Rangeley Lakes National Scenic Byway 2022 NSBP Grant Statutory Eligibility Criteria and General Project Information A. Project Identification

1. Primary Applicant:	The Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT)
2. Contact Information:	Matthew Drost, Regional Planner
	Maine Department of Transportation
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3. Cooperating Partners:	Town of Rangeley
	Joe Roach Town Manager
	15 School Street, Rangeley, ME 04970
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The Town of Rangeley is the only Town along the 35-mile Rangeley Lakes National Scenic Byway with two villages located directly on the Byway providing most of the amenities and services to travelers. They own the two parcels of land where the projects will occur and will provide matching funds and in-kind support from their Public Works Department.

Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust David Miller, Executive Director 2424 Main Street, Rangeley, ME 04970 dmiller@rlht.org, 207-864-7311

Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust (RLHT) is a non-profit regional land trust whose mission is to conserve the natural and historic resources of the region for the public and future generations. They have conserved over 16,000 acres of land across the region that the Byway traverses and host over 40 miles of recreational trails. They have served as the coordinator for the Byway since its designation in 2000 acting as coordinator for the Scenic Byways Council and serving as project manager and fiscal agent for many Byway grants over the past two decades. They also initiated a Byway Ambassador program hiring and organizing volunteer greeters stationed at popular scenic overlooks along the Byway. They are there to help visitors make the most of their time in Rangeley. Looking for trails or where to see a moose? The Byway Ambassadors are ready to help you find your special place in the Rangeley Lakes Region.

RLHT led the enhancements on the Rangeley Lakes National Scenic Byway with the installation of the Rangeley Region Wayfinding System which recently received a National Scenic Byway Foundation 2022 Byway Enhancement Award. They are currently coordinating the rewriting of the Corridor Management Plan and development of a marketing plan. They host RLNSB info on their web site www.rlht.org

- 4. **Byway Name:** Rangeley Lakes National Scenic Byway (RLNSB)
- 5. **Designation Type**: National Scenic Byway
- 6. Name of the Project: Village Gateways and Connector Hubs

7. Project Abstract:

We will plan, design, engineer, and construct two Gateway Connector Hubs in Rangeley and Oquossoc villages located directly along the RLNSB. These facilities will provide increased safe off-road parking for vehicles and recreational vehicles and trailers along with pedestrian walkways providing connections to village amenities and recreational opportunities. We will also provide wayfinding and interpretive signs and maps showing how to access the region's recreational/historic sites. The hubs will include streetscapes with landscaping and seating to attract travelers to this park & walk/ride gateway connecting with village amenities and four- season recreation. Both sites will incorporate train depot design themes reflecting their shared history as summer tourism rail stations. These gateway spaces will also connect to village parks, museums, marinas, and a shared workspace building/food truck court and smaller museum/park kiosks at key heritage sites will provide historic info. New parking with safe quick pedestrian access to the village centers will reduce village vehicle congestion and provide a location for a pickup/drop off for the Saddleback Ski Shuttle and train depot shelters for visitors and local events.

8. **Primary Project Goal:**

The Project will contribute to the achievement of all four of the NSBP goals. The primary goal of the Project is to enhance safety for vehicular traffic, pedestrians, and bicyclists. **Safety (E.2(b)(i)):** The primary goal of the Project is to enhance safety for vehicular traffic, pedestrians, and bicyclists. While much of the Byway passes through largely undeveloped forested hills and mountains winding along rivers and around the large lakes, it also passes through two villages which offer most of the amenities that travelers are seeking – lodging, shopping, restaurants, museums, etc. In Rangeley and Oquossoc villages the Byway is the Main St. and managing the flow of through traffic and Byway visitors who want to explore creates challenges. Parking is limited with mostly parallel parking along the roadway or along the gravel shoulders. This interrupts the flow of through traffic and creates a hazard for pedestrians. Providing off road parking will help alleviate this safety hazard. There

are no downtown by-passes so traffic through the villages regularly includes large and wide vehicles like logging trucks and box or tractor trailer trucks supplying local businesses or continuing on the New Hampshire or Canada. In Rangeley village the Gateway Hub will connect with existing sidewalks, display maps to guides visitors and provide off road paths to picnic areas and recreational opportunities. Oquossoc village does not have designated roadside parking and one area that had provided interim parking is now the site of a new restaurant. Expansion of offroad parking will greatly enhance safety and will open site views to create safer access to the parking area. We are also planning to create a walking path to the village center connecting to hiking and biking trails.

Additional Projects Goals:

Equity and Accessibility (E.2(b)(ii)): Franklin County, Maine where the Byway is located is a Census Designated Rural Area and an Economically Distressed Community. It is also described as rural isolated due to its distance from major population and service centers. While its rural nature is what provides the sense of place that many residents cherish, and visitors seek it does create challenges. This project will enhance that sense of place and support and manage the increased flow of visitors that support our working families. Several of the recreational amenities which will be linked to the Gateway Hubs are accessible to all ages and abilities. The Project will also provide accessible parking spaces.

Economic Strength (E.2b(iii)): Tourism is the cornerstone of the economy across Franklin County and the Rangeley Lakes region. The importance of this sector of the economy increased dramatically during the recent pandemic years. "What we saw as a general trend is that some of the more rural counties such as Franklin ... were actually seeing a higher percentage increase in visitation than some of the areas that you would typically think as the most popular tourist areas," said Steve Lyons, director of the Maine Office of Tourism.

Franklin County is classified by the Office of Tourism as part of the Maine's Lakes and Mountains Region. The Office of Tourism tracked the number of visitors through mobile phone data and saw that more users were coming to Franklin and staying for longer periods of time. Lyons said that the whole region benefited from the nature of traveling during the pandemic and that has stayed strong through 2021. According to data collected by the Maine Office of Tourism, "restaurant and lodging taxable sales are up about ... 11% between 2019 and 2021." The data also shows that "based upon the summer arrivals (June 1, 2020 – August 31, 2020) of mobile phones, Franklin County saw an increase of about 25% compared with 2019."

Scott Lavertu, executive director of the Franklin Chamber of Commerce, said that Franklin County is "a gateway to the Western Maine mountains and all of the outside activities that come along with that" and was "a huge draw" for travelers amid pandemic restrictions.

This Project is designed to help manage this increased visitation and assure visitor safety and satisfaction to encourage return visits, longer stays, and word of mouth and social media promotion. It is important to improve the core infrastructure which supports the travelers who in turn support a wide array of local businesses and our working families.

Climate & Sustainability (E.2b(iv)): Travel by vehicle is in inherent in the nature of Byway exploration, ultimately contributing to transportation-related gas emissions. However, encouraging travelers to explore closer to home rather than flying across country or internationally to tourist destinations reduces the impacts. Most destination Byway travelers are traveling with family or friends, further reducing the overall impact on greenhouse gas emissions. With the creation of centralized and convenient parking areas that are connected to pedestrian friendly walking paths, hiking, and biking trails we hope to get people to park and explore on foot. By providing information on the extensive opportunities within a few miles of the Byway we are encouraging longer stays which benefit both the climate and economy.

MaineDOT is currently reviewing potential locations for EV charging stations across the State, and we believe these two Gateway Hubs will be excellent choices where people can explore and engage with their surroundings while recharging their batteries both figuratively and literally. With the recent reopening of the Saddleback Mountain Ski Area, the number of winter visitors is dramatically increasing. Saddleback plans to provide a shuttle bus to bring skiers and snowboarders from the village to the mountain. The Rangeley Hub will provide a safe and convenient pick-up point for the shuttle, reducing the numbers of vehicles making the eight mile 15 minute drive up the mountain.

9. Primary Project Type:

Safety Improvements to a National Scenic Byway: The primary focus of this project is to accommodate increased traffic to the region which has occurred over time as the Byway has been enhanced and marketed to benefit the regional nature based tourism economy and as a result of a pandemic fueled interest in rural destinations and outdoor recreation. This has resulted in more visitors to the two villages located on the Byway which provide most of the traveler amenities like lodging, shopping, restaurants, museums, etc. While we encourage travelers to stop in these villages there is a critical lack of parking to accommodate them. The villages are also the hubs for recreational activities and cultural

events putting additional pressure on limited parking and increasing pedestrian traffic. Safety will be greatly enhanced by creating areas for off-street parking with pedestrian links to village and recreational amenities. Safety will also be improved by providing designated accessible parking and parking for boat, snowmobile, and ATV trailers.

10. Additional Project Types:

Construction along a scenic byway of a facility for pedestrians and bicyclists, rest area, turnout, highway shoulder improvement, overlook, or interpretive facility: An improvement to a scenic byway that will enhance access to an area for the purpose of recreation, including water-related recreation.

The project includes the construction of Gateway Connector Hubs in each of the two villages located along the Byway with off-street parking for passenger vehicles and recreational vehicles and trailers and locations for future EV charging stations. These hubs will incorporate kiosks, covered picnic areas, interpretive signage, pedestrian walkways, and links to adjacent recreational opportunities including hiking, boating, snowmobiling, and biking. Both projects are within a short walking distance to town parks, public access to Rangeley Lake and museums and additional kiosks will be located in those areas.

Development and provision of tourist information to the public, including interpretive information about a scenic byway:

Both village hubs will include interpretive information including a comprehensive map of the Byway with the locations of major attractions on and adjacent to the Byway. They will also be themed around the historic Rangeley Lakes, Sandy River, and Rumford Falls Railroads which used to bring travelers to the region before the development of the current Byway roads. Each hub will feature a restored train car and information about the location of the rail lines and the steamers that used to transport visitors from the train across the region's chain of large lakes to large hotels and sporting camps.

We will also work in partnership with the Rangeley Historical Society and Wabanaki tribal leaders to incorporate information about the indigenous people who first populated the region and named the many lakes and rivers across the region.

B. Project Description

11. Applicant Information:

The Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) is a cabinet-level state agency with primary responsibility for statewide transportation by all modes of travel and maintains more than 8,800 miles of road. Maine's All-American Road, six Nationally-designated Byways, and seven additional State-designated Byways cover more than 700 miles of MaineDOT's managed road network and are present in half of Maine's 16 counties.

12. Project Description:

Details, challenges, and how the project addresses challenges Please include data or evidence that supports the existence of the challenge(s) or issue(s) that the project is intended to address.

The Rangeley Lakes National Scenic Byway (RLNSB) winds through dense forests with curves that follow the Sandy River as it ascends into the mountains and lakes of the famed Rangeley Lakes region. Rangeley, with 1,000 residents, two villages and no traffic lights, is the only organized Town along the entire 35-mile Byway. At the center of the Byway on either end of Rangeley Lake are Rangeley and Oquossoc villages which provide a wide range of visitor amenities in a setting that reflects its historic character. The State Rt. 4 section of the Byway is also Main St. lined with wood framed buildings that look much like they did over a century ago. Seven miles west at the intersection with State Rt. 17 is Oquossoc village, an intimate rustic village which features the Outdoor Heritage Museum. All the amenities a traveler could wish for can be found in these villages in locally designed original buildings and storefronts. There are no national franchises. However, as the region continues to see increased visitation, what is a critical need is more parking, particularly off-street parking. Tourism is the backbone of the regional economy - visitor safety and satisfaction are essential in maintaining the RLNSB brand.

Several years ago, in order to improve traffic flow and safety on Main St./Rt. 4, the Town of Rangeley converted diagonal parking to parallel. With ever larger pickup trucks and SUVs parking diagonally along the Byway/Main St. there was often not enough width for two vehicles on the roadway, particularly when one of them was a logging truck or Poland Springs water tanker. While this change helped improve vehicular and pedestrian safety it resulted in a significant reduction of the number of available parking spaces. To address this challenge the Town recently purchased a parcel of vacant land adjacent to the Byway to be used for off-street parking. It will also serve as a safe off-street pickup location for shuttle buses to the newly reopened Saddleback Mt. Recreation Area which brings thousands of visitors to town each year.

In Oquossoc village the challenge is that there is no public parking along the roadway except for an undeveloped parking area that serves vehicles and trailers using the public boat launch. The Oquossoc Village Gateway Hub will bookend the railroad theme in Rangeley village as both locations served as stations for visitors arriving in the region by rail and connecting with steamers that transported people across the lakes. There will also

be an interpretive panel to honor the Abenaki Indians who set up hunting and fishing camps alongside the area's lakes, ponds, and rivers. Names of the bodies of water that comprise the Rangeley chain of lakes -- like Cupsuptic, Umbagog, Kennebago and Mooselookmeguntic -- attest to their influence. Visitors will be directed to the Outdoor Heritage Museum, located a short walk from the hub, for more displays and information..

Both sites will incorporate parking for vehicles and trailers for travelers who are bringing boats, snowmobiles, or ATVs and are convenient to launches and trails. Connectors from the hubs will provide links to walking, biking, snowmobiling, and boating opportunities.

Rangeley and Oquossoc villages both host numerous festivals all year long that draw thousands of people to the region along the Byway. Festivals celebrate seasonal natural treats to the eye and palate like lupine, blueberries, strawberries, and apples and local culture including arts, logging, and antiques. While these provide major support to our local businesses, they create a potentially hazardous situation with unmanaged parking and increased pedestrian traffic.

To address these issues, we propose to construct (2) Village Gateway Connector Hubs on town owned property in both villages which will provide significant off street parking. The work includes site analysis and planning with public input, site design/engineering and construction of facilities. These sites will also provide informational and educational signage about the Byway and the region. They will be the hubs which connect visitors to activities and amenities in the villages including local museums, village town parks and nearby recreational amenities and will be excellent locations for EV charging stations. All of these projects were identified and ranked as high priorities in the *RLNSB CMP* ("provide new or expanded parking areas to accommodate visitors") the *Rangeley Downtown* *Revitalization Plan* ("Improve parking and develop bicycle and pedestrian connections to Rangeley and Oquossoc Village parks from other areas of the villages"), the *draft update of the CMP* ("develop the Oquossoc village Carry Rd. and Rangeley village Depot St. parking areas to provide safe off street parking and pedestrian access to the villages"), *and surveys that were conducted to provide public input for the CMP update* ("additional or enhanced parking and informational kiosks in Rangeley and Oquossoc villages").

The partners in this project including Maine DOT, the Town of Rangeley (the landowner), and Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust (Coordinator and fiscal agent for the RLNSB and the Byway Council) are prepared to begin work on this project as soon as funding is committed.

13. Project Selection Criteria:

(a) Describe the challenge(s) or issue(s) the proposed project is seeking to mitigate and/or address.

As the Byway continues to see increased visitation a critical need is more parking, particularly off-street parking. Tourism is the backbone of the regional economy - visitor safety and satisfaction are essential in maintaining the RLNSB brand.

Several years ago, in order to improve traffic flow and safety on Main St./Rt. 4, the Town of Rangeley converted diagonal parking to parallel. With ever larger pickup trucks and SUVs parking diagonally along the Byway/Main St. there was often not enough width for two vehicles on the roadway, particularly when one of them was a logging truck or Poland Spring water tanker. While this change improved vehicular and pedestrian safety it resulted in a significant reduction of the number of available parking spaces. To address this challenge the Town recently purchased a parcel of vacant land adjacent to the Byway to be used for off-street parking. It will also serve as a safe off street pickup for shuttle buses to the newly reopened Saddleback Mt. Recreation Area which brings thousands of visitors to town each year.

In Oquossoc village the challenge is that there is no public parking along the roadway except for an undeveloped parking area that serves vehicles and trailers using the public boat launch.

Both sites will incorporate parking for recreational vehicles and trailers for travelers who are bringing boats, snowmobiles, or ATVs and are convenient to launches and trails. Connectors from the hubs will provide safe links to walking, biking, snowmobiling, and boating opportunities.

Rangeley and Oquossoc villages both host numerous festivals all year long that draw thousands of people to the region along the Byway. While these provide major support to our local businesses, they create a potentially hazardous situation with unmanaged parking and increased pedestrian traffic.

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supported by data and need.

(b) Describe how the proposed project will achieve one or more of the NSBP goals.

The Project will have a positive impact on all four NSBP goals: Safety (primary), Equity and Accessibility, Economic Strength, and Climate and Sustainability.

Safety: The primary goal of the Project is to enhance safety for vehicular traffic, pedestrians, and bicyclists. While much of the Byway passes through largely undeveloped forested hills and mountains winding along rivers and around the large lakes, it also passes through two villages which offer most of the amenities that travelers are seeking – lodging, shopping, restaurants, museum, etc. In Rangeley and Oquossoc villages the Byway is the Main St. and managing the flow of through traffic and Byway visitors who want to explore creates challenges. Parking is limited with mostly parallel parking along the roadway or along the gravel shoulders. This interrupts the flow of through traffic and creates a hazard for pedestrians. Providing off road parking will help alleviate this safety hazard. There are no downtown bypasses so traffic through the villages regularly includes large and wide vehicles like logging trucks and box or tractor trailer trucks supplying local businesses or continuing on the New Hampshire or Canada. In Rangeley village the Gateway Hub will connect with existing sidewalks, display maps to guides visitors and provide off road paths to

picnic areas and recreational opportunities. Oquossoc village does not have designated roadside parking and one area that had provided interim parking is now the site of a new restaurant. The Project will greatly enhance safety and we will open site views to create safer access to the parking area. We are also planning to create a walking path to the village center connecting to hiking and biking trails.

Equity and Accessibility: Franklin County, Maine where the Byway is located is a Census Designated Rural Area and an Economically Distressed Community. It is also described as rural isolated due to its distance from major population and service centers. While its rural nature is what provides the sense of place that many residents cherish, and visitors seek it does create challenges. This project will enhance that sense of place and support and manage the increased flow of visitors that support our working families. Several of the recreational amenities which will be linked to the Gateway Hubs are accessible to all ages and abilities.

Economic Strength: Tourism is the cornerstone of the economy across Franklin County and the Rangeley Lakes region. The importance of this sector of the economy increased dramatically during the recent pandemic years. "What we saw as a general trend is that some of the more rural counties such as Franklin ... were actually seeing a higher percentage increase in visitation than some of the areas that you would typically think as the most popular tourist areas," said Steve Lyons, director of the Maine Office of Tourism. Franklin County is classified by the Office of Tourism as part of the Maine's Lakes and Mountains Region. The Office of Tourism tracked the number of visitors through mobile phone data and saw that more users were coming to Franklin and staying for longer periods of time. Lyons said that the whole region benefited from the nature of traveling during the pandemic and that has stayed strong through 2021. According to data collected by the Maine Office of Tourism, "restaurant and lodging taxable sales are up about ... 11% between 2019 and 2021." The data also shows that "based upon the summer arrivals (June 1, 2020 – August 31, 2020) of mobile phones, Franklin County saw an increase of about 25% compared with 2019."

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This Project is designed to help manage this increased visitation and assure visitor satisfaction to encourage return visits, longer stays, and word of mouth and social media promotion. It is important to improve the core infrastructure which supports the travelers who in turn support a wide array of local businesses and our working families. **Climate & Sustainability:** Travel by vehicle is in inherent in the nature of Byway exploration, ultimately contributing to transportation-related gas emissions. However, encouraging travelers to explore closer to home rather than flying across country or internationally to tourist destinations reduces the impacts. Most destination Byway travelers are traveling with family or friends further reducing the overall impacts on greenhouse gas emissions. With the creation of centralized and convenient parking areas that are connected to pedestrian friendly walking paths, hiking, and biking trails we hope to get people to park and explore on foot. By providing information on the extensive opportunities within a few miles of the Byway we are encouraging longer stays which benefit both the climate and economy.

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The Project meets the *Highly Qualified Selection Criteria* by clearing describing how the proposed project will advance the goal and providing data that directly supports the need to advance the goal on the Byway.

(c) Describe the proposed timeline for the project, including phases, if applicable.

The Scenic Byway Council, Town of Rangeley, Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust and MaineDOT have worked together closely to develop the plans for these projects as evidenced by the detailed Concept Plans provided in Section E. Attachments. They are committed to continue this collaborative work to see the projects through to completion. Over the past 20 years this team has completed many enhancements along the Byway including four scenic overlooks, over 40 interpretive panels, two public restroom facilities, and an award winning wayfinding system. We are prepared to continue the planning and design of the proposed projects as soon as we receive a funding commitment and hope to begin design and engineering early in 2023 with construction to begin as soon as bidding and contracting can be completed.

The Project meets the **Highly Qualified Selection Criteria** providing detailed information on the project timeline, including identifying planning or other efforts that have gone into the project already and evidence of the project's readiness for implementation. The information provided demonstrates the feasibility of the project and the capacity of the Project partners and their ability to achieve the proposed outcomes within the NSBP obligation and expenditure deadlines.

(d) Describe, in detail, the proposed project budget.

See Section D. Budget and Budget Narrative

This Project meets the Highly Qualified Selection Criteria. The application includes a detailed budget that shows the total project cost, all funding sources and amounts, and percentage of total project costs.

(e) Describe how the project will benefit the byway community and/or traveler.

These Gateway Connector Hubs will benefit both the community and the traveler by drawing people off the roadway to safely access Byway information and experience the Byway story. They will invite travelers to explore the many opportunities to safely and responsibly explore multiple intrinsic qualities which led to the Byway designation by providing maps, information, and links. They will improve safety for vehicles and pedestrians moving through the villages and create more walking friendly villages which will encourage travelers to patronize local businesses. With a greater appreciation of the depth and breadth of activities that the locations offer it is expected that travelers will be enticed to spend more time and contribute more to the local economy.

The Project meets the **Highly Qualified Selection Criteria** by clearly describing with a high level of detail how the project will benefit the byway community and/or traveler and how it will help manage the intrinsic qualities that support the byway's designation, shape the byway's story, interpret the story for visitors, and improve visitor facilities along the byway. See Sections...

(f) Describe how you will evaluate the success of the proposed project in meeting its stated purpose and goal(s), including specific metrics that will be used to evaluate to the extent to which the proposed project would be successful in addressing and/or mitigating the identified challenges, or meeting the stated goals. Please be as specific as possible, including descriptions of specific data and project evaluation criteria.

Project partners will be able to gauge the success of the Project by monitoring the level of use of the facilities and through feedback solicited on our social media outlets and through our Byway Ambassadors. We will also ask our community business partners to solicit feedback about visitor experiences. As a follow up to this project we will use interns and Byway Ambassadors stationed at both Gateway Connector Hubs to interact with visitors to gather comments and suggestions. They will also gather data on numbers of vehicles and pedestrians using the facilities year round, particularly at busy times and during festivals and other events. Maine DOT can provide traffic and safety reports and RLHT will utilize remote counters to collect and tabulate use data. We expect that during weekends, holidays, school vacations, and festivals/events the facilities will be fully occupied. The Town Public Works Department will also monitor facility use and work with Maine DOT on the installation of EV chargers once the Project is complete. We will get reports from Saddleback Ski area on the use of the Shuttle Station including the numbers of people transported each day.

The Project meets the **Highly Qualified Selection Criteria** by describing in detail how the success of the project will be evaluated in advancing one or more of the NSBP goals and benefitting the byway community and/or traveler and how it will help manage the intrinsic qualities that support the byway's designation, shape the byway's story, interpret the story for visitors, or improve visitor facilities along the byway. See Sections

C. Policy Considerations. *The FHWA will give priority consideration to applications that address one or more of the following priorities:*

The Project meets all three of the policy considerations for priority consideration.

1. The majority of the project's costs will be spent within (or on the boundary of) a Census-designated rural area. At least part of the project falls within an economically distressed community per the U.S. Economic Development Administration. Franklin County where the Project occurs in is a Census-designated rural area and is an economically distressed community.

ECONOMIC DISTRESS CRITERIA

2020 Per Capita Personal Income (BEA PCPI)

2020 Per Capita Money Income (ACS 5-year PCMI)"Geography"BEAPCPIThreshold Calculation**Franklin County, ME\$43,276**U.S.\$59,510100

FWHA Supplemental Guidance provides that an area is economically distressed if it has a per capita income of 80 percent or less of the national average.

2. The total cost of the project is \$500,000 or larger. The project budget is greater than\$500,000

3. Applicant has identified cost sharing and leveraging of non-Federal funds beyond the required 20 percent non-Federal match.

Project partners Maine DOT, the Town of Rangeley, and Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust will provide non-Federal match in excess of 20 percent of projects costs.