

President Trump releases infrastructure proposal

February 12, 2018

In conjunction with the fiscal year (FY) 2019 budget request, President Donald Trump released his Legislative Outline for Rebuilding Infrastructure in America on February 12. The proposal asks Congress to act soon on infrastructure legislation that will stimulate at least \$1.5 trillion in new investment over the next ten years, shorten the process for approving projects to two years or less, address unmet rural infrastructure needs, empower state and local authorities, and train the American workforce of the future. The plan would address “traditional” infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and airports, in addition to drinking and wastewater systems, waterways, water resources, energy, public lands, and Brownfield and Superfund sites.

The plan calls for \$200 billion in federal investment over ten years, leaving \$1.3 trillion to come from local and state governments or the private sector. Half of the federal investment would be made available for an infrastructure incentives program, \$50 billion for rural infrastructure, \$20 billion for a new transformative projects program, \$20 billion for existing financing programs, and \$10 into a federal capital financing fund. The proposal also establishes a Department of the Interior maintenance fund using federal mineral and energy revenues to address the backlog of maintenance on public lands.

Furthermore, the President’s infrastructure plan outlines strategies to improve permitting timelines. Similar to a list of actions proposed in the Federal Register last fall, the plan directs the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to rewrite its National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) guidance for the first time since 1978. It proposes to establish a “One Agency, One Decision” review structure in which a sole agency would play the lead role in reviewing a single combined document and administering one decision within a two-year deadline. Other provisions of the proposal include authorizing federal agencies to accept funding from non-federal entities to support environmental and permitting reviews, eliminating the interagency review team for mitigation banking, prohibiting the ability of federal agencies to intervene in Federal Energy Regulatory Commission proceedings, and authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to review and approve permits for pipelines crossing National Park Service lands.

The proposal addresses supporting the technical workforce needed for infrastructure projects by expanding Pell Grant eligibility, enacting a modified version of the House-passed Strengthening Career and Technical Education or the 21st Century Act (H.R.2353), reforming federal work study programs to encourage apprenticeship, and requiring states utilizing federal funds for infrastructure projects to accept workers with out-of-state licenses.

Infrastructure initiatives and funding will ultimately be decided by Congress, which is expected to hold upcoming hearings to discuss infrastructure proposals.

Sources: E&E News, Library of Congress, White House
