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DRIVE applauds President's plan to speed up infrastructure projects

(MADISON, WI) -- The members of DRIVE (*Devote Resources, Invest for a Vibrant Economy*) today praised President Trump's plan to speed up regulatory approval of infrastructure projects. The *Rebuilding Infrastructure in America* plan streamlines and reduces the regulatory review process for infrastructure projects from 10 years down to less than two.

"I just returned from a productive trip to Washington D.C. to lobby our delegation, the White House and Federal DOT officials seeking their assistance to address Wisconsin's critical transportation needs," said DRIVE vice president Steve Baas. "I was encouraged by the bipartisan support to find a solution to this problem."

DRIVE released a comprehensive transportation financing plan in 2017 that specifically cited how costly project delays can be for taxpayers. That plan also identified what steps state and federal lawmakers must take to address this.

Reduce Costly Construction Delays

- **DELAYS COST MONEY** – Project delays translate to more taxpayer dollars spent on short-term fixes such as temporary overlays or patch work. Each time a project is delayed after it is enumerated, the final project cost increases due to construction inflation and short-term fixes such as temporary overlay or patch work to keep the roadway in operation. **Decision-makers and the public should be made aware of project delays and likely added costs for all currently approved projects that do not make the final priority project funding list.**

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- **PROJECTS TAKE TOO LONG TO COMPLETE** - The 2003 Highway Program audit identified that, on average, it took 12 years for the Department to incur all expenses on projects. **The recent LAB audit identified an 18-year timeframe for 13 of the 19 projects from enumeration to completion. Six of these projects took more than 20 years to complete after enumeration. The Department needs to identify and remove state or federal project requirements that add delays to the construction process while still maintaining adequate public input and environmental analysis.** “President Trump was right when he said, *‘Our Nation’s infrastructure is in an unacceptable state of disrepair, which damages our country’s competitiveness and our citizens’ quality of life,’*” stated DRIVE President Tom Diehl. “It may be difficult to get Congress to agree on a funding source for transportation, but they should be able to agree to cut red tape and speed up projects.” The **Rebuilding Infrastructure in America** plan would protect the environment while at the same time delivering projects in a less costly and more time effective manner by.

“The Wisconsin Ag community was pleased to see the President’s plan not only sped up project approval, but also put added emphasis on our rural roads and bridges,” added DRIVE Secretary Jim Holte. “Wisconsin’s \$88 billion farm economy relies on good local roads. It’s critical to this industry.”

The **Rebuilding Infrastructure in America** plan would:

- Create a new, expedited structure for environmental reviews;
- Delegate more decision-making to States and enhance coordination between State and Federal reviews;
- Authorize pilot programs through which agencies may experiment with innovative approaches to environmental reviews while enhancing environmental protections;
- Establish a “One Agency, One Decision” Environmental Review Structure;

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- Protect the environment through a structure that establishes firm deadlines to complete environmental reviews and permits. Under current law, project sponsors of infrastructure projects must navigate environmental reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and permitting processes with multiple Federal agencies with separate decision-making authority and often counter-viewpoints;
- Establish a firm deadline of 21 months for lead agencies to complete their environmental reviews through the issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or Record of Decision (ROD), as appropriate. Additionally, the proposal would establish a firm deadline of 3 months after the lead agency's FONSI or ROD for Federal agencies to make decisions with respect to the necessary permits;
- Reduce inefficiencies in environmental reviews. Require a single environmental review document and a single Record of Decision (ROD) coordinated by the lead agency. Currently, Federal NEPA reviews are conducted by the Federal agencies with jurisdiction over the same project. Agencies are encouraged, but not required, to prepare joint analyses. Requiring joint analyses can reduce the potential for delay caused by separate analyses. When not coordinated, these reviews can be duplicative and difficult for a project sponsor to navigate. Decisions are not issued in the same time frame and frequently are spread out over long periods of time. This additional time can add months, or even years, to the environmental review process, with little benefit to the environment; and
- Require the lead Federal agency under NEPA to develop a single Federal environmental review document to be utilized by all agencies, and a single ROD to be signed by the lead Federal agency and all cooperating agencies. This would reduce duplication and create a more efficient, timely review process.

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DRIVE coordinates and implements a legislative advocacy strategy to enact a sustainable, long-term transportation plan that will keep Wisconsin's economy strong. Members express their concerns to policymakers as work on a regular basis.

DRIVE is co-chaired by Tom Diehl, co-owner of Tommy Bartlett Incorporated in the Wisconsin Dells; Steve Baas, Senior Vice President of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce and Jim Holte, President of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation.

For more information on the DRIVE COALITION, please visit our website at: www.wisconsindrive.com