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PAUL SEO, COUNCILMEMBER

July 31, 2024

Shailen Bhatt
Federal Highway Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

SUBJECT: Request for In-Kind and/or Financial Assistance for Repairing Landslide Impacts to Palos Verdes Drive South

Dear Director Bhatt,

The City of Rancho Palos Verdes, California, is a coastal community in the South Bay of Los Angeles County. Record rainfall in 2023 and 2024 has accelerated land movement of the ancient Greater Portuguese Bend Landslide in our City, averaging 9-12 inches per week (depending on the location), causing major damage to our community. On behalf of the City Council and our 42,000 residents and business owners, I am writing today to bring your attention to this ongoing emergency and to seek your agency's assistance in assisting with and funding critical repairs to a major transportation route whose integrity is threatened by land movement.

The Portuguese Bend Landslide is one of the largest continuously active landslides in the United States. Reactivated in 1956, the ancient Greater Portuguese Bend Landslide Complex, comprised of five sub-slides that, together, have been slowly moving for decades, damaging homes, utilities, and roads. The movement picks up in speed in years with heavier rainfall due to the bentonite soil condition, which becomes slippery with water infiltration. Following the 2022-23 rainy season, which was approximately 200% of the historical average rainfall, movement in the landslide complex significantly accelerated, resulting in the formation of landslide fissures, grabens (i.e. pull-apart zones), thrust features, tensional cracking, and shear zones. These phenomena, along with land subsidence, have been particularly pronounced on Palos Verdes Drive South, a major arterial traversed by about 15,000 commuters daily. The regional roadway connects the Los Angeles Harbor Area to the Palos Verdes Peninsula and the South Bay beach cities. Palos Verdes Drive South is also an evacuation route for the fire-prone Peninsula and is home to an above-ground sanitary sewer trunk line serving thousands of residents and our local business community.

A 1-mile stretch of Palos Verdes Drive South runs through the landslide area. When the City of Rancho Palos Verdes was incorporated in 1973, it inherited the landslide and became

responsible for regularly repairing damage to the roadway. In typical years when the land movement can be measured in as a little as inches, repair and maintenance of Palos Verdes Drive South is performed every few months or so. Under the current conditions, with the land moving as much as 9-12 inches per week, the road needs repaving about every 2-3 weeks. The City spent over \$2.2 million on repairing and maintaining Palos Verdes Drive South in FY 2023-24. The City anticipates spending significantly more in FY 2024-25, which began with a major rehabilitation project on Palos Verdes Drive South estimated to cost upwards of \$500,000.

The City is solely responsible for ensuring the road is accessible at the skyrocketing costs of repairing this regional transportation route. While we are pursuing possible reimbursement under the federal disaster declaration issued in April in response to California's severe winter storms (Disaster No. DR-4769-CA), we are urgently requesting any possible in-kind and financial assistance from the Federal Highway Administration and the Army Corps of Engineers. The City is implementing short- and long-term engineering strategies to slow the land movement, including surface fracture infilling, surface water drainage improvements, and groundwater extraction.

The preservation of Palos Verdes Drive South is critical for regional transportation and the health and safety of the public and our first responders. We need your help in identifying any potential in-kind and financial assistance available from FHWA as we navigate this crisis.

Thank you for your consideration, and for more information, please contact me at aram@rpvca.gov or by telephone at 310-544-5202.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a horizontal line.

Ara Mhuranian
City Manager

cc: Lt. Col. Stephen V. Brooks, Deputy Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District
Robert Fenton, Jr., Administrator, FEMA Region 9
Laphonza Butler, U.S. Senator, California
Alex Padilla, U.S. Senator, California
Ted Lieu, U.S. Representative, 36th Congressional District
Ben Allen, Senator, 24th State Senate District
Al Muratsuchi, Assemblymember, 66th Assembly District
Janice Hahn, L.A. County Supervisor, 4th District
Kevin McGowan, Director, L.A. County Office of Emergency Management
Brandy Villanueva, Disaster Manager Area Coordinator, L.A. County Area G
Rancho Palos Verdes City Council
Catherine Jun, Rancho Palos Verdes Deputy City Manager

Attachments enclosed on page 3.

Attachments:

1. Article and photo of warping along Palos Verdes Drive South

<https://www.dailybreeze.com/2024/07/17/rancho-palos-verdes-will-spend-up-to-1-million-to-repair-roads-ski-jump-caused-by-landslide/?clearUserState=true>



2. One example of Seaview, a severely impacted neighborhood, experiencing significant damage to infrastructure, homes, and utilities. Previously, the street and homes were level, but are now on radically separate planes.

