

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 6, 2023

The Honorable Shailen Bhatt
Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Administrator Bhatt:

We write to request that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) assist New York State and the Slate Hill Fire District with the creation of an emergency vehicles-only access road, also known as a “crash gate,” on Interstate 84 (I-84) in Orange County, New York. In an emergency every minute, and second counts and establishing a crash gate would allow first responders to access accidents on I-84 in a more expeditious manner.

On September 21, 2023, a charter bus carrying marching band members from Farmingdale High School and their chaperones overturned on I-84 in Orange County, New York. This crash, which killed two adults and critically injured at least five students, demonstrates the troubling lack of access to I-84 that currently exists for first responders in the area. The Slate Hill Fire District’s closest entrance to I-84 is four miles from the firehouse, requiring its trucks to travel into another neighboring fire district just to enter the interstate. Once they do, the trucks must then circle back into their own jurisdiction to actually access the scene of an incident. It is clear that this long-standing problem must finally be resolved, which is why the local community and the New York State Department of Transportation are working together once again to submit a new request for a crash gate.

It is our understanding that this is not the first time the lack of a “crash gate” on I-84 has caused great difficulty for emergency responders to act. Years ago, Orange County was faced with another devastating crash – causing public outcry for a “crash gate.” Although New York State submitted plans for a crash gate, the project was never finalized between NYSDOT and FHWA. If such a crash gate had been available last week, according to the Chief of the Slate Hill Fire District, first responders could have gotten to the bus crash “between 5 to 10 minutes sooner.” Thus, as New York State and local officials finalize their request to FHWA, we urge you to work with New York State and the Slate Hill Fire District to create a “crash gate” to improve emergency response times on I-84. Such a crash gate would be a first responders-only access road, and would greatly improve response times going forward.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Patrick K. Ryan
Member of Congress