

June 16, 2020

TO THE MEMBERS OF UNITED STATES CONGRESS:

The undersigned organizations urge you to make permit streamlining a centerpiece of any future bill to rebuild America's infrastructure. Including provisions that modernize the Federal environmental review and permitting process to reduce delays and enhance project planning and delivery is paramount to realizing our shared goals of economic recovery and continued environmental protections.

Our organizations represent sectors that provide critical infrastructure and services for the American economy across a broad range of sectors, including agriculture, energy, forestry, manufacturing, construction, transportation, and more. We fully support the fundamental environmental stewardship goals of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); however, it is widely recognized that these review processes have become hampered by unreasonable costs and long project delays.

Since the beginning of NEPA implementation in the 1970s, the time it takes to complete environmental reviews has increased significantly, unnecessarily delaying investment and environmental stewardship. According to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the average completion time for the environmental review process is now four and a half years, with transportation project reviews taking more than six years. These long reviews delay investment in modern, efficient infrastructure and job creation, including potential reductions to congestion-related emissions, enhanced climate resiliency, and all forms of energy including solar and wind projects.

It is time to restore the original intent of NEPA review processes, which was to promptly consider relevant environmental information and arrive at an agency decision without delay. For example, CEQ's first implementing regulation from 1978 included a number of provisions aimed at facilitating expeditious permitting decisions by "reducing delays," setting "appropriate time limits," and implementing process requirements concurrently. Further, CEQ issued a memorandum in 1986 advising agencies that "under the new NEPA regulations even large complex energy projects would require only about 12 months for the completion of the entire EIS process."

Moreover, reducing delays and uncertainties associated with infrastructure investment and related projects has the potential to support good paying jobs when the economy needs them most. The need to maintain America's competitive edge and attract global investment is especially important given our current economic challenges. The American Society of Civil Engineers gave American infrastructure a D+ grade in their most recent report card, highlighting the need to improve and expand our infrastructure to more efficiently move people, goods, energy, and information across the country. To provide the near-term economic boost needed with any infrastructure bills and maintain America's competitive edge, permit streamlining will be a necessary accompaniment to speed up decision-making to benefit local communities and the U.S. as a whole.

Adopting permit streamlining policies in conjunction with any infrastructure bill would reduce delays and improve the predictability of the Federal permitting process allowing businesses to plan and invest with confidence while enhancing economic productivity and environmental stewardship. This is a priority with bipartisan support, and we are committed to work with you to ensure its inclusion in forthcoming infrastructure legislation.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association  
American Coke and Coal Chemicals Institute  
American Council of Engineering Companies  
American Highway Users Alliance  
American Public Gas Association  
American Road & Transportation Builders Association  
Associated Builders and Contractors  
Associated Equipment Distributors  
Associated General Contractors of America  
Association of American Railroads  
Association of Equipment Manufacturers  
Association of Oil Pipe Lines  
Building a Better America  
Consumer Energy Alliance  
Energy Equipment and Infrastructure Alliance  
Federal Forest Resource Coalition  
Independent Petroleum Association of America  
Laborers' International Union of North America  
LNG Allies, The US LNG Association  
National Association of Home Builders  
National Cattlemen's Beef Association  
National Lime Association  
National Mining Association  
National Ocean Industries Association  
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association  
North America's Building Trades Unions  
Portland Cement Association  
Public Lands Council  
The Fertilizer Institute  
The National Stone, Sand & Gravel Association  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce