

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2619

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

JULY 31, 2025

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO (for herself, Mr. DAINES, and Mr. SCHIFF) 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 Local and Regional Project Assist-
21 ance Program established under section 6702 of
22 title 49, United States Code (commonly known
23 as the “Better Utilizing Investments to Lever-
24 age Development (BUILD) grant program”
25 and formerly known as the “Rebuilding Amer-
26 ican Infrastructure with Sustainability and Eq-

1 uity (RAISE) grant program” and the “Trans-
2 portation Investment Generating Economic Re-
3 covery (TIGER) discretionary grant program”);

4 (B) the national infrastructure project as-
5 sistance program (commonly known as the
6 “Mega Grant program”) established by section
7 6701 of title 49, United States Code;

8 (C) the nationally significant multimodal
9 freight and highway projects program (com-
10 monly known as the “Infrastructure for Re-
11 building America (INFRA) grant program”) es-
12 tablished by section 117 of title 23, United
13 States Code;

14 (D) the rural surface transportation grant
15 program established under section 173 of title
16 23, United States Code;

17 (E) the Reconnecting Communities Pilot
18 Program established under section 11509 of the
19 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (23
20 U.S.C. 101 note; Public Law 117–58);

21 (F) the Strengthening Mobility and Revo-
22 lutionizing Transportation (SMART) Grant
23 Program established under section 25005 of the
24 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (23
25 U.S.C. 502 note; Public Law 117–58);

1 (G) the Grants for Buses and Bus Facili-
2 ties competitive grant program established
3 under section 5339(b) of title 49, United States
4 Code;

5 (H) the public transportation Low or No
6 Emission Vehicle Program established under
7 section 5339(c) of title 49, United States Code;

8 (I) the public transportation innovation
9 grant program established under section 5312
10 of title 49, United States Code;

11 (J) the public transportation safety pro-
12 gram established under section 5329 of title 49,
13 United States Code;

14 (K) the Federal lands access program
15 under section 204 of title 23, United States
16 Code;

17 (L) the airport improvement program es-
18 tablished under subchapter I of chapter 471 of
19 title 49, United States Code;

20 (M) the consolidated rail infrastructure
21 and safety improvements program under section
22 22907 of title 49, United States Code; and

23 (N) any other discretionary grant program
24 of the Department of Transportation under
25 which grants are awarded to—

- 1 (i) counties;
- 2 (ii) other units of local government; or
- 3 (iii) Tribal governments.

4 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
5 the Secretary of Transportation.

6 (4) TRIBAL GOVERNMENT.—The term “Tribal
7 government” means the recognized governing body
8 of any Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation,
9 pueblo, village, community, component band, or com-
10 ponent reservation, individually identified (including
11 parenthetically) in the list published most recently as
12 of the date of enactment of this Act pursuant to sec-
13 tion 104 of the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe
14 List Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 5131).

15 **SEC. 3. GRANTS.**

16 (a) REDUCTION IN LOCAL MATCHING REQUIRE-
17 MENTS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law,
18 with respect to a High-Density Public Land County and
19 any unit of local government or Tribal government within
20 a High-Density Public Land County, any requirement for
21 local matching funds under a qualifying grant program
22 shall be reduced by 50 percent.

23 (b) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—On request of a High-
24 Density Public Land County or any unit of local govern-
25 ment or Tribal government within a High-Density Public

1 Land County, the Secretary shall provide additional tech-
 2 nical assistance to the High-Density Public Land County,
 3 unit of local government, or Tribal government before and
 4 during the annual application period for each qualifying
 5 grant program.

6 (c) PRIORITY.—

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

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

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

22 (1) shall give special consideration to an appli-
 23 cation from a High-Density Public Land County or
 24 unit of local government within a High-Density Pub-
 25 lic Land County with respect to any rural set-aside

1 designated for the applicable qualifying grant pro-
2 gram by an Act of Congress; and

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

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

16 (1) scoring criteria relating to numerical size
17 and impact, such as the number of jobs created or
18 the number of people served, which disadvantage
19 small and isolated communities;

20 (2) any requirement that an applicant for a
21 qualifying grant program partner with other institu-
22 tions, such as community colleges or foundations,
23 which may not operate in the jurisdiction of the
24 High-Density Public Land County, unit of local gov-

1 ernment, or Tribal government seeking assistance
2 under the qualifying grant program;

3 (3) any financial or cash-on-hand requirement
4 that a High-Density Public Land County or a unit
5 of local government or Tribal government within a
6 High-Density Public Land County cannot meet for
7 reasons other than any financial constraints to
8 which the High-Density Public Land County, unit of
9 local government, or Tribal government is subject; or
10 (4) an overly complicated or overly technical ap-
11 plication for a qualifying grant program that deters
12 High-Density Public Land Counties or units of local
13 government or Tribal governments within High-Den-
14 sity Public Land Counties from applying for the
15 qualifying grant program.

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