



February 10, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy  
US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Support for Colorado State-Wide Avalanche Protocol (SWAP) Discretionary Grant Application

Dear Secretary Duffy:

As Mayor of the Town of Grand Lake, Colorado I am writing to express my strong support for the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT)'s State-Wide Avalanche Protocol Project, also known as "SWAP" or "the Project". SWAP takes a two-fold approach to statewide avalanche control with specialized solutions to address the varied avalanche threats the Rocky Mountain transportation system faces. The Project addresses both large and small slope mitigation techniques to provide a comprehensive approach to avalanche mitigation. The Project will include equipment transition from outdated Howitzers to modern Remote Avalanche Controls Systems (RACS), replacing rotary snow blowers that have reached the end of their life, and performing a Small Slope Alternative Avalanche Mitigation Analysis ("the study" or "the analysis").

Currently, CDOT uses U.S. Army-owned World War II Howitzers to perform avalanche mitigation missions and geologic maintenance along regionally and nationally significant roadways, including Interstate 70 (I-70), United States Highway 160 (US 160), and United States Highway 550 (US 550). However, Howitzers are 80-year-old military artillery that are less efficient and less environmentally sustainable than RACS. By transitioning to RACS, avalanche mitigation missions can be completed at peak environmental instability and at any time of day or night and reduce closure duration and frequency on these major freight and tourism corridors. The use of RACS is also better for the environment and will reduce debris on roadways and in wildlife habitats. When using Howitzers, CDOT is forced to leave a radius of foreign substance from every explosion, as it is too dangerous for crew to scout the unstable mountainside for Howitzer shrapnel after every mission. RACS confine explosions, do not use heavy metals and unnatural elements, and leave no residue or shrapnel when triggered.

For slopes too shallow to install or deploy RACS, CDOT will study alternative avalanche control methods along key slopes to identify effective and lasting solutions. The study will enable CDOT to begin the valuable process of constructing permanent solutions based on the unique character and needs of each small slope. This study will most notably evaluate avalanche

mitigation options along Berthoud Pass, which has endured several recent safety closures due to hazardous bank slides. The consequences of small slope bank slides remains a significant threat to the transportation network and is a top priority for CDOT to address.

I-70, US 160, and US 550 are backbone routes to and through the rural mountain communities of Western Colorado. The federal government has designated I-70 as a key freight corridor on the National Highway Freight Network. The interstate, along with US 160 and US 550, are designated as Highway Freight Corridors on the Colorado Freight Plan.

Berthoud Pass and small slopes around the Western Slope are critical access points for mountain towns, and necessary for these locations to access vital tourism dollars and emergency services. US 40, which runs along the pass, is identified by CDOT as a Highway Freight Corridor. Navigating the winding canyon roads and Rocky Mountain terrain of Western Colorado requires reliable mobility along these corridors for freight transport, essential daily accessibility, emergency services, tourism and recreation, and access to natural resources for economic livelihood.

We whole-heartedly support this project and request USDOT to prioritize grant funding for this worthy proposal.

Sincerely,

Christina Berquist  
Mayor, Town of Grand Lake