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MOU Streamlines Environmental Permitting Process.

Environmental permits will be streamlined for infrastructure projects under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) recently signed by President Trump.

The “One Federal Decision” MOU aims to accelerate the environmental review process for major infrastructure projects such as new highway construction and runway expansion or repair. Signatories of the MOU include the departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Energy, Homeland Security and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The One Federal Decision stems from the administration’s “one agency, one decision” environmental review procedure, which is detailed in Trump’s infrastructure plan released earlier this year. The memorandum aims to improve the current permitting process by consolidating decision-making, cutting costly delays and changing environmental review methods, according to the administration.

Streamlining the environmental review process for a variety of infrastructure projects will significantly cut the amount of time it takes to process permits, the administration claims. In 2017, Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 13807, “Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure Projects,” to reduce the permit processing time of new major infrastructure projects to no more than 21 months, with actual permits issued within three months following a decision.

These changes would achieve the administration’s goal of shrinking the permitting process to two years from what can sometimes be 10 or 20 years. The MOU also calls for one lead federal agency to work collaboratively with all other pertinent agencies to reach a final decision before signing off on their respective jurisdictional purviews of a project as opposed to the existing sequential process requiring permit applicants to go through a lengthy process of dealing with multiple federal agencies.

In addition to creating a shorter timetable, the One Federal Decision aims to cut back on unnecessary costs that delays can create. By working cooperatively, federal agencies can ensure important infrastructure projects are completed in a timely and cost-effective manner, according to the administration.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

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