

# SAFE ROADS

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Updated 08/20/2025

*Except for the statutes and regulations cited, the contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the States or the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide information regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.*

Safety is the top priority for the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). On July 1, 2025, Secretary Duffy launched the **SAFE ROADS** initiative— **Safe Arterials for Everyone through Reliable Operations and Distraction-Reducing Strategies**.

According to early estimates from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), **39,345 people died** in motor-vehicle crashes in the U.S. in 2024.<sup>1</sup> Over 50% of U.S. roadway deaths occur on non-freeway arterials. Nearly two-thirds of pedestrian fatalities also take place on these same non-freeway arterials.<sup>2</sup> This underscores the need for data-driven decision-making, accelerated deployment of proven solutions and interventions, and coordinated action to improve roadway safety.

The SAFE ROADS initiative is a whole-of-right-of-way approach that aims to accelerate safety and mobility improvements on non-freeway arterials to reduce fatalities and serious injuries. The “whole-of-right-of-way” approach is a holistic approach that looks beyond a single contributing factor and instead considers improvements to a variety of factors as they interact within road users’ points-of-view at an identified location. This approach gives agencies flexibility to address their most urgent needs. While participation is voluntary, collaborating closely with FHWA and MPOs, submitting prioritized lists, and leveraging existing funding and technical tools are critical to advancing results on this national initiative by the end of September 2026.

See the USDOT’s SAFE ROADS Announcement for additional information:

<https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/us-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-governors-roads-are-safety-not-politics>

*These FAQs will be updated if further clarification or guidance is released by FHWA or USDOT.*

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<sup>1</sup> NHTSA, [Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities in 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> NHTSA, [Fatality Analysis Reporting System \(FARS\): 2019-2022 Final File and 2023 Annual Report File](#)

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## General Information

### **Q1: Why should a State DOT respond?**

**A:** FHWA encourages all State DOTs to participate in the SAFE ROADS initiative to enhance safety, mobility, and the efficient use of the entire roadway right-of-way. By participating in this initiative, States have the opportunity to highlight and advance their data-driven strategies for improving safety and mobility for all road users on roadways with the greatest need.

### **Q2. What is the deadline to submit the list of arterial segments to the FHWA Division Office?**

**A:** September 2, 2025. Per the July 1, 2025 letter, the Secretary requested a response within 60 days.

### **Q3: What if a State DOT cannot submit the requested list within 60 days?**

**A:** State DOTs experiencing constraints to meet the deadline should communicate as early as possible with their Division Office. If needed, FHWA will allow a 30-day extension beyond the original deadline.

### **Q4: Is there a minimum number of locations the State DOT can submit?**

**A:** No, there is no specific number of locations or projects specified.

### **Q5. Can the list be limited to a few high-priority projects, or does it have to include all relevant projects?**

**A:** Ultimately, States determine which and how many projects to submit. However, FHWA encourages States to take this opportunity to highlight their data-driven efforts to improve safety and mobility for all road users on roadways with the highest need.

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## Funding & Eligibility

**Q6: Is this initiative tied to funding? Is additional funding being made available? Do projects need to be federally funded?**

**A:** While no new funding is being made available, existing Federal-aid highway funds can be used to support these activities. In addition, States and local agencies may also use their own funding.

Activities may be eligible for various Federal funding programs, such as:

- National Highway Performance Program (NHPP)
- Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG)
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)
- Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)

The eligible use of the program funding categories, including those listed above, is subject to that program's eligibility requirements and cost allocation procedures as per [2 CFR part 200](#). Federal funding is not a prerequisite for including projects on the list.

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## Project Definition & Scope

**Q7: The letter requests State DOTs to submit a list of non-freeway arterial segments (including intersections) that will be addressed by the end of Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2026 (September 30, 2026). How does FHWA define “addressed”?**

**A:** The term “addressed” in the context of the letter means that State DOTs should plan, program, or implement safety and mobility improvements at the identified locations by the end of FFY 2026. (September 30, 2026). However, FHWA encourages State DOTs to focus on projects that can be implemented in the near-term to accelerate delivery of safety and mobility improvements and reduce fatalities.

**Q8: Why focus on non-freeway arterials?**

**A:** More than **half of all roadway fatalities** occur on non-freeway arterials – roadways functionally classified as ‘other principal arterial’ or ‘minor arterial’. This is also **where nearly two-thirds of pedestrian fatalities occur**.<sup>3</sup> These roads often have intersections, pedestrian activity, and mixed-use challenges, making them critical for safety and operational interventions.

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<sup>3</sup> NHTSA, [Fatality Analysis Reporting System \(FARS\): 2019-2022 Final File and 2023 Annual Report File](#)

**Q9: Should the list include only State-owned roads?**

**A:** No, the SAFE ROADS initiative addresses all non-freeway arterial roads regardless of ownership. Collaboration with local agencies and MPOs is essential.

**Q10: What are examples of “distraction-reducing strategies”?**

**A:** Distractions include promotional or political messages of any nature, artwork, or anything else that detracts from the core mission of motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians safely navigating the right-of-way. For instance, intersections and crosswalks, especially, need to be kept free from distractions. Examples of distraction-reducing strategies to minimize driver, pedestrian, and automated vehicle confusion include but are not limited to:

- Clear, concise, and consistent applications of traffic control devices (e.g., pavement markings, highway signs, and traffic signals) that are consistent with the 11th edition of the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways* (MUTCD).
- Reduction of roadside clutter, including noncompliant and nonessential traffic control devices, notices, or advertisements within the right-of-way that distract attention from road users.

**Q11: How is this initiative different from a State’s Strategic Highway Safety Plan (including their Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment) or their Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)?**

**A:** State DOTs should use available safety data, analysis, and assessments to develop the list of arterial segments that would be addressed through the SAFE ROADS initiative. A State’s Strategic Highway Safety Plan (including their Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment) or network screening information from carrying out their HSIP are good examples of available safety data, analysis, and assessments to identify locations that could be used to meet this request. For instance, as part of the Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment, each State was required to use a data-driven process to identify areas of high-risk for vulnerable road users. (23 U.S.C. 148(l)(2)(A)), consult with local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, and regional transportation planning organizations that represent the high-risk area (23 U.S.C. 148(l)(4)(B)), and develop a program of projects or strategies to reduce safety risks to vulnerable road users in areas identified as high-risk (23 U.S.C. 148(l)(2)(B)).

A State DOT’s submittal for this request could support implementation of the Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment, as well as other available assessments, by implementing strategies and projects previously identified.

**Q12: How is this initiative different from substantial conformance reviews for a State’s adoption of the 11th Edition of the MUTCD with a State supplement or a State manual?**

**A:** Substantial conformance is not directly related to this initiative, as compliance and conformance are different. As a reminder, States have two years from the effective date of a new or revised National MUTCD to take one of three actions: 1) adopt the new or revised National MUTCD as the standard for traffic control devices in the State; 2) adopt the national MUTCD with a State Supplement that is in substantial conformance with the new or revised national MUTCD; or 3) adopt a State MUTCD that is in substantial conformance with the new or revised national MUTCD. That adoption action sets the

programmatic standard to be followed from that point forward (i.e., compliance). For more information on both substantial conformance and compliance, see [23 CFR 655.603](#).

**Q13: What is the expectation for State DOT coordination with the MPOs and local agencies?**

**A:** Collaboration is essential to improving safety and operational performance. State DOTs should coordinate with MPOs and local agencies to support effective identification, planning, and delivery of improvements on arterials under varied jurisdictions.

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## Reporting & Monitoring

**Q14: How will progress be tracked and reported?**

**A:** Division Offices will monitor progress as part of their routine coordination with State DOTs. After FHWA receives State submissions by September 2, 2025, FHWA will work with States to obtain updates which could include submitting actionable plans, milestones, and measurable outcomes.

**Q15: Will submission documents or progress reports be publicly available?**

**A:** Yes. FHWA aims to maintain transparency to build public trust and accountability. Information will be posted to <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/safe-roads>.

**Q16: Would submission documents be protected from discovery and admission as evidence under [23 U.S.C. 407](#)?**

**A:** 23 U.S.C. 407 protects reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data compiled or collected for the purpose of identifying, evaluating, or planning the safety enhancement of potential accident sites, hazardous roadway conditions, or railway-highway crossings, pursuant to 23 U.S.C. sections 130, 144, and 148 or for the purpose of developing any highway safety construction improvement project which may be implemented using Federal-aid highway funds. As stated in the Secretary's July 1, 2025, letter, the SAFE ROADS initiative is intended to help improve safety and mobility on non-freeway arterials. Also, we note above that State DOTs should use information from their State's Strategic Highway Safety Plan in identifying improvements and that these improvements can be eligible for one or more Federal funding programs. State DOTs should consult their legal counsel to determine applicability of 23 U.S.C. 407.

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## Technical Resources & Support

### **Q17: What technical resources are available from FHWA to support this initiative?**

**A:** USDOT and FHWA have numerous tools and resources to assist States in identifying priority arterials, diagnosing the safety, operational or compliance concerns, and developing potential solutions to improve safety and mobility of all road users. These resource include, but are not limited to, the [Crash Modification Factor Clearinghouse](#), [Road Safety Audits/Assessments \(RSAs\)](#), and [data driven safety analysis](#). Additional resources can be found at <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/safe-roads>.

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