

New Rail Grade Crossing Elimination Program

Michigan has a robust freight rail infrastructure that connects our manufacturers and farmers to domestic and foreign customers. The twenty-nine privately owned, operated, and maintained freight railroads traverse more than 3,400 miles across our state moving 79.4 million tons of freight in 2019 – the equivalent of 4.4 million trucks loads. Safety around these economic arteries is also crucial.

Enter the [Federal Railroad Administration](#) (FRA)'s newest funding opportunity, a grant for grade crossing projects to improve the safety and mobility of people and goods. The [Grade Crossing Elimination Program](#) was created by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) last year, and \$600 million will be available for FY22. The official grant announcement, or Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), is expected as early as June.

The program, which over the course of five years will provide \$5.5 billion for crossing projects, is intended for state and local applicants including local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, public port authorities, political subdivisions of a state, or federally recognized Indian Tribes.

“I want to emphasize that the Grade Crossing Elimination Program is focused on safety,” said FRA Administrator Amit Bose during a recent FRA listening session on the program. Eligible projects—which are not, as the grant title suggests, limited to just crossing eliminations—include grade separation, track relocation, improvement or installation of protective devices, or other means to improve safety.

FRA representatives also underscored that 3% of the program is dedicated just to planning projects, which should help some communities navigate cost barriers and explore good ideas that lead to future projects. Other set-asides include for rural and tribal areas, which will receive no less than 20% of funding, and for crossing safety and education programs (0.25%).

While we expect the NOFO for the Grade Crossing Elimination Program to come out later this spring, now is the time to start the planning process. Program conditions include a 20% non-federal matching share and that no award is smaller than \$1 million except for planning grants. States are also limited to no more than 20% of total funding. Beyond that, projects that have the buy-in of state departments of transportation will likely be more competitive, noted officials.

While education can encourage safer behavior around railroad tracks, the safest grade crossing is one that doesn't exist or one that is well-protected. The Grade Crossing Elimination Program recognizes the sobering statistic that 95% of rail-related deaths involve a person or vehicle on the tracks—and it will drive safety in communities across the country while also increasing freight mobility and reducing wait times for drivers.

More information on the Grade Crossing Elimination Program is available at the [FRA website](#) or on the [GoRail Rail Grant Hub](#). Contact Michael Gaynor at mgaynor@gorail.org with questions or if you would like to be kept up to date on the Grade Crossing Elimination Program.