP roads and therefore eligible for the \$18M. Also within that funding level are 30,000 miles of FLTP trails. Separately, I think it is important to communicate that the FLTP program is intended to fund improvements, not maintenance. The different levels of maintenance standards within the 370,000 miles of FS roads are balanced against our appropriated funding for maintenance. Improving a road under FLTP does not particularly relate to our fiscal ability to meet maintenance needs. In the big picture, we should consider that some FLTP projects may actually lead to an increase in maintenance costs. With the same maintenance funding levels, that could result in a lower standard of maintenance elsewhere, and potentially a reduction in mileage of public roads.

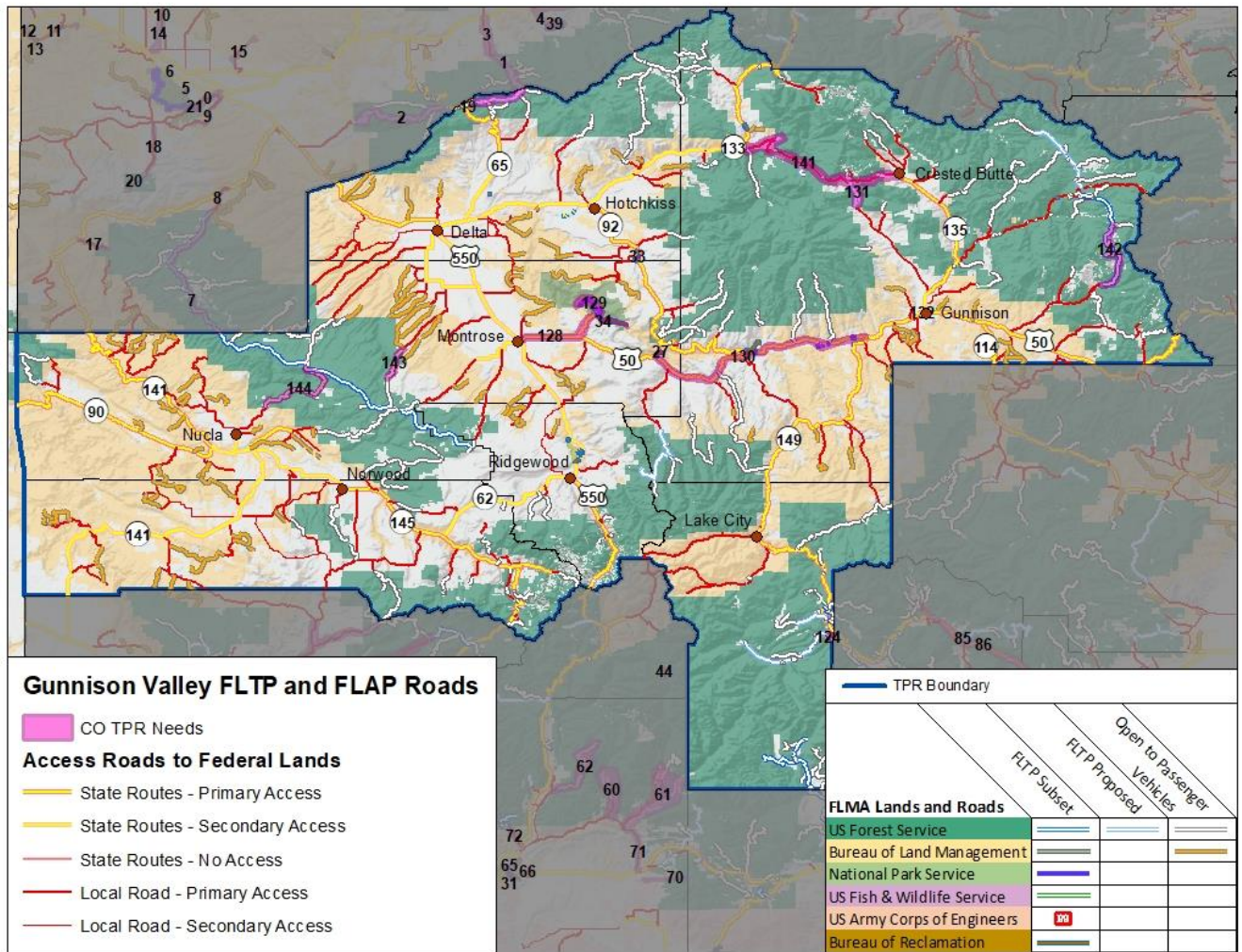
BLM has approximately 45,000 miles, and the other two competitive partners (USACE and BOR) manage networks that are approximately 5,000 and 3,000 miles respectively. Thus, there is only \$26M available for about 53,000 miles of road managed by the competitive partners. The NPS and FWS (5,000 and 4,000 miles respectively) are strategically better positioned funding wise with network sizes similar to USACE and BOR and available funding set at higher levels. However, regardless of network size and available FLTP funding, each agency struggles to meet all their transportation needs. Additionally, none of these funds are dedicated to the state of Colorado. Rather local Federal Land Management Agency (FLMA) offices throughout the state have to compete regionally or nationally amongst the other offices in their respective agencies to get their projects funded.

In comparison, the FLAP receives \$270M per year nationally of which the state of Colorado receives \$15.6M. While the FLTP is prioritized by these federal agencies, the FLAP is prioritized by Program Decision Committees (PDCs) set up in each state. Projects are selected through competitive calls for projects that occur approximately every two years.

**Figure 1** and the appended table shows the mileage of the FLTP color coded by the federal agency that owns the routes (TPRs Needs are discussed in next section). The red and gold routes represent the state and local routes that provide primary access to the FLTP and are eligible to receive funding through the FLAP. Three critical considerations need to be made when looking at these routes:

1. The priorities for the FLTP routes are determined by the federal agencies that own them and those set priorities are one of the main factors that influence how FLAP funding will be allocated.
2. For projects that are identified on the state routes highlighted in gold, there is an opportunity to leverage FLAP funding with other pots of funding managed by Gunnison Valley TPR and CDOT.
3. For projects that are identified on the local routes highlighted in red, FLAP provides a rare opportunity for local agencies to receive federal funding for their roads to the extent that those projects can be shown to enhance primary access to the adjacent federal lands and align with the priorities of the federal agency in charge of those lands and a portion of FLTP funding.

Figure 1: FLAP and FLTP Roads, and Mileage of FLTP roads by agency



**FLTP Road Mileage**

	FLTP Subset	FLTP Proposed	FLTP Total	Open to Passenger Vehicles	Paved	Unpaved
<b>Gunnison Valley</b>						
US Forest Service	41.3	174.6	215.9	986.8	26.4	611.8
Bureau of Land Management	0	0	0	412.1	0.0	412.1
National Park Service	14.7		14.7	14.7	14.7	0
US Fish & Wildlife Service	1.6		1.6	1.6	0.8	0.8
US Army Corps of Engineers	0		0	0	0	0
Bureau of Reclamation	29.1		29.1	29.1	19.1	10.0
	86.7	174.6	261.3	1,444.3	61.0	1,034.7

From a planning process standpoint, the differing approach to project prioritization and selection between the FLTP and FLAP creates a number of challenges in terms of aligning project priorities amongst FLTP partners and the PDCs in each state. In Colorado, the PDC is made up of a tri-party member group that includes representatives from FLH, CDOT, and a person from the Association of Counties. Additionally, FLH convenes a Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) to help evaluate the projects submitted during each FLAP call for projects. The TAG is comprised of a representative from each federal agency, and while TAG members aren't formally part of the PDC, they are very influential in the project selection process.

A work session was held with federal, state, and local agencies in the Gunnison Valley TPR to facilitate a more integrated approach to planning and program projects of mutual interest. As indicated above, Error! Reference source not found.1 shows an initial list of access enhancement needs that are intended to be the basis for collaboration during the next planning cycle under the 2045 RTP.

### Evaluating Enhanced Federal Lands Access Needs

When looking at the access enhance needs identified in Figure 1, it is important to keep in mind that managing access to Federal Lands and publicly owned land in general requires an ever increasing amount of interagency coordination and collaboration. As many of the needs indicate, demand for open space access continues to grow. Land managers at every levels of government (federal, state, and local) are confronted with seasonal overcrowding in popular locations with a lack of infrastructural capacity which may lead to degraded visitor experience and resource conditions caused by congestion, undesignated parking, and trail crowding. Many of the solutions to these common problems are enhanced and better achieved when agencies work collaboratively outside of their jurisdictional boundaries. Public agencies need to think regionally across the broad landscape and look for creative ways to communicate and coordinate across their boundaries by leveraging partnerships towards common solutions.

The list of needs represented by numbers in Figure 1 is a product of this type of regional collaboration, and understanding the interconnectedness of the needs is important. Additionally, it's important to understand the diversity of need represented by the list. The needs represented range from road maintenance to increased emergency response, safety, alternate Interstate access, improved bike/ped connectivity, expanded parking, and improved trailhead access. The BLM, USFS, NPS and BOR as well as the six counties in the Gunnison Valley TPR have identified a number of roadway improvement needs that currently exceed available funding from the FLTP, FLAP, or other funds managed by CDOT. Note that the needs on the map are assigned a number, and they are arranged in geographic clusters. In total, 16 needs were identified and the following is a summary of how they interrelate to each other.

This first need was identified during the Needs Assessment conducted for the Grand Valley TPR and is an example of inadequate and unsafe parking.

Need ID	Need	Description	Need Type	Ownership	FLMA Access
19	Ward Creek Parking Area/Trailhead	Unsafe Parking area on Hwy 65 ... major redesign needed to alleviate safety issues, particularly during winter use	Parking	USFS	USFS

This cluster is a bundle of need identified for the BOR. All the work is roadway in the center of the region in the vicinity of Black Canyon NP.

Need ID	Need	Description	Need Type	Ownership	FLMA Access
26	Blue Mesa Dam	Gravel to asphalt ; Acces Road Repair; 1.5 miles	Roadway	BOR	BOR
27	Morrow POint Dam ; 1.5	pulverize and repave 1/3 in asphalt	Roadway	BOR	BOR
33	Crawford Park Roads	Repacing and resurface of Interior roads	Roadway	BOR	BOR
34	Crystal East Portal Road	Paving of East Portal Road, 5 miles at steepest grade	Roadway	BOR	BOR

In Hinsdale County and on the southern tip of the region, NFSR 520 is on the FLTP and FSR520.21 connects to the FLTP route. The other critical need for Hinsdale County that didn't yet make onto the map is the set of counties roads that make up the Alpine Loop at provides access to BLM Lands. Travel demand on the loop is growing and there is increasing need for a vary of roadway improvements including widening, adding shoulders, improving parking and drainage.

Need ID	Need	Description	Need Type	Ownership	FLMA Access
123	NFSR 520 Road	Road reconstruction needed on NFSR 520	Roadway	USFS	USFS
124	FSR520.2I Crooked Creek Drainage Improvements	Drainage improvement needed on FSR 529.2I	Roadway	USFS	USFS

This next cluster of need is focused on access improvement needs for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP and Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA). Black Canyon's visitation has increased by more than 140% in the last 10 years and has a limited road and parking space to accommodate a growing level of demand given resource protection conditions. There is a need to manage the level of vehicle traffic as most of the sites could accommodate more people if they aren't arriving by personal vehicles. The need for transit connections from Montrose to the park was identified as well as the potential to shuttle visitors along the South Rim Drive thus eliminating or significantly reducing the number of cars and creating more space for bike/ped access.

Need ID	Need	Description	Need Type	Ownership	FLMA Access
128	Montrose to Black Canyon of the Gunnison transit	Explore opportunities for transit from Montrose to Black Canyon of the Gunnison	Transit	State	NPS
129	BLCA Travel Demand Planning Study	Study travel demand and congestion at Black Canyon of the Gunnison	Planning	NPS	NPS
130	Transit Access at Curecanti NRA	Study transit access - specifically bus stops - at Curecanti NRA	Planning/ Transit	NPS	NPS
132	Intersection Improvements at SR 135/US 50	Look at intersection improvements in Gunnison at SR 135 and US 50 to mitigate congestion and traffic	Planning	State	USFS

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These USFS roadway needs are a combination of paved and unpaved improvements on roads that are on a combination of county and USFS owned. This creates leveraging opportunities between the FLTP and FLAP.

Need ID	Need	Description	Need Type	Ownership	FLMA Access
131	Ohio Creek Pass Rehab	Rehabilitate Ohio Creek Road - Unpaved Scenic Byway	Roadway	USFS	USFS
141	Kebler Pass Road	Reconstruction and Paving	Roadway	County	USFS
142	Cumberland Pass Road	Reconstruction	Roadway	USFS	USFS

These last two USFS needs are on roads provide access to the Uncompahgre National Forest on the eastern side of the region. Neither is designated FLTP so they need to be added to the inventory of eligible routes before they could compete for funding.

Need ID	Need	Description	Need Type	Ownership	FLMA Access
143	Transfer Road	Place gravel on road	roadway	USFS	USFS
144	25 Mesa Rd	place gravel on road	Roadway	USFS	USFS

All of these FLTP and FLAP eligible needs currently exceed the availability of funding. However, their inclusion in this plan is a starting point for improved representation of these important programs and an attempt to organize these containing needs into a program of projects that complement each other as supposed to just being competitors against each other in future calls for projects. While detailed cost estimates have not yet been developed, it is likely that the cost to implement all these projects would require an investment in excess of \$100M. Clearly, the gap is large right now for how these needs will be met, but as demand for access to federally owned open space continues to grow so too will improvement needs.

#### Next Steps – Transitioning to Needs Prioritizations and Project Development

Now that an initial set of federal lands access enhancement needs have been identified, the next steps in the planning process are prioritization and project development. As the transition is made from long range planning to the project implementation phase of the transportation planning process, it is important to recognize the limitations in the availability of funding that all agencies grapple with and the importance of understanding the variance in missions and land management goals that exists amongst the federal agencies involved.

The NPS, for example, has a dual mission of ensuring public access while simultaneously ensuring that the natural and cultural resources are protected for future generations. As the demand for access continues to increase, the NPS faces the ever increasing challenge of finding new and creative ways to accommodate visitor access demands while also ensuring that the integrity of the resources they manage remain intact. By contrast, the USFS manage significantly great amounts of acreage and missions that allow both dispersed recreation and resource extraction. Additionally, it is often the case that there is a National Park or Monument that is surrounded by a vast wilderness managed by BLM, the USFS, a state park, county open space, or an intricate combination of multiple public land managers.



The FWS, USACE, and BOR have missions that are resource management focused more exclusively, and they often are part of the bigger public land landscape along with the NPS, USFS, or BLM. They too have sites that are in high demand for visitor access, but they may be less compelled by their mission or even prohibited from providing visitor access. Understanding the different carrying capacities across multiple sites at a landscape scale is critical to scaling the transportation system to a level of visitor access that doesn't exceed the capacity of any site in the system. As indicated in the previous sections, federal lands access for the Gunnison Valley TPR includes a combination of BLM, USFS, BOR, and NPS lands.

In terms of needs prioritization and project development, the next steps will focus on developing multi-agency evaluation criteria in conjunction with the FLMAs, CDOT, and the TPR Members to determine the comparative priority of the needs identified and the extent to which the needs are shared across jurisdiction. Additionally, the FLMAs will work with FHWA, CDOT and the members of the TPR to research innovative finance options that could introduce new revenue streams into the planning process and provide new opportunities to better leverage existing federal transportation funding programs. Using the established forums and other engagement opportunities built into the transportation process, the NPS and USFS will continue to work with CDOT and the members of the TPR to move their most important needs identified in this plan into the project development pipeline.