March 2, 2021

TO THE MEMBERS OF UNITED STATES CONGRESS:

As Congress develops infrastructure legislation to stimulate the economy and improve the quality of life for every American, the undersigned organizations urge you to prioritize improvements to the federal permitting process. We fully support the fundamental environmental stewardship goals of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and believe a modernized NEPA process would enhance the ability to realize our shared goals of COVID-19 economic recovery and continued progress on environmental protections, including climate change.

Given the current economic crisis brought on by the pandemic, investing in our infrastructure will encourage growth and increase opportunity, but in particular, can help the communities hit the hardest. Building resilient highways and other infrastructure will help link neighborhoods to businesses and job centers and provide better access to clean water and affordable energy. Investments in telecommunications infrastructure will support virtual learning and drive entrepreneurial opportunities. Improving roads, bridges and the efficiency of the distribution of goods will reduce traffic congestion and emissions associated with it. However, these needed investments will fail to deliver if the efficiency of the federal environmental review and permitting process is not improved.

Recognizing the need for a more efficient environmental review and permitting process, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee passed out of committee, with bipartisan support, core elements of the 2017 “One Federal Decision” policy that would improve the efficiency of NEPA’s environmental review and permitting process. Given that it takes an average of seven years to simply reach a “yes” or “no” decision on permits for a transportation project, and with some projects taking decades, it is easy to understand why the provision had bipartisan support.

Due to such unnecessary delays, presidents from both parties have long identified the need for faster, more efficient permitting, issuing executive orders to expedite federal decision-making and accelerate project delivery. President Biden, however, has rescinded the 2017 “One Federal Decision” policy and has asked CEQ to review the previous administration’s actions to modernize the NEPA permitting process. While we will work with the current Administration on any recommended changes to existing NEPA procedural requirements, the uncertainty from Administration to Administration makes the strong case for Congressional action.

We stand ready to work with Congress to codify important updates to the federal permitting system. The process should enhance coordination among federal agencies, states, tribes and localities and eliminate duplicative processes by employing a single, coordinated timetable and review process for federal permitting decisions. The process needs to be predictable and transparent in order to be fiscally responsible with public funds and continue to attract long term investment.

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.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association
Airlines for America
American Chemistry Council
American Coke and Coal Chemicals Institute
American Council for Capital Formation
American Council of Engineering Companies
American Exploration and Production Council
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers
American Gas Association
American Highway Users Alliance
American Petroleum Institute
American Pipeline Contractors Association
American Public Gas Association
American Trucking Association
Associated Builders and Contractors
Association of Oil Pipe Lines
Consumer Energy Alliance
Distribution Contractors Association
Energy Equipment & Infrastructure Alliance
Federal Forest Resource Coalition
The Fertilizer Institute
GPA Midstream Association
The Hardwood Federation
Independent Petroleum Association of America
International Association of Drilling Contractors
Laborers' International Union of North America
National Association of Home Builders
National Association of Manufacturers
National Association of Realtors
National Lime Association
National Mining Association
National Ocean Industries Association
National Stone, Sand and Gravel Association
National Utility Contractors Association
Natural Gas Supply Association
Plastics Pipe Institute
Portland Cement Association
Power and Communication Contractors Association
U.S. Chamber of Commerce