COLORADO
Department of Transportation
Office of the Executive Director

2829 W Howard Place
Denver, CO 80204

October 27, 2026

Federal Highway Administrator Sean McMaster
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, DC 0590

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

Dear Administrator McMaster:

Thank you for you and your team's attention and quick engagement as we respond to and assess the damage from significant flooding in Southwest Colorado over the past several days. 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.

Severe storms began on October 22, 2026, and extended through October 25, 2026. Rainfall totals have reached seven inches in areas like Pagosa Springs, with flooding that topped four feet on our federal-aid roadways during its peak. Flooding closed multiple state and local roads for extended periods of time, causing a range of immediate and longer-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.

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 within Southwest Colorado.

Current assessments show that three significant roads in particular have sustained structural damage: US 160, including multiple locations; US 550, between Ironton and Silverton; and 12 miles of CO 151. Our provisional damage assessments show roughly $65 million in likely damages, and we request 10 percent of those amounts — $6.5 million — in quick release funds so that we can begin work immediately. CDOT has commenced work in many of the damaged roadway areas with the goal of completing temporary repairs by winter and resuming permanent repair and betterments in spring 2027.

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.

US 160 (Wolf Creek Pass, Pagosa Springs to Durango and Four Corners Bridge)

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 three locations within this 33-mile closure have sustained damage, and are in need of emergency repairs. These include:
    - **Damaged culvert, MP 150**: Flooding caused a 20 foot deep culvert to fail five miles north of Pagosa Springs, resulting in a sinkhole and about 100 feet of highway damage. Drainage inspections and road repairs will need to be completed when conditions allow.
    - **Various damage to highway structures, MP 160-165**: Torrential rains and heavy runoff have damaged a retaining wall that supports the highway. Significant repairs are needed at this location near the Wolf Creek Valley Scenic Overlook. Two rock walls that protect the highway from debris falling from the cliffs uphill of the highway were undercut, further towards the summit from the overlook. These rock walls will need to be stabilized. Significant cutting to the roadside ditch in this stretch has also been identified.
    - **Damaged highway, MP 176 to 183 (Narrows)**: Flooding of the South Fork of the Rio Grande has caused shoulder damage and undercutting of the roadway along a three to four-mile stretch of the highway. The undercutting extends approximately six feet into the travel lane, about half of the eastbound lane. Floodwater levels within the river channel

next to the highway have been high, covering the road in some sections and making stabilization work difficult.

Shoulder damage and undercutting of the roadway on US 160 at MP 177

Retaining wall damage on US 160 at MP 161

- **US 160 west of Pagosa Springs, towards Durango (MP 133 to 137):** This area was fully closed from late Thursday evening, October 22, until Saturday,

October 24, after flooding caused significant damage to the eastbound travel lane between Deer Trail Road and Elk Canyon/Hersch Avenue. Crews opened the highway to one-way alternating traffic, but motorists continue to experience delays, and a temporary signal and pilot truck are guiding traffic through the impacted area. Expected repair and reconstruction needs include:

- Approximately 500 feet undercutting of the eastbound travel lane;
- Repairs to shoulder areas approximately 1,500 feet long on both sides of the highway;
- Up to a mile of major highway reconstruction (two to 12 foot travel lanes, and two foot shoulders);
- Culvert replacement and stream channel rehabilitation.

Significant shoulder damage and undercutting of travel lanes on US 160 at MP 135

- **US 160 Four Corners Bridge (MP 1):** This bridge has been closed since October 24 due to rising floodwaters and will remain closed until flood flows decrease and inspections can confirm the bridge structure is stable and safe for the traveling public. At this time, CDOT is not estimating full replacement costs for this bridge. Water gauges at this bridge confirmed that the high flow reached the 500-year event level. CDOT is estimating that major scour protection will be required for the majority of the substructure, with high end estimates at approximately $9 million.

San Juan River Bridge and floodwaters reaching the bridge girders on US 160 at MP 1

US 550 Red Mountain Pass (MP 75 to 80)

US 550, Red Mountain Pass, is a critical route for the communities of Durango, Silverton, Ouray, Ridgway and Montrose. US 550 at MP 75 was closed on October 22 due to mountainside flooding concerns and roadway damage. Due to the storm, tTwo culverts were plugged by debris and water flowed over the highway and damaged the downhill embankment. The shoulder embankment and a portion of the southbound travel lane was washed away. The area of downhill embankment damage was approximately 100 feet (along the edge of the roadway) and 10 feet down the hillside. Crews were able to begin stabilization work at the area and open the highway to one-lane alternating traffic, controlled by a portable light signal on the

evening of October 23. However, two culverts will likely need to be replaced, and the surrounding embankment stabilized.

Damage to shoulder and southbound travel lane on US 550 at MP 75

Colorado Highway 151 (MP 27 and 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.

Floodwaters destroyed and washed away this segment of roadway, about seven miles south of the road's junction with US 160 in two locations. The first location is near MP 27, where the entire highway has been washed out, and Stollsteimer Creek is running down the highway alignment for approximately 1,200 feet. At MP 30, Stollsteimer Creek ran over the highway for 48 hours and undermined both sides of the highway for approximately 300 feet.

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.

Highway destroyed by flood on CO 151 at MP 27

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 response to 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 $65 million. This estimate assumes that no full replacement of National Bridge Inventory (NBI) bridges are required (other than two NBI culverts) since complete structural inspections cannot occur at this time due to high water levels. CDOT expects to be able to provide a more accurate estimate in 8-10 weeks and will keep our federal partners updated as soon as more information is available.

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

- CDOT maintenance crew response (including equipment) = $1.5 million
- Visible damage estimates (including traffic control) = $45 million
- Assumed damage repair estimates (non-visible) costs = $3 million
- Design and field preparation costs = $5 million
- Construction Management and Construction Engineering costs = $6 million
- CDOT Indirects and Administration (non-maintenance staff) costs = $4.5 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 $6.5 million (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 $5 million of Transportation Commission

Contingency on October 26, 2026 to aid the initial response efforts. The approval of quick release will allow a greater share of repair needs to proceed immediately.

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

Sincerely,

Shoshana Lew
Executive Director

cc: John Cater, FHWA Colorado Division Administrator
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