

CAGTC members awarded 22 percent of INFRA funding for nationally significant freight projects

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By AJOT

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) recently announced 26 projects set to receive funds from the fiscal year 2017/2018 round of the INFRA discretionary grant program. The INFRA program was designed by Congress in 2015 to make investments in the nation's most critical freight and highway needs. Of the approximately \$1.5 billion available, freight projects or projects with a freight component received nearly \$1.35 billion, or 87.7 percent of total dollars. However, much of the spending was spread broadly throughout the nation while needs continue to grow in many freight hubs.

“As a Coalition, we have long advocated for a freight-focused multimodal competitive grant program that uses objective, performance-based merit criteria to select high-priority goods movement projects,” said Elaine Nettle, executive director of the Coalition for America's Gateways and Trade Corridors (CAGTC). “We look forward to working with Congress and the Administration to strengthen the competitive grant program and fund projects with the most demonstrable benefit to the national economy. We are pleased that a number of CAGTC members received awards for their nationally-significant freight projects and know that these projects will go far in supporting the national and regional economies they serve.”

Substantial freight infrastructure needs remain in key regions across the nation, as demonstrated in CAGTC's Freight Can't Wait, Second Edition booklet. In 2016, the first round of this competitive grant program received \$13 in request for every \$1 in funding (total funding requests are not yet available under this round of INFRA). The safety, efficiency and reliability of the national freight network is critical – the system directly supports 44 million U.S. jobs and the health of our nation's other economic sectors are inextricably tied to it.

Several successful projects in this round of INFRA were put forward by or partnered on by CAGTC members, and total roughly 22 percent of total dollars awarded. These include:

- Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro), Interstate 5 Golden State Chokepoint Relief Program (I-5 Component)
- Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) in partnership with the Idaho Department of Transportation, Interstate 84 Safety, Mobility and Economic Opportunity Expansion – Karcher Interchange to Franklin Boulevard
- The City of Chicago and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning in partnership with the Illinois Department of Transportation, 75th Street Corridor Improvements and Argo Connections (P3, GS19, B9)
- The Memphis Chamber of Commerce supporting the Tennessee Department of Transportation, US-78/SR 4/Lamar Avenue Corridor Improvements

LA Metro will use the INFRA funds to address a chokepoint along a critical 18-mile stretch of I-5 in north Los Angeles County. LA Metro's CEO, Phil Washington, said: “Metro is pleased to

be a recipient of valuable federal funds to bring more freeway mobility to the residents and commuters who travel through the Santa Clarita Valley. This project is an excellent example of what happens when local, state and federal governments step up together to fund critically needed transportation improvements.”

The Idaho Department of Transportation, in partnership with COMPASS, will use their grant funds to address a critical component of the Idaho Transportation Department’s Regional Long Range Transportation Plan. “We are thrilled to be selected to receive a \$90 million INFRA grant to address a significant bottleneck on Interstate 84 in southwest Idaho,” said Matt Stoll, Executive Director of COMPASS. “As the metropolitan planning organization for the region, we (COMPASS, the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho), had ranked improvements to this area of I-84 as the region’s #1 transportation priority. I-84 is the only nationally designated major freight corridor through Idaho, carrying over \$80 billion of freight annually, yet it reduces from three lanes in each direction to two in this highly congested area, leading to substantial safety issues and gridlock.”

The Illinois Department of Transportation, in partnership with CAGTC members the City of Chicago and Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, will use the \$132 million INFRA grant to help complete construction of a critical phase of the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project, the largest and most complex of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program projects. “By eliminating conflicts in the nation’s rail hub for some two million-plus freight cars each year, the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Program benefits the Midwest and national economy,” said Joseph C. Szabo, Executive Director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. “The \$132 million INFRA grant leverages \$341 million of local, state and private investment to provide tangible benefits to shippers and consumers across North America – a true win-win!”

“Transportation is both Chicago’s and our nation’s historic strength and competitive advantage for the future,” said Commissioner Rebekah Scheinfeld of the City of Chicago’s Department of Transportation. “Investments in Chicago’s rail system strengthen our economy and benefit the entire country. This grant is the culmination of a highly successful partnership between the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, Cook County, the railroad industry, Metra and Amtrak who all came together to advance this critical, nationally significant package of rail projects.”

The Tennessee Department of Transportation will use their INFRA funds to address crippling congestion on a nationally and regionally significant multimodal freight corridor that serves as a conduit for freight movement throughout the Southeast and the rest of the nation. “In addition to the enormous amount of freight that moves through the Lamar Corridor, thousands of people use this road to get to and from work each day,” TDOT Commissioner John Schroer said. “Our projects will relieve congestion and improve our ability to attract more industry and jobs to Memphis. We thank Governor Haslam, Tennessee’s congressional delegation, state and local elected officials, and the many stakeholders who provided unwavering support in our efforts to secure this grant.”

“The Lamar Avenue improvements will create thousands of new jobs and significantly reduce unemployment and poverty in the region,” said Phil Trenary, President and CEO of the Greater

Memphis Chamber. “As we work on moving Memphis forward, this type of success is significant for Memphis businesses and for our recruitment and retention efforts because it further strengthens our position as the center of business in North America.”