



April 17, 2020

The Honorable Cynthia Axne
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Axne:

Thank you for your letter to Secretary of Transportation Elaine L. Chao seeking information on the status of disaster relief funds to help Iowans affected by the flooding that began in March 2019.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) primary assistance program for the repair or reconstruction of Federal-aid highways damaged by natural disasters or catastrophic failures is the Emergency Relief (ER) Program. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), which administers the ER Program, works with the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) to provide ER assistance for eligible road and bridge projects on State and locally-owned Federal-aid highways in Iowa.

Following the 2019 flooding, Iowa DOT, FHWA's Iowa Division Office, and local public agencies responded to restore essential traffic to Federal-aid routes as efficiently as possible. On April 15, 2019, DOT announced the "quick release" of \$9 million of ER funds to help pay for the repairs done to restore essential traffic and prevent additional damage at locations impacted by severe flooding. Despite the prolonged and repeated flooding challenges throughout Iowa in 2019, traffic has been restored on all flood-damaged Federal-aid routes in the State, except for a few county-owned Federal-aid routes that are still closed due to construction. Based on the coordinated assessments, Iowa DOT estimates the State experienced a total of \$73.9 million in ER-eligible damages to the Federal-aid highway system statewide.

In addition to the annual amounts authorized for the ER Program, Congress periodically provides a supplemental ER appropriation when current available funding falls short of total outstanding ER needs. The FHWA administers such supplemental disaster relief acts by releasing funds to advance projects that can use the funds in the following 6-month period. While the June 2019 Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act you referenced appropriated \$1.65 billion in ER funds for Federal-aid highways and federally owned roads on public lands, Iowa DOT did not have ER projects ready for that 6-month window. In FHWA's most recent allocation, on February 27, 2020, FHWA allocated \$653,225,970 to State DOTs, Federal Land Management Agencies, and territories. This included \$30,300,728 to assist in repair and reconstruction of Federal-aid roads and bridges damaged by Missouri River flooding, rain, and snow melt in March 2019. The FHWA also allocated \$50,000 for repair of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service facility in Iowa.

Of 175 flood-damaged sites on Federal-aid highways identified in the State, FHWA has approved 113 of the 116 Detailed Damage Inspection Reports (DDIR) completed by the Iowa DOT, totaling an estimated \$51,917,166, that can be reimbursed, along with any other eligible work, during the next release. As a result, the Federal-aid reimbursement process has begun for this work. Iowa DOT is developing DDIRs for the remaining sites, many of which were not accessible until recently due to the prolonged flood event.

Repair and reconstruction work is continuing in Iowa in advance of the next cycle for ER funding. The FHWA has assured Iowa DOT that it may use its regular formula Federal-aid highway funds for eligible repairs, with the Federal share to be reimbursed when ER funds become available.

We understand that you provided similar letters to other agencies whose disaster aid is related to individuals, business, and communities. The FHWA primarily works with State DOTs. Other agencies that were also a part of the disaster supplemental act will be better positioned to respond to your specific questions for those areas within their jurisdiction.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact me or Mr. Alex Etchen, FHWA Associate Administrator for Highway Policy and External Affairs, at 202-366-5085 or Alex.Etchen@dot.gov.

Sincerely,



Nicole R. Nason
Administrator