

Millions in FEMA Allocations for Several Roads Around the Island

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Guaynabo, PUERTO RICO - The municipalities of Cayey, San Germán, Utuado and Yabucoa received a total of over \$23 million in obligations from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to repair roads affected by hurricanes María and Fiona.

These funds include funds for mitigation measures that will help prevent similar damage in the event of future disasters.

“Roads are a vital part of the country, especially in emergency situations when access to a particular route can prevent accidents and even save lives. The funds that FEMA allocates to repair roads not only help provide safe access to our communities, schools or hospitals, but will also help reduce the wear and tear on our cars by driving on roads in better condition,” said FEMA’s Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José G. Baquero.

General work on these roads consists of removing and replacing asphalt, curbs and sidewalks, repairing embankments, and replacing gabions. In other cases, guardrails will also be replaced. Mitigation measures will consist mostly of pavement reinforcement, drainage repairs for runoff control, and the incorporation of bioengineering techniques to convert normal gabions into green gabions.

These green gabions are created with galvanized baskets filled with filler stone, topsoil and planted with deep-rooted grass. The function of these green retaining walls is to filter water to regulate its flow and reduce soil erosion by creating a permanent protected system, stabilizing embankments and restoring vegetation in the affected area.

In the municipality of Utuado, nearly \$8 million were allocated to repair a municipal road that provides access to a residential area in the Roblegar sector. Of these funds, over \$670,000 were allocated for hazard mitigation measures.



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According to Utuado's alternate contact for Federal Programs, Héctor Cruz Cruz, the repairs to this road provide access to about ten families who use it as the only entrance and exit to access Highway 10 in the municipality. "Awarding federal funds is the municipality's highest priority to address and manage the damage and ensure vehicle traffic. This is of great importance for the benefit of the residents; to provide a safe and efficient roadway for their safety. By having adequate and safe roads they can have basic services, such as being able to go to the hospital and do their shopping," Cruz Cruz said.

Moreover, in Cayey, several roads will be repaired in the Caña 1, 2 and 3 sector, Cana Los Valdíos in the Farallón neighborhood, in Cana Frente and in the Quebrada Arriba sector with an obligation of over \$6 million, of which about \$588,000 will cover mitigation measures.

Municipal Programs Director Sherileen Rivera Muñiz mentioned that these roads provide access to the town and that in both neighborhoods there are small merchants who were affected by the damage and will benefit from the repairs, as they will provide safety for residents and visitors alike. "Public roads are of vital importance for our citizens to be able to move throughout the city, which results in economic and social development. In addition, having the road infrastructure in the best conditions ensures the life and safety of everyone, as well as their access to health and other services in their daily lives," she added.

Likewise, in Yabucoa, over \$2.5 million were allocated to repair roads that give access to residences in the Calabazas neighborhood. Here, mitigation measures will be addressed with an allocation of over \$490,000.

According to the Finance director of the municipality of Yabucoa, Pedro Crespo, the project will benefit 800 residents. Crespo explained that the project covers the Santa María neighborhood, the Rincón sector and two roads in the community of Calabazas Arriba. He detailed that the Santa María and the Rincón sector are in the design contracting stage, while in Calabazas Arriba part of the damage was already taken care of. "In case of the Rincón sector, the area suffered greater damage in Hurricane Fiona compared to María. Some damage was temporarily addressed because of the hazardous access," he added.

Another municipality that suffered damage from Hurricane Fiona was San Germán, which was awarded nearly \$7 million to repair Los Padillas and Los



Sorrentini roads in the Cotui neighborhood and the Mr. Sánchez Road. In this rural area, over \$439,500 were allocated for mitigation measures.

Meanwhile, the executive director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3), Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, emphasized that the Working Capital Advance (WCA) program has played a fundamental role in expediting the construction of many of the road works in the municipalities. The COR3 program delivers FEMA funds in advance.

“For example, in Utuado, the Working Capital program has advanced some \$6,041,833 and Yabucoa has received \$5,824,722. This is the same for many other municipalities developing road projects. These road projects are part of 3,000 completed works and another 9,000 underway on public roads, bridges, the electrical system, the potable water and sewage system, sports and recreational facilities, among other public facilities throughout Puerto Rico,” said Laboy Rivera.

To date, FEMA has obligated approximately \$33.8 billion for nearly 11,000 recovery projects in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane María. Of these funds, over \$2.4 billion are for road repairs.

Likewise, about \$812 million have been obligated for nearly 2,000 projects in the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona, of which over \$466 million are for roads.

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