

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 649

To improve the process for awarding grants under certain programs of the Department of Transportation to certain counties in which the majority of land is owned or managed by the Federal Government and to other units of local government and Tribal governments in those counties, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 9, 2021

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO (for herself and Mr. DAINES) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To improve the process for awarding grants under certain programs of the Department of Transportation to certain counties in which the majority of land is owned or managed by the Federal Government and to other units of local government and Tribal governments in those counties, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “More Opportunities
3 for Rural Economies from DOT Grants Act” or the
4 “MORE DOT Grants Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

6 In this Act:

7 (1) HIGH-DENSITY PUBLIC LAND COUNTY.—

8 The term “High-Density Public Land County”
9 means a county (or equivalent jurisdiction) of a
10 State or territory of the United States—

11 (A) that has a population of not more than
12 100,000 people, according to the most recent
13 annual estimates of population by the Bureau
14 of the Census; and

15 (B) in which more than 50 percent of the
16 land is owned or managed by the Federal Gov-
17 ernment.

18 (2) QUALIFYING GRANT PROGRAM.—The term
19 “qualifying grant program” means—

20 (A) the Better Utilizing Investments to Le-
21 verage Development (BUILD) Transportation
22 discretionary grant program of the Department
23 of Transportation;

24 (B) the Infrastructure for Rebuilding
25 America (INFRA) grant program of the De-
26 partment of Transportation;

1 (C) the public transportation innovation
2 grant program established under section 5312
3 of title 49, United States Code;

4 (D) the public transportation safety pro-
5 gram established under section 5329 of title 49,
6 United States Code;

7 (E) the Federal lands access program
8 under section 204 of title 23, United States
9 Code;

10 (F) the airport improvement program es-
11 tablished under subchapter I of chapter 471 of
12 title 49, United States Code;

13 (G) the consolidated rail infrastructure and
14 safety improvements program under section
15 22907 of title 49, United States Code; and

16 (H) any other discretionary grant program
17 of the Department of Transportation under
18 which grants are awarded to—

19 (i) counties;

20 (ii) other units of local government; or

21 (iii) Tribal governments.

22 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
23 the Secretary of Transportation.

24 (4) TRIBAL GOVERNMENT.—The term “Tribal
25 government” means the recognized governing body

1 of any Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation,
2 pueblo, village, community, component band, or com-
3 ponent reservation, individually identified (including
4 parenthetically) in the list published most recently as
5 of the date of enactment of this Act pursuant to sec-
6 tion 104 of the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe
7 List Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 5131).

8 **SEC. 3. GRANTS.**

9 (a) REDUCTION IN LOCAL MATCHING REQUIRE-
10 MENTS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law,
11 with respect to a High-Density Public Land County and
12 any unit of local government or Tribal government within
13 a High-Density Public Land County, any requirement for
14 local matching funds under a qualifying grant program
15 shall be reduced by 50 percent.

16 (b) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—On request of a High-
17 Density Public Land County or any unit of local govern-
18 ment or Tribal government within a High-Density Public
19 Land County, the Secretary shall provide additional tech-
20 nical assistance to the High-Density Public Land County,
21 unit of local government, or Tribal government before and
22 during the annual application period for each qualifying
23 grant program.

24 (c) PRIORITY.—

1 (1) APPLICATION APPROVAL.—In approving ap-
2 plications for a qualifying grant program, the Sec-
3 retary shall give priority to an application from a
4 High-Density Public Land County, unit of local gov-
5 ernment within a High-Density Public Land County,
6 or Tribal government within a High-Density Public
7 Land County that has not received support under
8 the qualifying grant program during the 10-year pe-
9 riod preceding the date of the application.

10 (2) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND OTHER SUP-
11 PORT.—In carrying out subsections (b) and (e), the
12 Secretary may give priority to a Tribal government
13 within a High-Density Public Land County.

14 (d) SPECIAL CONSIDERATION.—In approving appli-
15 cations for a qualifying grant program, the Secretary—

16 (1) shall give special consideration to an appli-
17 cation from a High-Density Public Land County or
18 unit of local government within a High-Density Pub-
19 lic Land County with respect to any rural set-aside
20 designated for the applicable qualifying grant pro-
21 gram by an Act of Congress; and

22 (2) may give special consideration to an appli-
23 cation from a Tribal government within a High-Den-
24 sity Public Land County with respect to a rural set-
25 aside described in paragraph (1).

1 (e) OTHER SUPPORT.—The Secretary may provide
2 additional support, as the Secretary determines to be ap-
3 propriate, for a High-Density Public Land County or a
4 unit of local government or Tribal government within a
5 High-Density Public Land County, including by consid-
6 ering and, if appropriate, offering flexibility with respect
7 to any requirement of, or barrier to applying for or receiv-
8 ing assistance under, a qualifying grant program if the
9 requirement or barrier relates to—

10 (1) scoring criteria relating to numerical size
11 and impact, such as the number of jobs created or
12 the number of people served, which disadvantage
13 small and isolated communities;

14 (2) any requirement that an applicant for a
15 qualifying grant program partner with other institu-
16 tions, such as community colleges or foundations,
17 which may not operate in the jurisdiction of the
18 High-Density Public Land County, unit of local gov-
19 ernment, or Tribal government seeking assistance
20 under the qualifying grant program;

21 (3) any financial or cash-on-hand requirement
22 that a High-Density Public Land County or a unit
23 of local government or Tribal government within a
24 High-Density Public Land County cannot meet for
25 reasons other than any financial constraints to

1 which the High-Density Public Land County, unit of
2 local government, or Tribal government is subject; or
3 (4) an overly complicated or overly technical ap-
4 plication for a qualifying grant program that deters
5 High-Density Public Land Counties or units of local
6 government or Tribal governments within High-Den-
7 sity Public Land Counties from applying for the
8 qualifying grant program.

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