

ANALYSIS

Department of Transportation

Interstate 84 Rockfall

Analyst: Ben Ruef

Request: Approve the submission of a federal grant application to the U.S. Department of Transportation, Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation grant program, in the amount of \$5,000,000, for the Rowena Bluffs Rockfall Project.

Analysis: The U.S. Department of Transportation's Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant program provides funding to state transportation agencies and other eligible entities to support projects that help transportation systems withstand and adapt to natural hazards such as climate change, sea level rise, flooding, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters.

If awarded, ODOT will use the grant funds to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of rockfall hazards at Rowena Bluffs along Interstate 84 (I-84) and develop a preferred alternative to reduce or eliminate these risks. This section of I-84 has been identified as one of the highest-rated rockfall hazard sites in the state and frequent rockfalls have led to temporary highway closures, safety hazards, and costly maintenance efforts.

The project will include a detailed risk assessment to evaluate current and projected rockfall hazards, considering factors such as extreme weather, seismic activity, and long-term climate impacts on slope stability. Through this process, ODOT will identify and analyze potential mitigation strategies, including slope stabilization, rockfall barriers, or possible realignment options. A cost-benefit analysis will assess the feasibility of each alternative by examining construction costs, maintenance needs, and long-term resilience benefits. The evaluation will ultimately lead to a recommended plan that improves roadway safety, enhances reliability, and minimizes disruptions for travelers. Additionally, the project will produce a finalized plan that ODOT can use to seek additional funding for design and construction, supporting long-term efforts to mitigate rockfall hazards in this transportation corridor.

The grant has no matching requirement, and applications are due on February 24th. If funding is awarded, ODOT will request an increase in expenditure limitation, as needed. Award announcements are likely in summer or fall 2025 and PROTECTS grant funds are available for obligation through September 30, 2028.

Recommendation: The Legislative Fiscal Office recommends approval.

Department of Transportation Parada

Request: Authorization to apply for a grant of \$5,000,000 for an evaluation of options and the development of a preferred alternative to reduce or eliminate the risk of rockfall in a section of Interstate 84 from the Federal Highway Administration (FHA).

Recommendation: Approve the request.

Discussion: The FHA through their Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Savings Transportation (PROTECT) program is accepting applications for the 2024-25 fiscal year, in which there is \$876 million in available funding. The Oregon Department of Transportation has identified the Interstate 84 Rowena Bluffs Rockfall Project as a competitive application for the PROTECT program funding being offered. The project would offer a comprehensive evaluation of options to address rockfall issues reducing safety hazards, seismic vulnerability, and the overall cost of maintenance. The work will serve to improve interstate resilience.

The grant application deadline is February 24, 2025. The grant does not require a match as the project meets the criteria for a planning project. The agency may return to request additional limitation if the grant is awarded.



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Department of Transportation

Director's Office

355 Capitol St. NE, MS 11

Salem, OR 97301

January 30, 2025

Senator Kate Lieber, Co-Chair
Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court Street NE
H-178 State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs:

NATURE OF THE REQUEST

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) Delivery & Operations Division requests permission to apply for \$5,000,000 in Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant funding from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for the Rowena Bluffs Rockfall Project near Rowena, Oregon.

AGENCY ACTION

The PROTECT grant program provides \$1.4 billion in contract authority over five years (FFY 2022 – 2026) through competitive grants to state transportation agencies and other eligible entities to ensure surface transportation resilience to natural hazards such as climate change, sea level rise, flooding, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters. FHWA released a notice of funding opportunity for the FY 2024 and 2025 program on October 25, 2024, and applications are due on February 24, 2025. The total available funds are \$876 million. The first round of grant funding (FFY 2022 and 2023) awarded \$829.6 million to 80 recipients. ODOT's process for selecting next-round projects to put forward for grant funding was informed by the previous year's process and grant award success. Award announcements are likely in summer or fall 2025.

ODOT has identified the Interstate 84 Rowena Bluffs Rockfall Project as a competitive application for the PROTECT discretionary program. The project will conduct an in-depth evaluation of options and develop a preferred alternative to reduce or eliminate the risk of rockfalls along this section of I-84. The Rowena Bluffs rockfall area is one of the highest-rated rockfall hazard sites in the state. Numerous incidents of rockfall on the highway have led to required restrictions and temporary closures for cleanup and crash investigations. The project area is along the Columbia River Gorge where conditions have caused excessive winds and weather-related effects. The bluffs are increasingly susceptible to erosion in the form of

rockfalls from extreme weather ranging from drought, wildfire, extreme heat, rain, snow, ice, wind and freeze/thaw cycles. Addressing the rockfall issues along this stretch of I-84 will reduce significant safety hazards, reduce seismic vulnerability, and reduce ongoing very high maintenance costs to collectively provide a more resilient interstate lifeline route.

Grant Request:	\$5,000,000
<u>Matching Funds:</u>	<u>\$0</u>
Total Project Cost:	\$5,000,000

The Interstate 84 Rowena Bluffs Rockfall project meets the criteria for a Planning project under PROTECT eligible project types. For PROTECT Planning Grants, the Federal share of an eligible planning activity is 100 percent; therefore, no state match is required for this project. Projects selected by FHWA will be funded with either FFY 2024 or 2025 funds. All awards of FFY 2024 funding are available for obligation through September 30, 2027. All awards of FFY 2025 funding are available for obligation through September 30, 2028. Funding expenditure deadlines for fiscal years 2024 and 2025 will be documented in the grant agreement depending on the fund source.

If this grant is not awarded, ODOT would look for other grant opportunities to fund the alternatives analysis needed at the Rowena Bluffs. I-84 is a priority travel and economic corridor for the state. If this project is not supported, all users are at higher risk of safety hazards and travel disruption, now and into the future.

ACTION REQUESTED

ODOT requests approval to apply for \$5,000,000 in PROTECT grant funds from FHWA for the Rowena Bluffs Rockfall Project. If this grant is awarded, ODOT may need to return for additional expenditure limitation; no additional positions will be needed to complete this workload.

LEGISLATION AFFECTED

None.

Sincerely,



Kristopher W. Strickler
Director