

Anticipating FRA's Next CRISI Funding Round: Timeline and Outlook

When Will the Next CRISI NOFO Be Announced?

Based on recent information, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is expected to open the next Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant round in late fall or early winter of 2025. The agency has been consistent in forecasting a ninety-day period from issuance of the notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) to the deadline to turn in application packages through grants.gov.

What Could Delay the Announcement?

Several factors could push this timeline later. From my perspective, the key considerations are:

- **Concurrent Grant Programs:** FRA administers multiple rail grant programs (e.g. Railroad Crossing Elimination, Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail), and its staff has been juggling an **oversubscribed workload**. Adding to the challenge, a significant number of staff at FRA who managed CRISI and other grant program application reviews and elements of the awarded projects took the buyout packages offered earlier in the year. The last CRISI round drew an overwhelming number of applications, which took many months to evaluate and award. This heavy workload creates a *"vicious cycle"* for FRA: by the time they finish evaluating and awarding one round, it's almost time to issue the next NOFO. Handling other grant programs concurrently (with their own application and award timelines) can further slow the release of a new CRISI NOFO. Essentially, FRA's grants team is stretched thin processing prior awards, which might delay kicking off the next round.
- **Leadership Transitions:** FRA's leadership changes may also impact the schedule. As of mid-2025, the agency is led by an Acting Administrator (Drew Feeley) while **nominee David Fink** awaits Senate confirmation as the new FRA Administrator. As of this writing the Senate Republican majority is working on a change to that body's rules of procedure to enable faster processing of nominees. It's possible that FRA could wait for appointed leadership to be in place before launching the next major funding opportunities. A confirmed Administrator might want to set their priorities or even announce the NOFOs themselves. If Mr. Fink's confirmation is delayed into late 2025, that uncertainty at the top could translate into cautious timing for releasing the next NOFOs. On the other hand, FRA has a mandate to get grants out *"quicker"*, so they may proceed under acting leadership if needed.
- **Federal Budget Factors:** Another consideration is the federal budget process. If Congress has not finalized appropriations for the upcoming fiscal year by early fall, FRA could hold off on issuing the next NOFO. Uncertainty in discretionary funding (including the **supplemental CRISI funds** provided by annual appropriations) could cause FRA to pause until the FY 2026 appropriations process is fully resolved. A continuing resolution that maintains prior year

funding levels only for a short period, or failure to come to agreement leading to a federal shutdown, could push the NOFO announcement farther into the future.

The Likely Second to Last of the Billion-Dollar CRISI Rounds

One big-picture point to remember: the **current and next fiscal year of CRISI are likely the final rounds featuring \$1 billion-plus funding levels**. The IJA (Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) provided a huge boost to rail grants, including *guaranteed* advance appropriations of **\$1 billion per year for CRISI through FY 2026**. In addition, Congress authorized up to another \$1 billion annually in discretionary budget for CRISI. This is why recent CRISI rounds have had enormous totals—for example, around \$1.2 billion to \$1.5 billion in each of FY 2022, 2023, and 2024, and \$2.4+ billion when combined for FY23–24. Unless new legislation extends these levels, **after FY 2026 the program will likely revert to pre-IJA funding levels**. Before 2021, CRISI was funded in the *hundreds of millions* per year (not billions), so without another infusion or reauthorization, we may drop back to a smaller-scale program. Industry groups like ASLRRA are urging Congress to maintain at least the \$1 billion/year funding in the next surface transportation bill, warning that going back to the old model would be a major step backward. In essence, the clock is ticking on the IJA's generous rail funding—making the upcoming rounds in FY 2025 and FY 2026 critical opportunities for rail projects to secure grants while the money is still flowing.

Closing Thoughts: Be Prepared and Stay Tuned

From a grant applicant's perspective, it's a waiting game right now—but an active one. **November-December 2025** appears to be the target for the release of the next CRISI NOFO, with a forecast ninety-day period from NOFO issuance to the application submittal deadline. Yet external factors (staff workload, leadership confirmation, budget timing) could nudge that date later. Keep an eye on FRA announcements as we head into the fall. The **funding opportunity will be substantial**. This could be the second-to-last chance to tap into a billion-dollar-plus CRISI pot before funding levels potentially scale down post-IJA. My advice to fellow applicants is to use this lead time wisely: start planning projects, gathering partners, and prepping your materials so you're ready to hit the ground running when the NOFO drops. The demand for rail improvement grants isn't slowing—and neither should our preparation. Opportunities like this don't come often, and with the future beyond 2026 uncertain, being ready to capitalize on the upcoming round is essential (both for the success of our individual projects and for the broader rail community's continued growth). **Stay tuned—the next few months will be pivotal for everyone following FRA's grant programs!**

About the Author

Lucas J. Brewer, PE, PMP, MBA is a freight-rail strategist and professional engineer who leads market development and project delivery for short line and regional railroads nationwide. He currently chairs the ASLRRA Engineering Committee and serves as Vice Chair of AREMA Committee 18.

A former Assistant Chief Engineer for the Western New York & Pennsylvania Railroad and a Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve, Lucas blends hands-on railroad operations and bridge/track engineering with disciplined program management. He and his teams have secured **\$360M+ in state and federal rail grants**—including numerous FRA CRISI wins—with a success rate near 80%, and he was recognized among Railway Age’s “10 Under 40” Fast Trackers.