

March 27, 2023

The Honorable Steve Scalise
House Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-107, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515



25 Massachusetts Ave NW, Suite 500
Washington D.C., 20001
(202) 789.7850 main ■ www.ASCE.org

Dear Majority Leader Scalise:

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) applauds the inclusion of provisions in the Lower Energy Costs Act (H.R. 1) that aim to further reform the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to optimize infrastructure investments while safeguarding environmental protections. The drawn-out regulatory review process can be a detriment to infrastructure investment, delaying projects, creating uncertainties, and increasing overall project costs. Therefore, ASCE has been a long time advocate for a balanced approach to the NEPA process that streamlines the permitting and approval process for infrastructure projects, but not at the expense of a science-based evaluation and determination of impacts to the environment.

Founded in 1852, ASCE is the country's oldest engineering society. Representing more than 150,000 civil engineers from the private sector, government, and academia, ASCE is dedicated to advancing the science and practice of engineering. As the professionals who plan, design, construct, and maintain much of the nation's infrastructure, civil engineers are acutely aware of and affected by regulations that either facilitate or impede the expeditious and environmentally effective development of infrastructure.

ASCE strongly supports regulations that protect the environment from damage for current and future generations and environmental reviews play a vital role in indicating whether the benefits of a project outweigh the environmental impacts. However, inefficient review and approval processes are harmful to the implementation of infrastructure projects that have the potential to improve safety, create jobs, and generate economic activity. Delays and changes in project scopes due to regulatory inefficiencies and uncertainties increase costs and adversely affect the economic, societal, and environmental benefits of the project.

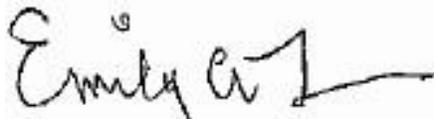
Therefore, ASCE believes that reducing unnecessary delays in environmental review and permitting processes is a critical step in improving our nation's infrastructure, which earned a "C-" on ASCE's *2021 Report Card for America's Infrastructure*. By establishing time limits for reviews and decisions on infrastructure projects and designating a lead permitting agency for project reviews, H.R. 1 could reduce future delays. Clarifying the role of an agency tasked with overseeing a particular permitting process and urging collaboration between agencies will not only more quickly resolve interagency conflicts but will help ensure the development and use of a single NEPA document. These efforts will prevent duplication of work, make documents

readily available to the public, and allow for more efficient and expedited approval of critical infrastructure projects. The provisions will also improve the ability of agencies to reject incomplete project designs more efficiently, saving taxpayers money and creating greater agency flexibility to explore alternatives.

Beyond that, we recognize that efficient processes are essential as implementation of the massive Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) continues. This once-in-a-generation investment in our nation's physical infrastructure will result in projects across the country, from pipelines and tunnels to bridges and dams. Permitting reform can play an important role in helping the projects supported by this legislation break ground in a timely manner.

ASCE supports H.R. 1's intention to reduce regulatory burdens associated with the NEPA process and we thank the House for addressing this critical issue and hope for a bipartisan process moving forward. Reducing delays in the permitting process can help civil engineers work more efficiently to deliver safe and effective projects that improve quality of life for people and economic competitiveness for the nation as a whole. Going forward, ASCE is happy to be a resource for policymakers as you craft policies that will move infrastructure projects forward in a timely manner, as well as policies that support the development of safe, resilient, and sustainable infrastructure. Addressing permitting reform is a critical step toward building and maintaining national infrastructure systems fit for the 21st century and we look forward to continuing to work with Congress on these issues that are vital for job creation and economic growth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Feenstra". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small "v" above the "i" in "Emily".

Emily Feenstra
Chief Policy & External Affairs Officer
American Society of Civil Engineers

CC:

Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Chair, House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Bruce Westerman, Chair, House Committee on Natural Resources
Sam Graves, Chair, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure