

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106378](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The INFRA program—a DOT discretionary grant program—funds nationally significant freight and highway projects. From 2016 through 2022, DOT awarded over \$7 billion to fund such projects across the country.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act includes a provision for GAO to review DOT's process for evaluating and selecting INFRA projects for award. This report examines DOT's processes to solicit, evaluate, and select applications for INFRA grant awards in fiscal year 2022; and the extent to which DOT's evaluation and selection processes aligned with federal guidance. GAO reviewed DOT's notice of funding opportunity, evaluation plan, and documentation of the INFRA fiscal year 2022 evaluation process; analyzed application and award data; and interviewed DOT officials. GAO also reviewed the documentation of 50 applications, including the 26 applications that received an award.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to DOT, that it (1) establish quality control procedures to verify that the documentation of eligibility determinations and conflict-of-interest screenings is complete and (2) clearly define its "exemplary project" criteria for advancing applications for potential selection. DOT concurred with the first recommendation but did not concur with the second, stating that it had discretion to determine which projects are exemplary projects. GAO maintains the recommendation is valid as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-24-106378](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth Repko at (202) 512-2384 or repkoe@gao.gov.

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DISCRETIONARY TRANSPORTATION GRANTS

DOT Should Improve Transparency in the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America Program

What GAO Found

In September 2022, the Department of Transportation (DOT) awarded \$1.5 billion in discretionary grants to fund nationally and regionally significant freight and highway projects through the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) program. In fiscal year 2022, DOT combined some phases of the INFRA grant award process with those of two other discretionary grant programs. Specifically, DOT issued a single notice of funding opportunity to solicit applications. DOT also created a combined evaluation plan that outlined the criteria and process for evaluating applications for all three programs. Once applications were evaluated, award selections were made separately for each grant program.

Example of a Highway Construction Project



Source: Cheangchai/stock.adobe.com | GAO-24-106378

DOT has taken steps to improve its processes for evaluating and selecting INFRA applications for award. For example, DOT implemented and documented an evaluation process as required by guidance and created a new quality control process. DOT also created a new memo to better explain the Secretary's award decisions, which provides insight into why the applications chosen for award were selected over similarly situated applications.

However, DOT's evaluation and selection processes did not fully align with requirements set out in federal guidance. For example, DOT did not fully document eligibility determinations and reviewer conflict-of-interest screenings. Improving its documentation would help DOT ensure it is using accurate and complete information. Additionally, DOT did not clearly define the criteria used to advance applications to the Secretary for possible selection, specifically how projects could be deemed "exemplary." Providing such information would help applicants understand how they will be evaluated and ensure reviewers advance applications using consistent criteria. These actions would also position DOT to more fully demonstrate that it is implementing the program with enhanced transparency and making fair grant award decisions.