

Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council Strategic Plan

2022-2026



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Cover Page Photos

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PERMITTING COUNCIL

Dedicated to permitting excellence.

Message from the Executive Director



I am pleased to present the Permitting Council Strategic Plan for 2022-2026. This marks the first ever strategic plan for the organization and establishes our organizational mission, values, and goals for the near future. This Strategic Plan focuses the work of the Permitting Council, providing clear priorities to drive the allocation of resources and communicate to Congress and the public our intended efforts.

The Permitting Council holds the unique position of collaborating across the Federal Government to advance coordination of permitting processes and implementation of Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST-41). The transparency and inclusive benefits of the FAST-41 program are critical to deliver smart, green, and resilient infrastructure.

With the passage of landmark infrastructure legislation (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, P.L. 117-58) in November 2021, the Permitting Council is prepared to bolster its efforts and capacity to support investments in our national infrastructure, while bringing transparency and predictability of the Federal environmental review and authorization process.

Our Strategic Plan establishes four goals focused on maximizing the benefits of the FAST-41 program to meet the growing permitting needs of our national infrastructure investments. These goals underscore our commitment to the infrastructure permitting community and advancement of transparent, predictable, and coordinated Federal environmental reviews and authorizations.

The Permitting Council will continue to play a vital role in shaping our nation's infrastructure, and we are honored to support the American people and the critical growth of our infrastructure.

Christine Harada
Permitting Council Chair and Executive Director



Overview of Permitting Council

The Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council (Permitting Council) is an independent Federal agency charged with improving the transparency, predictability, and outcomes of the Federal environmental review and authorization process for qualifying (covered) infrastructure projects.

The Permitting Council was established in 2015 by Title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST-41), 42 U.S.C. § 4370m et seq., and made a permanent agency with the recent passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) (Public Law 117-58). As detailed in the figure below, the Permitting Council is composed of the Permitting Council Executive Director, who serves as the Council Chair, and Deputy Secretaries or equivalents from thirteen Federal agency Council members, with additional Council members the Chair of the Council

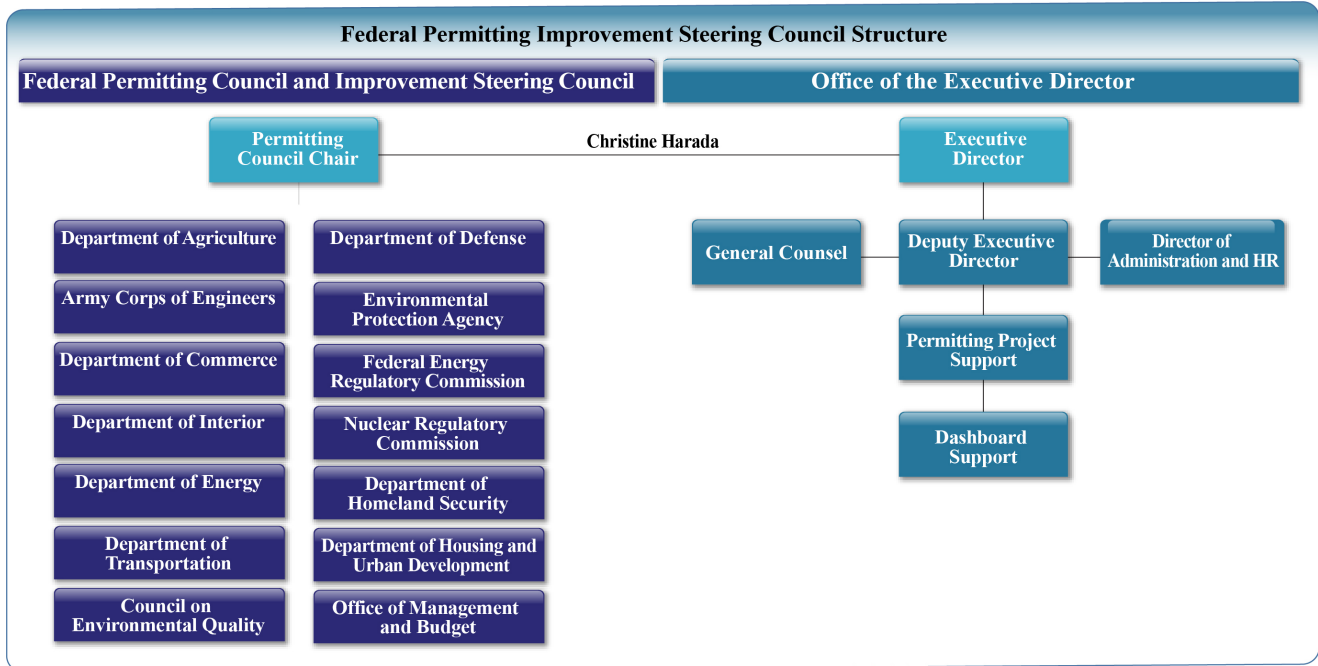


Photo Courtesy of Department of Energy

on Environmental Quality and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. The list below details the agencies represented on the Permitting Council.

- Department of Agriculture
- Army Corps of Engineers
- Department of Commerce
- Department of the Interior
- Department of Energy
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Defense
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
- Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
- Council on Environmental Quality
- Office of Management and Budget





One of the primary functions of the Permitting Council is to coordinate Federal environmental reviews and authorizations for infrastructure projects in industry sectors identified in the FAST-41 statute, which include the conventional energy production, renewable energy production, electricity transmission, surface transportation, aviation, ports and waterways, water resource, broadband, pipelines, manufacturing, mining, and carbon capture sectors, and any other sector determined by majority vote of the Permitting Council.

The Permitting Council manages and facilitates the work of the Permitting Council in addition to performing certain prescribed statutory functions. The Permitting Council's mission is to modernize the nation's infrastructure and invest in America's future by facilitating transparent, predictable, and coordinated Federal environmental reviews and authorizations. The Permitting Council serves as a Federal center for permitting excellence to improve the review and deployment of infrastructure in the United States. In collaboration with the other Permitting Council members the Executive Director executes this mission by: developing FAST-41 implementation guidance and templates; issuing annual recommendations for best practices infrastructure review and permitting; publishing recommended performance schedules for environmental reviews and authorizations for projects in the FAST-41 sectors; and developing permitting process improvements based on lessons learned. The Permitting Council OED is

also responsible for maintaining the Permitting Dashboard, which brings transparency through an online tool for Federal agencies, project developers, and interested members of the public to track the Federal government's environmental review and authorization processes for large or complex infrastructure projects.

About the **FAST-41 Program**

Participation in the FAST-41 program is voluntary, and sponsors of infrastructure projects that meet specific statutory criteria apply to obtain FAST-41 program benefits. Program elements include a single, coordinated, and public permitting timetable for all federal environmental reviews and authorizations for the project and FAST-41 issue elevation and dispute resolution processes that ensure project permitting issue resolution is expedited by high-level federal decision makers. In this way, FAST-41 helps ensure a deliberate, transparent, and predictable Federal environmental review and permitting process for projects that successfully obtain FAST-41 coverage. However, FAST-41 does not alter any applicable statutory or regulatory requirement, environmental law, regulation, or review process, or public involvement procedure. FAST-41 does not predetermine the outcome of any Federal decision-making process with respect to any infrastructure project receiving FAST-41 benefits. The FAST-41 project portfolio supports Administration energy and environmental goals with investments supporting jobs and solutions in renewable and more efficient energy.



Strategic Vision and Framework

The Permitting Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 supports the Agency's mission and values. Each goal and the supporting objectives build upon each other to drive organizational excellence and implement the mission.

Permitting Council Strategic Framework

MISSION

Modernize the Nation's infrastructure and invest in America's future by facilitating transparent, predictable, and coordinated Federal environmental reviews and authorization.

STRATEGIC VISION

The Permitting Council agencies consistently practice inter-agency collaboration, outreach, and transparency to deliver timely, quality Federal infrastructure decisions.

VALUES

We strive to be a trusted partner that brings transparency and good governance to infrastructure permitting.

We strive to be a national Center for Infrastructure Permitting Excellence.

We strive to create and sustain operational excellence.

We strive to foster a culture of continual learning and professional development.

We strive to empower and invest in the infrastructure permitting community.

GOAL 1:	GOAL 2:	GOAL 3:	GOAL 4:
<p>Standardize organizational policies and procedures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1: Refine standard operating procedures. • Objective 2: Disseminate policies & procedures and train employees. • Objective 3: Establish cadence to enable continual business process improvement 	<p>Grow and diversity personnel skills, capacity, and experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1: Expand organizational capacity to meet increased infrastructure permitting demands. • Objective 2: Establish results-oriented professional development and capacity building program. 	<p>Advance implementation of FAST-41.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1: Establish and implement FAST-41 guidance. • Objective 2: Develop tools and templates To aid in FAST-41 implementation. • Objective 3: Update the permitting dashboard to ensure transparency and alignment and FAST-41. • Objective 4: Formalize and offer permitting council Services. 	<p>Conduct outreach to expand participation in the FAST-41 program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1: Refine website to solidify web presence. • Objective 2: Establish and foster new relationships across Federal, State, Local, Tribal, and Private Sectors.



Goal 1: Standardize organizational policies and procedures.

As a Federal Agency, the Permitting Council must maintain certain policies and associated procedures. With the recent passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) (Public Law 117-58), the Permitting Council transitioned to a permanent agency. This necessitates refining existing and developing new policies and procedures. Standard organizational policies and procedures facilitate the mission and work of the Permitting Council. To promote the consistent application of updated policies and procedures, the Permitting Council will focus on efficiently disseminating information regarding relevant changes and training employees on standard policies and procedures as they evolve.

Objective 1: Refine Standard Operating Procedures.

As the Permitting Council transitions into a permanent agency, the organization plans to establish its own independent policies and procedures. While under the original terms of the sunset, the Permitting Council often relied on the policies and procedures provided through the General Services Administration's services. With the passage of IIJA, the Permitting Council seeks to mature its existing policies and develop its own agency policies and associated standard operating procedures (SOPs). This includes thoroughly documenting all required policies in accordance with Federal statutes, as well as organizational policies to effectively run the Permitting Council.

To accomplish this goal, the Permitting Council will conduct an assessment of all existing policies and procedures against required and desired policies. The Permitting Council will leverage best practices and lessons learned from other Departments and Agencies to craft comprehensive policies and SOPs tailored to organizational practices and needs. The Permitting Council will leverage internal and external subject matter

experts and practitioners to develop SOPs. As robust and compliant policies are deployed, the Permitting Council will promulgate policies and procedures across the organization. Recognizing that policies are not stagnant and evolve over time, the Permitting Council will maintain procedures with regular updates. Additionally, the organization is committed to enabling continual improvement and will establish mechanisms for refining policies and execution of SOPs across the organization.

Objective 2: Disseminate policies and procedures and train employees.

The Permitting Council recognizes that operational excellence requires the consistent application and practice of SOPs. As such, the Permitting Council will establish a training program to routinely train its employees on current policies and procedures. This training will include detailees and contractors, as appropriate, to ensure consistent practice across all organizational resources. Training will be developed leveraging standards-based instructional design models and will be mindful of training methodologies that promote learning.

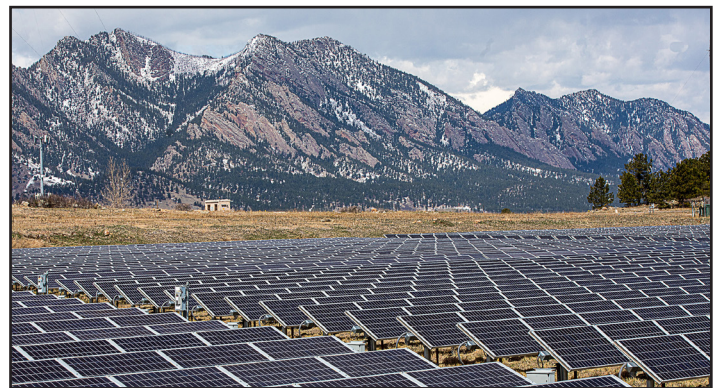


Photo Courtesy of Werner Slocum, National Renewable Energy Laboratory



Training will be conducted regularly to promote awareness, education, and compliance with organizational policies and processes. Training also provides a means for employees to keep apprised of changes to established policies and procedures. Specialized training will be developed and delivered to account for specific roles and functions across the organization, ensuring employees are aware of policies and procedures applicable to their role. Coupled with training, the Permitting Council will establish a repository for employees to easily access policies and procedures for reference.

- Establish a process improvement lifecycle based on industry standard best practices.
- Conduct routine process assessments to identify process gaps and/or discrepancies.
- Engage process owners and practitioners to develop and refine optimal processes.
- Develop process performance measures to assess process adoption and/or effectiveness.
- Identify and implement recommendations to improve processes and process compliance.

Objective 3: Establish cadence to enable and nurture continual business process improvement.

Effective and efficient processes are a trademark attribute of operational excellence, and the Permitting Council seeks operational maturity through continual business process improvement. To enable process improvement that drives achievement of Agency goals, the Permitting Council will:

The Permitting Council will establish mechanisms and incentives to nurture an organizational culture driven towards continual improvement. Such mechanisms include dedicated forums to suggest improvements and lessons learned workshops to address challenges to efficiencies and processes. As incentives, the Permitting Council leadership will highlight employees exemplifying a commitment to continual improvement through recognition awards and bonuses. As the organization embraces continual improvement, the Permitting Council will emerge a stronger and more capable organization.

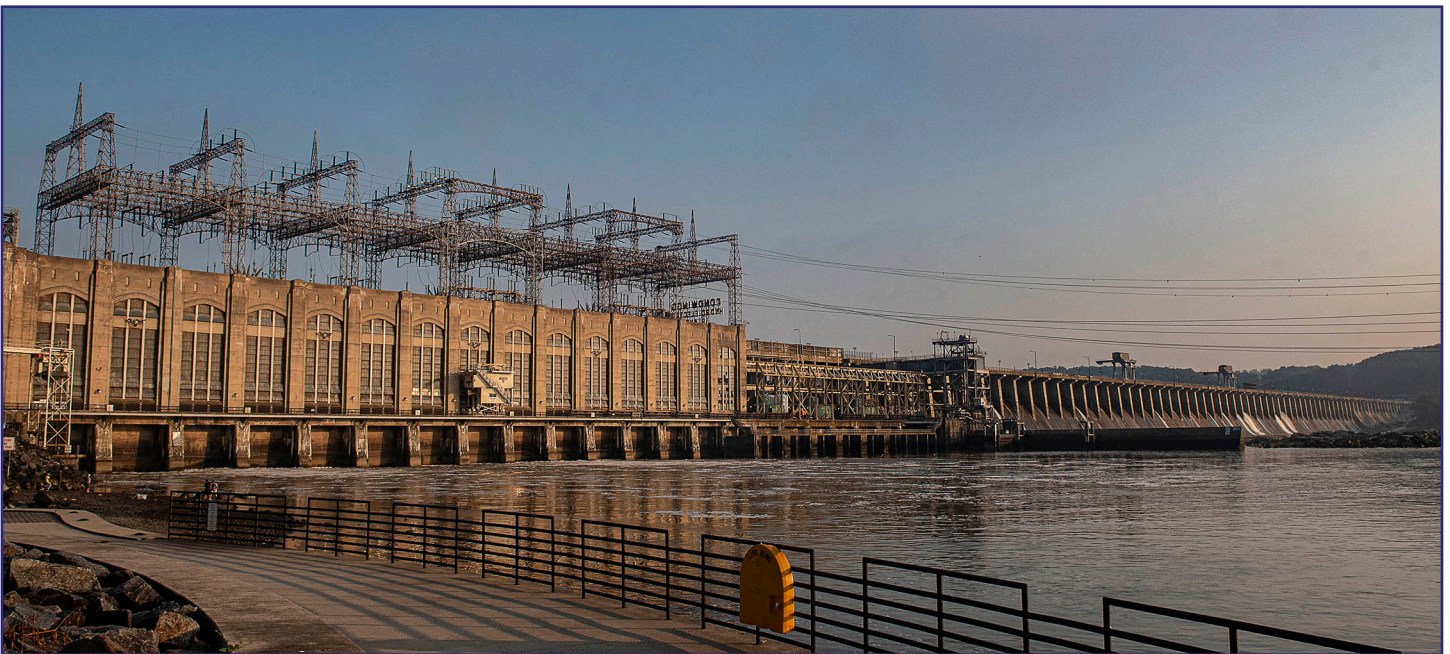


Photo Courtesy of Conowingo Dam, Tony DeYoung



Goal 2: Grow and diversify personnel skills, capacity, and experience.

Infrastructure is an investment in our nation's future; one that should benefit the American people and our environment. Given the diversity of our nation - demographically, geologically, economically - the Permitting Council believes it is vital to build its workforce thoughtfully, in a way that reflects our nation's needs. A quality workforce is built upon diverse personnel and capabilities, and the Permitting Council will seek approaches that expand the backgrounds, skills, and experience of Permitting Council staff. To accomplish this goal, the Permitting Council will grow through the strategic recruitment and hiring of additional workforce and providing growth opportunities that foster retention.

In seeking new personnel, the Permitting Council will strategically target skill sets in a range of fields that address expanding needs including infrastructure permitting sectors, management, and administration. The Permitting Council will leverage multiple hiring mechanisms to build and foster relationships to support its growth. To address talent retention, the Permitting Council will refine its professional development program and offer professional opportunities that are distinctive to the organization

Objective 1: Recruit and hire diverse staff and capabilities to meet increased infrastructure permitting demands.

As the Federal Government expands its investments in our national infrastructure, the Permitting Council anticipates an increase in applicable projects that would benefit from the FAST-41 program. To effectively support these infrastructure projects, the Permitting Council must increase its capacity in infrastructure permitting expertise, as well as organizational support functions. The Permitting Council will develop a staffing plan that details how the Agency will strategically

increase in size, including the steps that will be taken to identify, sequence, and source needed positions and skills. To support development of the staffing plan, the Permitting Council will conduct a staffing assessment that examines existing skills, required skills, and staff amounts. Execution of the staffing plan will enable the Permitting Council to attain the size and skill sets needed to optimally support its mission. The Permitting Council will maintain flexibility to adapt its staffing plan to meet evolving Council needs, such as changes in sector-specific FAST-41 support.

For each required position, the Permitting Council will examine various hiring mechanisms and select those which provide the most qualified and diverse candidates. The Permitting Council will explore a range of mechanisms to include Federal employees, Federal detailees, internships, fellowships, and contractors. To effectively use these mechanisms, the Permitting Council will build upon or establish new relationships or programs.

In addition to fostering relationships that will contribute to the growth of the organization, the Permitting Council will also address aspects of recruiting that will enable a large, diverse, and qualified applicant pool. Each hiring mechanism will have a tailored recruitment approach further influenced by the type of skills required. For example, the Permitting Council may leverage different advertising sources based on the infrastructure sector (e.g., renewables, transmission lines, broadband, etc.). Further, the Permitting Council will also target recruitment efforts at minority-based organizations, websites, universities, etc.

The Permitting Council will introduce new assessment tools, such as questionnaires and interview guides, and ensure they reflect the required skills and experience. These tools will aid the Agency in more accurately evaluating candidates to ensure they meet or exceed the needs and requirements of each position.



Objective 2: Facilitate growth opportunities to retain talent.

As organizational talent increases, the Permitting Council recognizes that retention efforts are necessary to effectively maintain the capacity to fulfill its mission. To achieve this objective, the Permitting Council will first build upon its existing professional development program to focus on results-oriented development. Tying development to results allows the Permitting Council to track and ensure achievement of Agency and individual employee goals. Specifically, Individual Development Plans will foster a joint commitment to each employee's professional development. The Permitting Council will ensure these plans align with individual and organizational goals and support development by maximizing its training budget allocation for individuals and the organization. The Permitting Council will identify and establish training opportunities to facilitate Agency-wide and individual development. Such training may be formal through conferences or certifications as well as informal through brown bag knowledge sessions and reference materials. The Permitting Council will organically foster retention as employees experience and directly benefit from an organization's commitment to their personal growth and learning.

The Permitting Council will also promote retention through the unique professional opportunities the organization offers. Such opportunities include:

- Regular engagement and insights to over a dozen Federal agencies
- Autonomy to lead major cross-agency initiatives
- Exposure to innovative, cutting-edge infrastructure solutions and fields
- Direct engagement with the White House
- Flexibility through a primarily virtual workplace
- Individual contribution to the strategic growth of a young and dynamic Federal agency
- Ideation and ownership of new agency programs

These opportunities provide employees rare leadership and growth experiences not readily found at more mature Federal agencies or in the private sector. Employees are able to directly influence their role and contribution to the organization, bringing ideas that are welcomed and encouraged by agency leadership.



Photo Courtesy of U.S. Department of Energy - Western Area Power Administration



Goal 3: Advance implementation of FAST-41.

Foundational to the Permitting Council is the advancement of the FAST-41 statute. As the coordinating entity for FAST-41 implementation, the Permitting Council seeks to provide guidance and related resources to aid agencies and stakeholders. To ensure effective resources, the Permitting Council will support guidance updates, resources, and Permitting Dashboard to comply with recently updated regulations and policies. As the Permitting Council matures, the agency will also refine the services provided to stakeholders in implementing FAST-41.

Objective 1: Establish and implement updated FAST-41 guidance.

While individual agencies are responsible for compliance with FAST-41, the Permitting Council provides detailed guidance to aid Departments and Agencies in implementing FAST-41. The passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) (Public Law 117-58) in 2021 necessitates the Permitting Council to update its guidance to ensure accuracy and alignment with FAST-41 statute. The Permitting Council will promote this guidance through its Federal outreach and engagement efforts such as the Permitting Council and Chief Environmental Review and Permitting Officer (CERPO) working groups.

Currently, there are two major guidance documents related to FAST-41 implementation: the FAST-41 Implementation Guidance; and the Data Management Guide. For the FAST-41 Implementation Guidance, the Permitting Council will coordinate closely with the Office of Management and Budget and Council on Environmental Quality to update this document to reflect the statute changes, best practices identified and implemented to date, and any lessons learned. The Data Management Guide, which aids agencies with developing, maintaining, or modifying their permitting timetables as reflected on the Permitting Dashboard, will be updated to similarly reflect the latest statutory language.

Finally, as the infrastructure permitting community and its needs evolve, the Permitting Council may supplement its guidance through the issuance of additional guidance documents or Executive Director memos. These supplemental mechanisms provide nuanced details or clarification on implementing FAST-41.

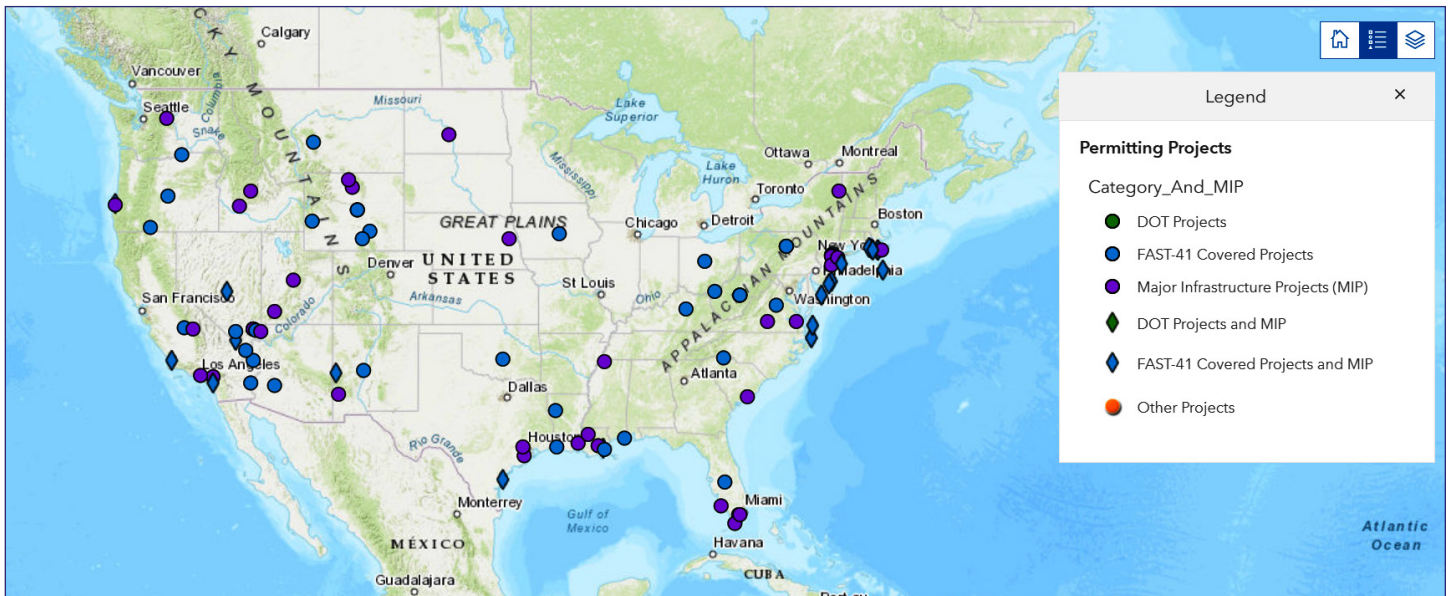
Objective 2: Develop tools and templates to aid in FAST-41 implementation.

While FAST-41 guidance outlines how agencies can implement and comply with FAST-41, the Permitting Council plans to provide additional resources for implementing partners. The Permitting Council will develop tools and templates for agencies and stakeholders to leverage throughout the permitting process, helping agencies to more efficiently navigate FAST-41. As a unique collaborator across the Federal Government on infrastructure permitting, the Permitting Council can provide valuable insights and aids for FAST-41 implementation. In working with agencies, the Permitting Council will identify common challenges or lessons learned to inform best practices and additional tools and templates. These resources, such as a Coordinated Project Plan (CPP) template, will help expedite permitting activities so agencies can comprehensively plan permitting timetables. To support access to these resources, the Permitting Council will establish an online repository.

Objective 3: Update the Permitting Dashboard to ensure transparency and alignment with FAST-41.

The Permitting Dashboard is a public-facing, online tool that brings transparency to environmental review and authorization processes for large, complex infrastructure projects. To ensure continued reliability





<https://www.permits.performance.gov/>

and value of the Dashboard, the Permitting Council will update the Permitting Dashboard to align with the changes in FAST-41 statute.

Dashboard updates will ensure the Dashboard is compliant, accurate, and accessible to stakeholders and the general public. As with the FAST-41 guidance, the Permitting Council will coordinate with stakeholders to properly plan, develop, and implement Dashboard updates. The Permitting Council will conduct an analysis of the existing Permitting Dashboard against the FAST-41 requirements. This will include collecting and addressing agency, project sponsor, and stakeholder feedback on the user experience of the Dashboard. To accompany these refinements, the Permitting Council will bring awareness and educate stakeholders on changes. The associated Data Management Guide will also reflect Dashboard updates as a continued resource for agencies.

Objective 4: Formalize and offer Permitting Council services.

With a principal responsibility to coordinate FAST-41 across applicable infrastructure projects, the

Permitting Council provides unique support across the infrastructure permitting community. To clearly articulate ways in which the Permitting Council advances FAST-41 implementation, the Permitting Council will formalize its service offerings.

The Permitting Council will explore a variety of service options with a focus on driving FAST-41 implementation and timely, quality permitting decisions. To begin, the Permitting Council will assess its current informal offerings, as well as examine existing challenges and opportunities of FAST-41. Each service offering (e.g. Blanket Purchase Agreement, CPP template, Environmental Impact Statement template, etc.) will have clearly articulated purpose, type or support, and associated benefit to FAST-41 compliance.

In formalizing services, the Permitting Council will explore the use of a fee structure for agencies and stakeholders to solicit specific services. This fee structure would be developed in accordance with FAST-41 statute and take into consideration reasonable cost and burden. Further, any fee structure would be subject to consultation with and approval by the Permitting Council.



Goal 4: Conduct outreach to expand participation in the FAST-41 program.

Outreach plays a critical role in advancing participation in and implementation of the FAST-41 program. Attracting qualifying infrastructure projects to participate will result in enhanced transparency, greater compliance, and better permitting decisions - which in turn encourages overall investment in our nation's economy. The Permitting Council aims to further its reach to the infrastructure project development, government, and stakeholder communities to bring greater awareness to the FAST-41 program by 1) establishing a robust official website to bring awareness and resources to stakeholders and 2) conducting strategic outreach across all levels of the public and private community to educate and encourage engagement in FAST-41.

Objective 1: Refine website to solidify web presence.

As the Permitting Council strives to be a national Center for Infrastructure Permitting Excellence, it is imperative to maintain a strong online presence to provide transparency, information, and resources for FAST-41. With this online resource, stakeholders will learn more about FAST-41, how to participate in the FAST-41 program, and the benefits of FAST-41. To enable this robust web presence, the Permitting Council will establish an independent Agency website beyond the current website solution hosted by the Department of Transportation. A dedicated website will direct stakeholders to resources for infrastructure permitting information and will help solidify the Permitting Council's role as a value-added partner within the permitting infrastructure community. As a permanent Federal Agency, the Permitting Council seeks its website to:

- Be the official website for the Permitting Council;
- Provide an overview of the agency mission, efforts, and value it creates;
- Maximize transparency to covered infrastructure projects through the Permitting Dashboard;
- Act as a resource for information and guidance on FAST-41 ;
- Provide an access point for FAST-41 implementation resources to include tools and templates;
- Make agency plans and reporting accessible; and
- Detail the Permitting Council services to aid in FAST-41 implementation.

The Permitting Council will seek a cost-effective solution while meeting Agency requirements and needs. The Permitting Council will engage Permitting Council members and other stakeholders for input on website content and resources, as well as bringing awareness to the website.

Objective 2: Establish and foster new relationships across Federal, State, Local, Tribal, and Private Sectors.

With a mission focused on collaboration, stakeholder engagement is essential to the further adoption of FAST-41 and increased transparency of large, complex infrastructure projects. Recognizing that infrastructure





Photo Courtesy of Conowingo Dam, Tony DeYoung

projects span all levels of government and public and private sectors, the Permitting Council seeks to reach and engage stakeholders to raise awareness of and participation in the FAST-41 program. Outreach efforts will specifically target potential project sponsors, found through organizations such as state agencies or trade associations, as well as stakeholders with often limited engagement during the permitting process such as tribal nations.

The Permitting Council will develop an outreach and engagement strategy. This strategy will define types of

stakeholders, identify tools and techniques to conduct outreach, and provide a means to manage and track implementation and effectiveness. The strategy will identify outreach goals, targeted initiatives, and key messages. The Permitting Council intends to leverage a wide array of outreach tactics to include conferences, working groups, social media, print media, and email. To effectively execute the outreach and engagement strategy, the Permitting Council will develop outreach materials tailored to the specific audience and communication channel.

