

Welcome to the Commuter Authority Rail Safety Improvement (CARSI) Round 2 Grants Webinar

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Number 693JJ322NF00002

This webinar is brought to you by the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT)

Date: March 3, 2022, Time: 2:00-3:30 pm (EST)

- Submit your questions or comments via the Chat Box.
- This webinar will be recorded. The link to the recording will be posted to Grants.gov under the NOFO number.



Welcome

Sarah Tarpgaard, Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer

USDOT / Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Office of Acquisition and Grants Management

Esther Strawder, Railway-Highway Crossing Program Manager

USDOT/Federal Highway Administration

Office of Safety



Purpose and Disclaimer

This webinar will be conducted as a virtual forum and will help potential Applicants gather additional information about this Funding Opportunity and ask specific questions. Participation in this webinar is not mandatory to submit an application under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

As soon as possible after the webinar, the U.S. DOT will post the webinar presentation slides and a webinar recording at www.Grants.gov.

In the event of any discrepancy between the information presented in this webinar and the NOFO written document, the NOFO written document will prevail.

Agenda

- **Introduction of Presenters**
 - Sarah Tarpgaard, Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer, FHWA
 - Esther Strawder, FHWA Office of Safety
- **Grant Program Overview: Purpose, Legislative Authority, & Goals**
- **Grantee Eligibility, Cost Share Requirement**
- **Technical Details: Eligible Projects**
- **Application Instructions: Submittal Process & Content**
- **Application Review and Selection of Awardees**
- **Q&A**

Program Overview

NOFO Sections A & B

Esther Strawder, FHWA Office of Safety



CARSI Grants Program Overview

- The purpose of this grant program is to improve safety at public railway-highway crossings. The program provides funding to eligible entities for the construction of projects for the elimination of hazards at railway-highway crossings.
 - Multiple grant awards anticipated
 - No specified minimum or maximum amount per grant



SUMMARY	FY 2020 Appropriation Act	FY 2021 Appropriation Act	Total
Funding Available under this NOFO	\$9,744,250 (available from CARSI Round 1 NOFO)	\$50,000,000	\$59,744,250
Cost Share Required per Legislation	10% of project cost	0%	

CARSI Grants Program Overview

Funding is available from two separate Fiscal Year (FY) Appropriations Acts: FY 2020 and FY 2021.

CARSI Grants Program Goals

- Specific program goals include:
 - 1) Improve safety at railway-highway crossings through the elimination of hazards at public railway-highway crossings;
 - 2) Reduce fatalities, serious injuries, and crashes at public railway-highway crossings;
 - 3) Reduce the number of existing public at-grade crossings by closure or grade separation; and
 - 4) Reduce delays or improve system performance by eliminating hazards posed by blocked grade crossings due to idling trains.



Grantee Eligibility and Cost Share

NOFO Section C

Sarah Tarpgaard, Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer, FHWA



Eligible Grantees

The prime grantee must be either: (1) a commuter authority; OR (2) a public or non-profit entity partnering with an eligible commuter authority.

A grantee team must include a “commuter authority” as defined in 49 U.S.C. 24102, which is a State, local, or regional entity established to provide, or make a contract for, commuter rail passenger transportation.

An eligible commuter authority must have experienced at least one accident investigated by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2018, and for which the NTSB issued an accident report.

Method of Award

Eligible commuter authorities are encouraged to partner with their State department of transportation (State DOT).

USDOT recommends the State DOT apply as the prime applicant for receipt of CARSI Federal funding.

Awards may be made to State DOTs as pass-through grantees for administration of the funds to a commuter authority as a subawardee.

Or, awards can be made directly to a commuter authority by USDOT headquarters.

“Cost Share” = “Match” = “Non-Federal Share”

1

Cost share or match means the portion of project costs not paid by Federal funds.

2

Grantee must provide documentation to support the value of cost share proposed, to prove fair market value.

3

Cost share cannot come from Federal sources (*like another grant*) unless the underlying statute specifically authorizes use for a match.

4

For a more complete definition, and guidance on how to value cost share, please see 2 CFR 200.306 on Cost Sharing or matching.

Cost Share (continued)

Cost Share is not required but is encouraged.

- Evaluation Criteria give preference for projects that include cost sharing.

10% Cost Share is required for projects funded with FY 2020 funding.

- \$9,744,250 available from FY20 CARSI Round 1

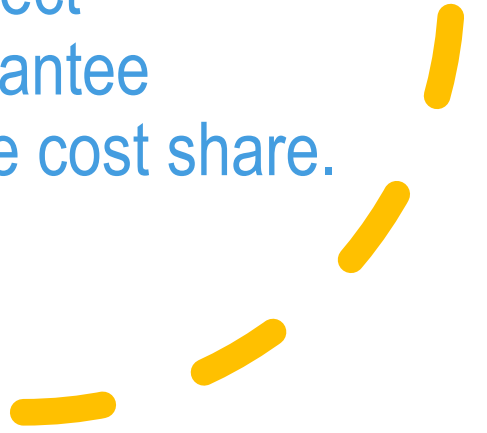
0% Cost Share is required for projects funded with FY 2021 funding.

- \$50,000,000 FY21 CARSI Round 2

USDOT will decide which fiscal year funding is used on individual selected grants, taking into account the cost share requirements of the funding.

- Applicants do not need to identify which pot of funding they are applying for.

Cost Share (continued)

- Cost share can include:
 - Project costs incurred during the grant period by the grantee or a 3rd party, in the form of labor, equipment, etc. (“soft match” or “noncash match”);
 - Cash contributions from the grantee used to pay for project costs incurred by a vendor during the grant period. (“hard match”).
 - Cost share can include direct and indirect costs.
 - Cost share contributions may come from the prime grantee, a project partner, project subcontractor, 3rd party. But prime grantee remains responsible for satisfying the cost share.
- 

Estimated Timeline

Date	Action
2/14/2022	NOFO issued
4/14/2022	Applications due by 11:59 PM (Eastern Time) through www.Grants.gov
July 2022	Estimated announcement of selected awardees



Technical Details: Eligible Projects

NOFO Section C

Esther Strawder, FHWA Office of Safety



Eligible Projects

- Eligible projects under this grant program are limited to the following:
 - the separation or protection of grades at crossings;
 - the reconstruction of existing railroad grade crossing structures;
 - the relocation of highways to eliminate grade crossings; or
 - projects at grade crossings to eliminate hazards posed by blocked grade crossings due to idling trains.
 - NOTE: The proposed location of the project is not required to be the location of the accident previously investigated by the NTSB. The proposed location of the project is up to the discretion of the applicant.
- 

Priorities on Eligible Projects

- Priority will be given to applications that bundle safety improvements to eliminate hazards at more than one public railway-highway crossing.
- Priority will be given to applications that bundle grade separation project(s) with closing more than one existing public at-grade railway-highway crossing.
- Priority will be given to applications that propose projects for construction as opposed to engineering and design.



Application Instructions:

Submittal Process & Application Content

NOFO Section D

Esther Strawder, Section 130 Program Manager, FHWA Office of Safety

Sarah Tarpgaard, Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer, FHWA



Application Submission Process

- Applicants must submit their applications via [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) under the Notice of Funding Opportunity Number: 693JJ322NF00002
- Applications are due by April 14, 2022 by 11:59 PM (Eastern Time) through www.Grants.gov
- You need a registered Grants.gov account. Obtaining an account can involve multiple steps and numerous days. Please see the NOFO and Grants.gov website for detailed instructions, training videos, an online user guide, and a help desk.

The screenshot displays the Grants.gov website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: HOME, LEARN GRANTS, SEARCH GRANTS, APPLICANTS, GRANTORS, SYSTEM-TO-SYSTEM, FORMS, CONNECT, and SUPPORT. A search bar on the right contains the text 'Grant Opportunities' and a search button. Below the navigation bar, the page title is 'VIEW GRANT OPPORTUNITY'. The main content area shows the grant details for 693JJ322NF00002, titled 'Commuter Authority Rail Safety Improvement (CARS) Grants' by the Department of Transportation, DOT Federal Highway Administration. A red 'Apply' button is visible. Below the title, there are tabs for SYNOPSIS, VERSION HISTORY, RELATED DOCUMENTS, and PACKAGE. The 'General Information' section is expanded, showing details such as Document Type (Grants Notice), Funding Opportunity Number (693JJ322NF00002), Funding Opportunity Title (Commuter Authority Rail Safety Improvement (CARS) Grants), Opportunity Category (Discretionary), Opportunity Category Explanation, Funding Instrument Type (Grant), Category of Funding Activity (Transportation), Category Explanation, Expected Number of Awards, CFDA Number(s) (20.205 - Highway Planning and Construction), Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement (Yes), Version (Synopsis 1), Posted Date (Aug 25, 2020), Last Updated Date (Aug 25, 2020), Original Closing Date for Applications (Oct 26, 2020), Current Closing Date for Applications (Oct 26, 2020), Archive Date (Nov 25, 2020), Estimated Total Program Funding (\$50,000,000), Award Ceiling (\$50,000,000), and Award Floor (\$0).



Application Submission Process

To apply for a Federal grant using Grants.gov, an Applicant needs a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number, an active [www.Sam.gov](https://www.sam.gov) registration, and a Grants.gov account.

Can take 4 weeks to complete all these steps. Start now!

Grants.gov Support: Grants.gov provides applicants 24/7 support via the toll-free number 1-800-518-4726 and email at support@grants.gov.

If you have technical difficulties, it is best to call the Grants.gov Support Center and get a ticket number.



Late Applications

A late application will not be reviewed or considered unless the Agreement Officer determines that doing so is in FHWA's best interest.

In the event of system problems or technical difficulties with the application submittal, Applicants should contact the FHWA point of contact designated in the NOFO.

If Applicants are unable to use the system due to technical difficulties, Applicants must e-mail applications to the FHWA point of contact no later than the application deadline cited above.

Volume 1 – Project Application

- Cover Page
- Project Narrative (30-page limit on Project Narrative section)
- Project Readiness (no page limit)
- Letters of Support (no page limit)
- Benefit-Cost Analysis (no page limit)

Volume 2 – Budget Application - no page limit

- Application Forms
- Cost Breakdown
- Other Business Information

Application Content (NOFO Section D)



Volume 1 – Project Application

Cover Page

Project Narrative (30-page limit on Project Narrative section)

Project Readiness (no page limit)

Letters of Support (no page limit)

Benefit-Cost Analysis (no page limit)

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Volume 1 – Cover Page

Cover Page should include:

Project Name

Project location

Name of eligible entity applying

Total project costs

Amount of Federal funding requested

Amount of non-Federal share proposed if applicable

Volume 1 – Project Narrative

Project Narrative is limited to 30-pages and should include the necessary information for FHWA to determine that the project satisfies the eligibility criteria, and to assess how the application addresses the selection criteria.

- i. Statement of applicant eligibility
- ii. Statement of project eligibility
- iii. Project description
- iv. Safety impacts
- v. Safety impacts performance metrics
- vi. Quality of life impact
- vii. Summary of benefit-cost analysis

Volume 1 – Project Readiness

Project Readiness should include information sufficient for USDOT to determine whether the project is reasonably expected to begin construction in a timely manner.

- i. Technical feasibility
- ii. Project schedule
- iii. Required approvals, environmental permits and reviews
- iv. Assessment of Project Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Volume 1 – Letters of Support

Letters of support should be included from all identified partners, as applicable, and required if:

- Rail corridor is owned by an entity other than the commuter authority.
- Funding or resources is contributed by other partners, including if the State DOT will act as a pass through entity for the proposed project.
- Operation and maintenance is required by another entity than the eligible commuter authority.

Volume 1 – Benefit-Cost Analysis

- The Benefit-Cost Analysis should document the assumptions and methodology used to produce the analysis, including a description, sources of data, and values of key input parameters so that FHWA can replicate and evaluate the analysis.
- The results of the analysis should be summarized in the Project Narrative and the analysis attached as an appendix, including all relevant spreadsheet files and technical memos.
- USDOT Guidance applies to all USDOT grant programs that require a benefit-cost analysis. The Guidance is found here: <https://www.transportation.gov/office-policy/transportation-policy/benefit-cost-analysis-guidance-discretionary-grant-programs>.

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Volume 2 – Budget Application

- a. Application Forms
- b. Cost Breakdown
- c. Other Business Information



Volume 2 – Application Forms in Grants.gov

- Application Forms include: SF 424 Application for Federal Assistance; SF 424C Budget Information for Construction Programs; SF 424D Assurances for Construction Programs; and the SFLLL.
- NOTE: On the SF 424, the information in block 8a (Applicant's "Legal Name") must be the same as entered for registration in www.SAM.gov and for the Applicant's Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number.

Volume 2 – Cost Breakdown

Provide an estimate of all project costs including:

- Federal Share. Provide a detailed project budget showing how the Federal funds will be spent over the proposed period of performance. The budget should estimate – by dollar amount and percentage of cost – the cost of construction work for each project component.
- Cost Share if applicable. Describe proposed non-Federal share.

Volume 2 – Other Business Information

A series of questions to be answered by Applicant, including:

- List of past projects, whether an A-133 Audit has been done, Conflict of Interest statement, List contracts performed by grantee that have been terminated, List violations of criminal law
- *Acknowledgement of acceptance of the NOFO terms and acknowledgement and acceptance of any Amendments issued to this NOFO. List Amendment numbers and issue dates, if any.
 - Tip: Register to receive notifications of updates/amendments to this notice. It is the Applicant's responsibility to monitor for any updates to this notice.

Application Review & Selection

NOFO Section E

Sarah Tarpgaard, Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer, FHWA



Application Review and Selection Process

A multi-modal team of USDOT technical staff will review eligible applications and rate projects based on the NOFO evaluation criteria.

Discussions with Applicants may be necessary to address questions.

The final funding decisions will be made by the FHWA Administrator.

Evaluation Criteria

A. SAFETY IMPACTS: Degree to which the project will deliver safety impacts to meet the program goals.

B. PROJECT READINESS: Likelihood of a successful project, including Environmental Risk, Technical Capacity, and Financial Capacity.

C. ECONOMIC VITALITY: Extent to which a project would support the economic vitality of either the nation or a region.

D. COST SHARE: Extent of matching funds proposed. Preference for cost share.

E. QUALITY OF LIFE: EQUITY, CLIMATE, AND RURAL OUTCOMES: Extent to which the applicant incorporates these USDOT priorities into the project.

Type of Award, Period of Performance, Pre-Award Costs



Awards will be Cost Reimbursement grants.



Awards will vary in duration based on the proposed project. The anticipated period of performance is between 1 and 4 years from the effective date of award. Applicants shall propose a period of performance specific to their proposed demonstration project.



The FHWA will not reimburse any pre-award costs or application preparation costs.

Q & A

Q: Is right-of-way and engineering eligible reimbursable expenses?

- Yes, preliminary engineering costs (design, ROW, environmental) are eligible. However, please note the NOFO, states “Priority will be given to applications that propose projects for construction as opposed to engineering and design.”

Q: Is NEPA clearance required? Or can preliminary engineering activities still take place as part of the schedule for the grant award?

- Yes, as applicable, NEPA clearance is required. Preliminary engineering activities can take place as part of the grant period. However, please note the NOFO, states “Priority will be given to applications that propose projects for construction as opposed to engineering and design.”

Q & A

Q: Would these funds be eligible for grade crossing improvements associated with light rail? Or is it just commuter rail grade crossings?

- The railway highway crossing improvement should be the primary focus of the proposed project. Any ancillary safety improvement where a light rail may share the tracks or facilities with a commuter rail is acceptable to include.

Q: If the applicant submitted for engineering and construction, not just construction, would that be eligible?

- Yes, planning and engineering activities can take place as part of the grant period. However, please note the NOFO, states “Priority will be given to applications that propose projects for construction as opposed to engineering and design.”

Q & A

Q: Are we eligible if we have not had an accident between 2008 and 2018 that was investigated and had a report generated by the NTSB?

- No, this eligibility requirement comes directly from the 2020 and 2021 Appropriations Acts that authorize the funding and the grant program.

Q & A

Q: Must the involved public highway be a designated federal aid highway?

No, however, the project must be for a public railway-highway crossing.

Q & A

Q: If an applicant applies for construction funds under this NOFO, then does NEPA need to be complete before receiving award?

- No, NEPA clearance is not required to be completed before grant award. Planning and NEPA clearance activities can take place as part of award. However, the NOFO states “Priority will be given to applications that propose projects for construction as opposed to engineering and design.”
- If a grantee only applies for construction funds, preliminary engineering activities must be completed before grant award, including NEPA clearance if applicable. Previous CARSI awardees provided the status in their applications or gave an indication that the project is expected to qualify for a categorical exclusion.

Q & A

Q: Is there a date by which the project must be completed, thus a limit on period of performance?

- The NOFO states “The grant period of performance will vary by award and must be proposed by the applicant depending upon the needs of the proposed project. Estimated duration of grant awards is 1 to 4 years.” It’s a program goal for the project to be completed within 4 years of award.
- The funding lapses 9/30/2029 which means FHWA cannot make payments using the funds after 9/30/2029. The project must be completed, invoiced and payments made by FHWA – all by 9/30/2029. After that date the funds are cancelled, are no longer available.



Q & A

Q: Is it possible to propose a project wherein the State and local environmental and planning approvals process has not yet started?

- Yes, however, the project schedule should demonstrate how the project will be completed within 4 years, including accomplishment of the environmental and planning approvals.

Q: Is the period of performance completion date when the construction contract needs to be awarded by, or when construction needs to be completed?

- The applicant must complete the project actions they are awarded funds for by the completion date, including any preliminary engineering and construction activities included in the grant project.

Q & A

Q: Can preaward costs be included in the Benefit-Cost Analysis even though preaward costs are not reimbursable?

- Yes, the Benefit-Cost Analysis is intended to evaluate the overall merits of the project, rather than the merits of Federal investment in the project. Therefore, previously incurred costs should be included in the analysis even if they are not eligible for reimbursement.

Q: Can a Benefit-Cost Analysis be done after grant selection?

- No, the Benefit-Cost Analysis is a required portion of the application. It must be completed and submitted with the application by the deadline.

Q & A

Q: Will FHWA consider awarding less amounts than requested? As a corollary: if so, would it be advisable for an application to discuss scalability of the project?

- FHWA is not planning to award less amounts than requested. If the need arises, FHWA may enter into discussions with an applicant that may include mutually agreeing upon a lesser amount award than originally proposed if necessary due to the quantity, size and scope of the applications received and the results of the application reviews.

Q: Will there be a CARSI Round 3 NOFO in the future?

- Unknown.

More Q & A?

Additional Questions – from the Chat Box





Thank You for Attending

Contact Information

Please direct all inquiries to:

Sarah Tarpgaard, FHWA Contracting Officer/Agreement Officer

Sarah.Tarpgaard@dot.gov; 202-493-3225

