



Washington Office

25 Massachusetts  
Ave., NW Suite 500

Washington, D.C. 20001

(202) 789 -7850

Fax: (202) 789-7859

**Statement for the Record of**

**The American Society of Civil Engineers**

**on**

**"Improving the Federal Environmental Review and Permitting Processes"**

**Committee on Environment and Public Works**  
**U.S. Senate**

**February 19, 2025**

## **Introduction**

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) appreciates the opportunity to submit a statement to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works regarding the hearing “Improving the Federal Environmental Review and Permitting Processes.”

Efficient project delivery is among the issues ASCE is advocating for as we look toward the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill. Increased investment in infrastructure must be paired with strategic permitting reform that cuts down on red tape while providing environmental protections. ASCE recognizes the major role the Committee on Environment and Public Works will have in shaping the next surface transportation reauthorization bill, and we appreciate committee members’ consideration of permitting reform.

Founded in 1852, ASCE is the nation’s oldest civil engineering society. ASCE represents more than 160,000 members of the civil engineering profession in 177 countries. As the professionals who plan, design, construct, and maintain critical aspects of our nation’s infrastructure, from roads and bridges to dams and levees, ASCE welcomes the opportunity to offer perspective on the important subject of permitting reform.

## **ASCE’s Report Card for America’s Infrastructure**

Every four years, ASCE publishes its *Report Card for America’s Infrastructure*, which grades the nation’s major infrastructure categories using an “A” to “F” school report card format. The most recent Report Card<sup>1</sup>, released in March 2021, evaluated 17 categories of infrastructure and reflected an overall “C-” grade. Roads received a “D” on the Report Card, while bridges received a “C”, transit a “D-”, and rail a “B”. The next Report Card will assess 18 categories and will be released on March 25, 2025.

## **Support for safe and efficient project delivery**

In any surface transportation reauthorization bill, ASCE asks Congress to consider commonsense ways to improve project delivery. ASCE supports reducing delays in the permitting process for infrastructure projects, helping our nation achieve infrastructure appropriate for the 21st century.

ASCE supports a balanced approach to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process characterized by quality science, objective determinations of potential project impacts on the environment, and streamlining the permitting and approval process for infrastructure projects. Project delays resulting from the current NEPA process often lead to significant costs to taxpayers stemming from issues such as increases in labor and materials costs. Time is another challenge, as environmental impact statements (EIS) can take years to complete. These delays in projects across every infrastructure

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/>

sector are impacting public safety and our economy while impeding the investments made by recent federal legislation.

## **Additional recommendations for a surface transportation reauthorization bill**

### **1. Funding for infrastructure investment**

Besides support for streamlined project delivery, ASCE urges Congress to provide adequate funding for infrastructure investment in the next surface transportation reauthorization bill. Recent federal legislation, such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, set a new standard for investment in surface transportation. However, a funding gap to fully address our nation's transportation needs remains, and ASCE requests that Congress at least maintain investment levels set by the IIJA.

The IIJA has resulted in many tangible benefits to the transportation system. Since the law's enactment in November 2021, the IIJA has directed \$591 billion to over 72,000 projects.<sup>2</sup> These are projects to improve safety on roads and at railroad crossings, accelerate the movement of goods at ports, and increase connectivity in rural and under-resourced communities. In short, the IIJA has funded projects that not only protect human lives, but also spur economic activity.

Transportation funding should involve a continuation of traditional user fees, such as federal and state motor fuel taxes, while transitioning to more sustainable innovative user fees, such as alternative energy vehicle fees and road usage charges. Funding for roads and bridges relies on the Highway Trust Fund (HTF), which is supported by motor fuel tax revenue. The federal motor fuel tax rate of 18.4 cents per gallon for gasoline and 24.4 cents per gallon for diesel has not been raised since 1993. Due to the growth in construction costs and the increasing fuel efficiency of vehicles, the purchasing power of the HTF has declined precipitously over the years.

Vehicles, navigation systems, safety mechanisms, and roadway design techniques have all made their way into the 21st century. Funding for infrastructure should transition to reflect the current transportation system. ASCE recommends innovative user fees that align with the "user pay" principle, which is based on the idea that people who use roadways should bear the costs associated with them. Innovative financing techniques can benefit infrastructure development by better leveraging available resources to deliver more capital. They can also play a major role in delivering projects and public benefits sooner than conventional methods. However, financing by any technique does not supplant the need for adequate user fees or other sources of revenue to pay for projects.

### **2. Operations and maintenance**

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/big-deal-biden-harris-administration-nears-close-history-making-progress-continues>

Congress should support state- and local-level transportation asset management plans that link asset management efforts to long-term transportation planning and incorporate the use of life-cycle cost analysis. Life-cycle cost analysis, which helps raise awareness of the full cost of infrastructure, can help transportation professionals make well-informed operations and maintenance decisions. Using life-cycle cost analysis to evaluate operations, maintenance, repair, and energy costs can help with the overall cost-effectiveness of the project.

One key component of judicious infrastructure decisions is accurate, updated data. Thoroughly collected and promptly reported data guides infrastructure owners on when and how to distribute valuable resources to maintain their roads and bridges. ASCE would like to suggest the incorporation of a provision included in the Rail Bridge Safety and Transparency Act that proposes a bridge inspection report database. This bill, which was introduced last year, calls on the Department of Transportation to develop a database of bridge inspection reports received from railroad carriers. ASCE believes this provision would promote transparency and increase the safety of these critical structures.

ASCE also recommends Congress consider the Bureau of Transportation Statistics' (BTS) work to provide local government agencies with data tools to support infrastructure decisions. The IIJA directed BTS to conduct outreach and identify the data needs of local government officials to make informed decisions about infrastructure investments. It also called on BTS to create a work plan to develop relevant data analysis tools for infrastructure investments in rural and urban communities. In the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill, ASCE suggests requiring an update from BTS on the progress of the work plan. Additionally, ASCE would recommend preserving an IIJA provision authorizing \$10 million per fiscal year for BTS besides the amounts provided through the HTF.

### **3. Building for the future**

Across the U.S., disasters of greater intensity, duration, and frequency have wreaked havoc on communities of every size. In 2023, a total of 28 extreme weather events caused nearly 500 deaths and over \$95 billion in damages. Since 1980, the U.S. has experienced 400 events amounting to at least \$1 billion with a total cost of \$2.7 trillion.

Therefore, in any reauthorization bill, ASCE urges Congress to include requirements to design and construct infrastructure that can withstand increasingly extreme weather events, such as incentivizing the use of the latest codes and standards for projects receiving federal dollars. Designing and maintaining with resilience in mind can result in longer-term project viability, cost savings over time for infrastructure owners, reduced negative impacts on communities and the environment, and increased public involvement in decision-making. The widespread adoption of frameworks and standards can help deliver resilient, fiscally responsible projects and make the nation's infrastructure fit for the future. The past year alone, during which tornadoes caused

damage across the central and southeastern U.S. and hurricanes devastated communities, has demonstrated the need for resilient infrastructure. One recent standard ASCE recommends would be ASCE/COS 73-23: Standard Practice for Sustainable Infrastructure, which provides guidance for infrastructure owners to develop and implement solutions throughout a project's entire life cycle.

Additionally, incorporating sustainability considerations into project design and construction can help ensure infrastructure systems are built to withstand growing challenges caused by extreme weather. An effective approach to this is the increased utilization of the Envision Sustainable Infrastructure Framework. The Envision framework is a decision-making tool that allows stakeholders – including engineers, architects, and contractors – to evaluate projects through the lens of sustainability indicators addressing economic, environmental, and social factors, allowing for more systemic change and improving system performance.<sup>3</sup>

Relatedly, ASCE recommends Congress continue to fund research into the use of innovative technologies, materials, and construction techniques, which can help ensure our infrastructure systems withstand extreme weather events. Innovation in the transportation sector can result not only in longer-lasting infrastructure, but also safer systems for the traveling public.

### **The economic value of infrastructure investment**

In 2024, ASCE released *Bridging the Gap*, a report that analyzes the impacts of recent infrastructure investments on American households and businesses. As Congress considers reauthorizing surface transportation programs over the upcoming year, it will be critical to have a strong understanding of the country's needs. The report found that, to bring the nation's surface transportation infrastructure into a state of good repair, \$3.5 trillion would need to be invested from 2024-2033.<sup>4</sup> If Congress continues to invest in surface transportation programs at the same funding levels represented by the IIJA, the overall funding gap for surface transportation programs will decrease slightly to \$1.2 trillion. However, if funding reverts to 2019 levels, the gap will grow to \$1.8 trillion. While recent federal legislation has halted the infrastructure investment gap's rapid growth, continued robust investment is needed to keep up with increasing demands and ensure our system is fit for the future.

Furthermore, continuing to invest in infrastructure at IIJA levels will have significant economic benefits for American families and businesses over the next two decades. *Bridging the Gap* finds that, if IIJA spending becomes the new baseline for infrastructure investment, American families will save \$700 more per year from 2024-2043. These savings will allow Americans to have more disposable income to invest in the goods and services they want, rather than the expenses related to failing infrastructure, such as car

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://sustainableinfrastructure.org/envision/about/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bridgingthegap.infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-Bridging-the-Gap-Economic-Study.pdf>

repair, bottled water, or losses from spoiled food when the power goes out. Continued investment in our transportation system will also result in safer and more dependable trips for individuals heading to work, children on their way to school, and truck drivers delivering goods to businesses.

### **Conclusion**

ASCE thanks the Committee on Environment and Public Works for holding a hearing on the important subject of the federal environmental review and permitting process. Streamlining project delivery in a safe and responsible manner will help facilitate meaningful infrastructure investment and improve quality of life for people across the country. We appreciate the opportunity to offer perspective and we stand ready to answer any questions.