



GROW AMERICA Act: **Delivering Transportation Projects** **More Efficiently And Quickly**

The GROW AMERICA Act builds on the recent efforts to implement the President’s stated commitment to reduce project review and approval timelines for major infrastructure projects while delivering better outcomes for communities and the environment. **The Act** builds on a series of successful efforts by the Administration to expedite high priority projects and identify best practices to guide future efforts without undermining bedrock environmental laws or public engagement.

A range of factors can contribute to delays in infrastructure projects – most often lack of funding, project complexity or a lack of community support. Through the Administration’s infrastructure permitting work, we’ve also identified a number of best practices that can help deliver projects in a more timely manner by improving the federal permitting process. These include:

- Concurrent, rather than sequential, agency review processes to reduce delays;
- Avoiding duplicative processes that include unnecessary steps to help eliminate costly paperwork exercises; and
- Early collaboration between permitting agencies and the project applicant about the project’s scope to avoid repetition of review steps;

The various Federal, state, tribal, and local permitting and review processes can also be confusing for the general public and elected officials who want to know how a project is progressing.

The President has challenged us to “*to significantly reduce the aggregate time required by the Federal Government to make decisions in the review and permitting of infrastructure projects, while improving environmental and community outcomes.*” –May 17, 2013

The GROW AMERICA Act provides solutions to expedite Federal permits and reviews and deliver projects more quickly and put Americans back to work building our nation’s critical transportation infrastructure, all without undermining the critical protections provided to our nation’s important environmental and historic resources. **The Act:**

- *Improves transparency and accountability and institutionalizes best practices from Administration successes.* **The Act** directs the establishment of an online reporting system to show the progress of environmental reviews and permitting on transportation projects under environmental review. This project “Dashboard” reporting system has already been used successfully to provide daily clarity to the public on the status and schedule for each project’s review and which agency is responsible in each step along the way. **The Act** will establish a new interagency center to spearhead the federal government’s permitting reform efforts by further developing and institutionalizing these process efficiency efforts in each agency’s everyday business practices.
- *Increases flexibility to support reviews.* Many state transportation agencies use federal highway funds to support liaisons at other agencies to help speed environmental reviews. **The Act** will extend this authority to the rest of DOT’s programs. Agencies that are large funding recipients, such

as the Los Angeles Metro, or the Chicago Transit Authority, will be able to enlist dedicated staff at Federal resource agencies, ensuring efficient and high-quality environmental reviews that lead to speedier decisions.

- *Promotes early and substantive engagement among agencies during the review process.* Complex infrastructure projects can involve many different Federal agencies, each with their own statutory responsibilities. Through on-the-ground experience, we've learned that early interagency collaboration can maximize permitting efficiencies and avoid delays by spotting issues early and incentivizing concurrent agency reviews.

The GROW AMERICA Act promotes transparent and clear permitting and eliminates duplicative and unnecessary requirements:

- *Providing transparency.* The **GROW AMERICA Act** provides for greater transparency in the deliberations on permits and other Federal reviews for transportation infrastructure. It requires an on-line platform to make publically available the status and progress with respect to compliance with applicable requirements.

This builds on efforts underway to expand the use of the Federal dashboard displaying the status and progress in expediting the Federal decisions necessary to advance major infrastructure projects.

- *Providing clarity to the permitting process.* The **GROW AMERICA Act** provides for greater clarity in the deliberations on bridge permits between U.S. DOT and the U.S. Coast Guard. It requires the Coast Guard to consider land-based transportation needs and the full costs of a bridge replacement when recommending alternatives to avoid unreasonable obstruction of the waterway. This improves the predictability of the bridge permitting process and provides a more comprehensive accounting of a proposed bridge project's impacts and benefits. This reform builds on earlier agreements between the Coast Guard and the U.S. DOT to improve cooperation and ensure that bridge permit reviews are concurrent, rather than sequential.
- The National Historic Preservation Act and the preservation of historic sites known as "Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act" include two different, often overlapping historical preservation processes. By eliminating the overlapping review for certain sites, buildings, and bridges that are subject to review under other mechanisms, the **GROW AMERICA Act** will allow agencies to avoid spending resources to reach the same conclusion multiple times for the same projects, all while maintaining necessary protections of historic sites.

These duplicative requirements meant that in Chicago, for instance, agencies planning to reconstruct the 100-year old Wilson Station along the elevated Red Line to allow for transfers, accommodate passengers with disabilities, and include modern amenities, had to conduct an extensively documented evaluation of whether a feasible alternative to renovation existed – something that would otherwise never have been considered.

Building 21st Century infrastructure rapidly and affordably while safeguarding our communities and the environment is an important component of President Obama's effort to strengthen our nation's economy, create new jobs, and improve U.S. competitiveness in the global market. These provisions of the **GROW AMERICA Act** help achieve that vision.

PROJECT DELIVERY SUCCESS

The Tappan Zee Bridge, a critical Hudson River crossing north of New York City, carries approximately 138,000 vehicles per day between Westchester and Rockland counties north of New York City. Replacement of this 60-year-old Bridge will improve mobility and make travel safer on one of the east coast's busiest routes. Through early engagement and aligning processes, both strategies encouraged in the GROW AMERICA Act, Federal agencies completed the permitting and review in 1.5 years for a process that normally takes 3-5 years.