

Article 1

Progressive Railroading 2/19/2016

Rail News: Federal Legislation & Regulation FRA awards \$10 million to states to upgrade grade crossings

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) yesterday announced the award of nearly \$10 million in grants for nine projects in eight states to upgrade the safety of grade crossings along energy routes.

The funding will be provided under the Railroad Safety Grants for the Safe Transportation of Energy Products (STEP) by Rail Program, according to an FRA press release.

The agency received 34 eligible applications requesting five times — or \$50.8 million — available for the program.

Grants were awarded to state departments of transportation (DOT) in the states of Washington, California, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Arkansas and Louisiana. Elected officials in some of those states have already announced the grant awards and plans for them.

"These grants will reduce accidents and fatalities at railroad crossings and help modernize our nation's rail system," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. "Through a combination of these grants, education and enforcement, we can — and will — achieve our goal of preventing accidents and deaths at railroad crossings."

The FRA last year launched a new effort to address a recent uptick in fatalities at crossings. Collisions between trains and automotive vehicles at crossings are the second-leading cause of all railroad-related fatalities. In 2014, 267 individuals died in these collisions, according to the FRA.

Article 2

RT&S

2/23/2016 Eighth round of TIGER funding makes \$500 million available

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) will make \$500 million available for transportation projects across the country under an eighth round of the successful Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) competitive grant program.

"The TIGER program funds vital transportation projects that provide real benefits to communities all across the country. Every year, we see hundreds of compelling applications that have the potential to improve people's access to economic opportunities, make people safer and improve their well-being." said U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. "I am proud that for seven rounds, TIGER has been able to make a valuable contribution to improving our nation's transportation infrastructure and I look forward to this year's competition."

Like the first seven rounds, FY 2016 TIGER discretionary grants will fund capital investments in surface transportation infrastructure and will be awarded on a competitive basis for projects that will have a significant impact on the nation, a metropolitan area or a region. The 2016 TIGER grant program will continue to make transformative surface transportation investments by providing improvements over existing conditions. The program will focus on capital projects that generate economic development and improve access to reliable, safe and affordable transportation for communities, both urban and rural.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, does not provide dedicated funding for the planning, preparation, or design of capital projects; however, these activities may be funded as part of an overall construction project.

Since 2009, TIGER has provided nearly \$4.6 billion to 381 projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, including 134 projects to support rural and tribal communities. Demand has been overwhelming and during the previous seven rounds, USDOT received more than 6,700 applications requesting more than \$134 billion for transportation projects across the country.

The TIGER grant program supports innovative projects, including multimodal and multi-jurisdictional projects, which are difficult to fund through traditional federal programs. These federal funds leverage money from private sector partners, states, local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, ports and transit agencies. The 2015 TIGER round alone is leveraging \$500 million in federal investment to support \$1.4 billion in overall transportation investments.

Applications are due April 29, 2016.

Article 3

RT&S

Friday, February 26, 2016

USDOT accepting applications for new \$800M FASTLANE grants

Written by Mischa Wanek-Libman, editor

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) is soliciting applications for a new grant program authorized by the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act.

The FAST Act authorizes \$800 million for the Fostering Advancements in Shipping and Transportation for the Long-term Achievement of National Efficiencies (FASTLANE) grant program in fiscal year 2016 to fund critical freight and highway projects across the country. Rural projects will receive 25 percent of the funds and smaller projects, will receive 10 percent of the available funds.

FASTLANE grants, authorized by the FAST Act's Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects (NSFHP) program, will fund small and large projects, based on project size, that meet statutory requirements. Large projects (equal to the lesser of \$100 million or a certain specified statutory percentage of the project state's FY 2015 apportionment) are eligible for a minimum award of \$25 million. Small projects, which consist of projects below the minimum large project size threshold, are eligible for a minimum award of \$5 million.

"Our nation needs a strong multimodal freight system to both compete in the global economy and meet the needs of consumers and industry," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. "We now have an opportunity to fund high-impact projects that address key challenges affecting the movement of people and freight."

The FASTLANE grant program provides funding for projects of national or regional significance. USDOT said that for the first time in the U.S. Department of Transportation's 50-year history, the program establishes broad, multiyear eligibilities for freight infrastructure, including intermodal projects.

FASTLANE grants will address many of the challenges outlined in the USDOT report Beyond Traffic, including increased congestion on the nation's highways and the need for a strong multimodal transportation system to support the expected growth in freight movement both by ton and value. It is also in line with the Department's draft National Freight Strategic Plan released in October 2015, which looks at challenges and identifies strategies to address impediments to the efficient flow of goods throughout the nation.

The NSFHP program is authorized at \$4.5 billion through 2020. Applications for FY 2016 are due on April 14, 2016. For more information, including a schedule of webinars on the program, please visit www.transportation.gov/FASTLANEgrants.

Article 4

Railway Age

Friday, February 26, 2016

Don't judge a bridge by its color

Written by William C. Vantuono, Editor-in-Chief

The Federal Railroad Administration on Feb. 26, 2016 launched a new tool on its website that allows states and municipalities to request inspection reports for railroad bridges in their communities. FRA's announcement of the website came with allegations leveled at the railroads that the industry says are essentially bogus.

The tool is being launched following the passage of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act and "is one of the first provisions FRA has implemented," FRA said. It is in response to what the FRA claims is indifference and disrespect for public safety on the part of railroads about publicly communicating bridge conditions to politicians and the public.

The Association of American Railroads has a different take.

FRA claims that railroads have been unresponsive with regard to publicly sharing information about bridge conditions, going as far as saying they are "ignoring" and "putting off" members of Congress or the public making inquiries. Said Administrator Sarah E. Feinberg: "The FRA has repeatedly urged railroads to be more responsive and more transparent with state and local leaders concerned about the condition of their local railroad bridges. State and local Congressional officials will now be able to get more information from railroads on the infrastructure in their communities. Providing inspection reports to local leaders is a great first step, but more can—and must—be done. The FAST Act addressed the issue after months of [me] repeatedly urging railroads to be more transparent and respond to communities when they have questions and concerns about the condition of rail bridges. Last September, [I] sent a letter to all railroads saying, 'When a local leader or elected official asks a railroad about the safety status of a railroad bridge, they deserve a timely and transparent response. I urge you to engage more directly with local leaders and provide timely information to assure the community that the bridges in their communities are safe and structurally sound.' While addressing the Railroad Safety Advisory Committee in November 2015, [I] again told railroads, when FRA is asked about bridge safety, it's frequently because, again, the public or a member of Congress become concerned and has tried to get answers from a railroad, and they have been ignored or put off."

AAR spokesman Ed Greenberg responded to FRA's allegations: "Freight railroads are complying with the FAST Act measure passed by Congress, which provides a workable framework for freight railroads to provide pertinent inspection information that is requested," he told Railway Age. "Freight railroads also have been taking additional steps to enhance bridge information sharing, including having information readily available on their websites. Bridge inspections are comprehensive reports based on meticulous examinations conducted by qualified rail bridge experts, who follow strict engineering standards to assess the bridge's structural integrity. Under the FAST Act measure, pertinent areas from bridge inspections have been identified so that railroads are able to provide this key information in order to respond to a request.

"Regarding rail bridge safety in general, the freight rail industry shares the FRA's commitment to safety, and freight railroads are steadfast compliant with federal regulations when it comes to the nation's rail bridges, which are built, maintained and inspected to handle today's freight traffic. Freight railroads follow an aggressive 24/7 safety first inspection and monitoring process. Qualified railroad bridge inspectors are meticulous in assessing a bridge's structural integrity and have deep expertise in assessing the safety of the many types of bridges in use today, including those made of timber, steel, concrete, stone and brick. These bridge experts know the safety of a bridge has nothing to do with how good it looks on the outside and thoroughly scrutinize the structure to make sure it is safe, with no relationship to whether it is aesthetically pleasing. Some bridges are painted, others are not, while some are more weathered than others. Outward appearance does not indicate a bridge's safety."

A state or a political subdivision of a state, such as a city, county, town or municipality, can now use FRA's website to request information from inspection reports for local bridges via <https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0922>. Once FRA receives the request, the railroad that owns the bridge will have 30 days to respond to the request. FRA plans to provide a copy of the report to the requester within 45 days of the original request. According to the FAST Act, the following information about the bridge will be included in the report: the date of the last inspection; length of bridge; location of bridge; type of bridge (superstructure); type of structure (substructure); features crossed by the bridge; railroad contact information; and a general statement on the condition of the bridge.

FRA has requested additional resources as part of the President's Fiscal Year 2017 budget to double its bridge specialist staff and create a national bridge inventory database and website. "We hope Congress will provide the resources to double our bridge safety staff and create a national database," said Feinberg.