

**WESTAC Submission to Government of Canada
Consultation on Major Project Assessment and Regulatory Efficiency**

Submitted by: Western Transportation Advisory Council (WESTAC)

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About WESTAC

The Western Transportation Advisory Council (WESTAC) is a council of senior leaders from across Canada's freight transportation system. WESTAC's membership spans carriers and logistics providers, ports and terminals, shippers, labour unions, and all three levels of government. Members work together to address constraints affecting the safety, efficiency, reliability, resilience and competitiveness of Western Canada's freight transportation network.

Western Canada's ports, railways, highways, terminals, inland hubs and resource production regions are central to Canada's trade performance. As Canada seeks to diversify trade, attract investment, improve productivity and build a more connected "One Canadian Economy," the performance of western trade corridors will be crucial.

Executive Summary

WESTAC applauds the Government of Canada for undertaking this consultation and for moving expeditiously to improve the efficiency, predictability and coordination of federal project assessment, permitting and Crown consultation processes. These reforms are well aligned with priorities WESTAC members have raised for many years: reducing duplication, accelerating decision-making, improving investment certainty and strengthening Canada's competitiveness.

WESTAC also commends the Government for recognizing that major project delivery is central to Canada's economic future. Canada's trade, transportation, energy and industrial ambitions cannot be achieved unless nationally significant infrastructure can be planned, approved and built within commercially relevant timelines while maintaining strong environmental standards, meaningful Indigenous consultation and public accountability.

This submission focuses on seven areas:

1. **Competitiveness requires faster, more predictable project delivery.** Canada can deliver nationally significant infrastructure, as demonstrated by such projects as the Trans Mountain Expansion, LNG Canada and BC Hydro's Site C dam. However, these examples also show that prolonged approval timelines, legal uncertainty and rising costs can test investor confidence and slow the pace of nation-building.
2. **Federal reviews should be coordinated, disciplined and decision focused.** WESTAC supports the objective of completing federal reviews and permitting within one year, provided timelines are supported by adequate departmental capacity, clear and consistent information requirements and accountability across federal departments.

3. **Crown consultation should be coordinated and meaningful.** WESTAC supports one Crown consultation process if it reduces duplication and consultation fatigue while preserving meaningful dialogue, regional flexibility and adequate Indigenous participation capacity.
4. **One project decision can improve clarity if federal responsibilities are clearly defined.** Consolidated federal decisions should reduce duplication while preserving sector-specific expertise, transparency and clear accountability.
5. **Single project authority should rely on the most knowledgeable regulator.** WESTAC supports assigning review responsibility to regulators with appropriate technical expertise and recommends that the proposed Transportation Project Office responsibilities be clarified and held to the same timelines as the Major Projects Office.
6. **Federal Economic Zones and regional assessments should support practical corridor development.** These tools should be developed with provinces, territories and Indigenous governments and should avoid creating new layers of overlapping authority.
7. **Regulatory modernization should reduce burden while maintaining accountability.** Streamlined regulation should focus on decision-relevant information, practical conditions, clear and consistent criteria and transparent use of ministerial powers.

1. Competitiveness Requires Faster, More Predictable Project Delivery

WESTAC supports the Government of Canada's efforts to improve the efficiency, predictability and coordination of federal decision-making processes for major infrastructure and transportation projects. Canada's ability to deliver major projects is increasingly central to economic growth, energy security, trade diversification, supply chain resilience and national competitiveness.

Canadians are demanding a more reliable path to completing the infrastructure required to support economic growth and market diversification, particularly in today's uncertain geopolitical environment. Recent projects such as the Trans Mountain Expansion, LNG Canada and BC Hydro's Site C dam demonstrate that Canada can deliver nationally significant infrastructure. They also highlight the scale of the challenge. Even priority projects can face years of delay, regulatory uncertainty & complexity, legal challenges and rising costs.

These prolonged timelines test investor confidence and weaken Canada's competitiveness. Canada is competing with peer jurisdictions for capital, customers, supply chain investment and major project opportunities. When approvals are slower, less predictable or more costly than in competing jurisdictions, investors face higher risk, project costs increase and Canada becomes a less attractive place to build. Multiple levels of government, overlapping mandates, sequential review processes and unsupported project teams contribute to these delays and uncertainties.

WESTAC supports efforts to reduce duplication, improve intergovernmental coordination and establish clearer and more predictable approval pathways. However, legislative reform alone will not deliver materially faster decisions unless accompanied by stronger institutional capacity, clearer accountability, empowered project teams and improved intergovernmental coordination.

The financial cost of delay is significant. Longer and less predictable approval timelines increase project risk and investor return requirements, which can ultimately undermine project viability and Canada's competitiveness. A direct relationship exists between regulatory timelines and investor confidence: the longer it takes to approve a project, the greater the perceived risk and the more difficult it becomes to attract capital. For transportation projects, delays also mean deferred corridor capacity, higher costs for shippers, reduced reliability and lost opportunities to move Canadian goods to market. Improving project delivery is therefore not only a matter of regulatory efficiency. It is central to Canada's ability to attract investment, build major infrastructure, strengthen supply chains and compete globally.

2. Federal Review and Decision-Making Within One Year

WESTAC supports efforts to conduct federal impact assessment and permitting processes concurrently rather than sequentially. Parallel review processes have the potential to improve coordination, reduce duplication and create greater predictability for project proponents, Indigenous communities and affected stakeholders.

The proposed reforms appropriately recognize several long-standing challenges associated with federal project review processes, including overlapping federal and provincial requirements, sequential permitting, inconsistent coordination among federal departments, uncertainty for proponents regarding timelines and information requirements, and the need for stronger staffing and technical capacity within federal departments and agencies.

Improving timelines should not be interpreted as reducing the quality of assessment or weakening environmental protections. Rather, the focus should be on improving the quality, relevance and usefulness of information used to support federal decision-making. Regulatory systems should support effective decisions, not simply the accumulation of information.

WESTAC is concerned that federal review processes can sometimes become overly focused on process administration, repeated information requests and document production rather than timely and disciplined decision-making. More studies, more paper and additional information requests do not necessarily produce better decisions. In some cases, they can create duplication, delay, uncertainty and increase cost and administrative burden without materially improving project outcomes or public-interest analysis.

Project requirements and conditions should be technically feasible, economically realistic and demonstrably necessary to achieve legitimate regulatory objectives. Conditions that are impractical, duplicative, ever changing or disconnected from measurable outcomes increase costs and delay infrastructure delivery without improving environmental or public-interest performance.

To support effective implementation, WESTAC recommends:

1. Establishing clear service standards and accountability mechanisms across all participating federal departments.
2. Providing transparent guidance regarding information requirements at the outset of reviews and do not change the requirements during the review.
3. Focusing assessments on decision-relevant information.
4. Ensuring that conditions and mitigation requirements are practical, technically achievable and economically realistic.
5. Allowing risk-based and project-specific approaches where warranted.
6. Maintaining transparency regarding timeline suspensions or extensions.
7. Investing in sufficient departmental resources and technical expertise to prevent bottlenecks.

WESTAC also supports the role of a Federal Review Coordinator to improve process management, coordination and accountability across departments.

3. One Crown Consultation Process

WESTAC strongly supports efforts to improve coordination of Crown consultation processes and reduce consultation fatigue for Indigenous communities. Multiple overlapping consultation processes can create confusion, duplication and administrative burden, particularly where numerous federal departments are engaged simultaneously. Indigenous participation is central to successful project delivery. Early engagement, long-term relationship-building and meaningful economic participation are essential to durable project outcomes. Policies and financing tools should better support Indigenous equity participation, including in greenfield developments.

A centralized consultation process must not become overly proceduralized or reduce opportunities for meaningful dialogue. The objective should be better coordination, not a narrower or less flexible approach to consultation.

WESTAC recommends that the proposed Consultation Hub:

1. Ensures consultation timelines are realistic and community capacity constraints are recognized.
2. Provides clear protocols for coordination with provincial consultation processes.
3. Supports regionally tailored engagement approaches that recognize differing governance structures and rights-holders.
4. Maintains flexibility for direct department-to-community engagement where appropriate.
5. Be appropriately resourced with personnel experienced in Indigenous relations and transportation infrastructure.

WESTAC also emphasizes that early engagement prior to formal regulatory processes often produces better outcomes and should continue to be encouraged.

4. One Project Decision

WESTAC supports the objective of consolidating federal decision-making processes into a more coordinated framework. A single federal decision document could improve clarity, reduce duplication and provide proponents with greater certainty regarding regulatory outcomes.

At the same time, it is important that the *Impact Assessment Act* and associated federal review processes remain focused on matters clearly within federal jurisdiction and responsibility. Federal assessments should concentrate on impacts and regulatory considerations that fall within the federal domain, rather than expanding into areas more appropriately addressed through provincial or other regulatory processes.

Transportation projects frequently involve multiple permitting authorities with distinct statutory mandates, operational requirements and technical expertise. Consolidation should therefore preserve the independence and integrity of specialized technical reviews while improving coordination and clarity for proponents.

WESTAC recommends that:

1. Federal reviews focus on matters within clear federal jurisdiction and responsibility.
2. Decision-making processes remain transparent and clearly documented.
3. Sector-specific expertise remains central to project evaluations.
4. The relationship between the consolidated decision document and individual permitting authorities be clearly defined.

WESTAC supports the continued involvement of the Minister of Transport in final determinations related to transportation infrastructure projects.

5. Single Project Authority

WESTAC recognizes the potential efficiency benefits associated with assigning review responsibility to sector-specific regulators with established expertise. In particular, WESTAC commends the proposal to allow pipelines, transmission lines, offshore energy projects, nuclear projects and uranium projects to be reviewed and approved by the regulators with the greatest sector-specific technical knowledge and operational expertise.

The Canadian Energy Regulator and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission possess deep technical expertise, established regulatory frameworks and significant operational understanding of the sectors they oversee. Allowing these organizations to lead reviews within their respective mandates has the potential to improve clarity, reduce duplication and support more disciplined and informed decision-making.

WESTAC supports an approach where the most knowledgeable regulator is responsible for assessing and regulating projects within its jurisdiction, while maintaining strong environmental oversight, Indigenous consultation obligations and public accountability. For transportation infrastructure projects, the proposed Transportation Project Office may provide an opportunity to improve coordination for projects outside formal impact assessment processes. WESTAC encourages the Government to clarify the scope, mandate, authority and resourcing of this office, and to hold the Transportation Project Office to the same timelines as the Major Projects Office.

6. Federal Economic Zones and Regional Impact Assessments

WESTAC supports exploring regional and corridor-based planning approaches for strategic transportation and trade infrastructure. Transportation infrastructure is inherently network-based. Corridor planning approaches can improve long-term investment coordination, and infrastructure integration across jurisdictions.

Federal Economic Zones should be implemented cautiously and in close collaboration with provinces, territories and Indigenous governments. Transportation corridors, industrial development and land-use planning often fall within areas of shared or provincial responsibility. Any regional assessment or economic zone framework should therefore respect provincial jurisdiction, existing provincial regulatory systems and regional economic priorities.

WESTAC recommends that Federal Economic Zones:

1. Be developed collaboratively with provinces, territories and Indigenous governments.
2. Avoid creating new layers of overlapping federal authority where effective provincial processes already exist.
3. Support alignment and mutual recognition between federal and provincial review processes where appropriate.
4. Maintain clear accountability regarding jurisdictional responsibilities.
5. Recognize that successful corridor development depends on coordinated federal-provincial decision-making.

Regional assessment approaches should remain focused on enabling practical infrastructure development rather than creating additional planning or procedural layers. Successful regional planning will also require strong federal-provincial collaboration and alignment with municipal land-use planning and transportation strategies.

7. Streamlined Regulatory Environment

WESTAC supports targeted regulatory modernization efforts that reduce duplication and improve administrative efficiency. Improved coordination among permitting authorities and greater flexibility in permitting processes could reduce avoidable delays for transportation infrastructure projects.

Streamlining should focus on reducing unnecessary process burden while maintaining transparency, accountability, environmental protection and meaningful consultation. Regulatory modernization should also improve the quality of decisions by ensuring that requirements, conditions and information requests are tied to clear regulatory objectives.

Ministerial powers to adjust environmental conditions should include:

- Transparent and consistent criteria
- Public reporting requirements
- Clear thresholds for use
- Appropriate accountability safeguards

Across the proposed reforms, WESTAC encourages the Government of Canada to focus on outcomes: faster decisions where appropriate, better decisions in all cases and a more predictable pathway for projects that advance Canada's trade, transportation, energy and economic objectives.

Responses to Guiding Questions

A. Opportunities Emerging from These Proposals

WESTAC sees several potential opportunities arising from the proposed reforms, including:

- Improved coordination among federal departments and agencies
- Reduced duplication between assessment and permitting processes
- Greater timeline predictability for proponents and investors
- Better integration of transportation corridor planning
- Reduced consultation fatigue through coordinated engagement approaches
- More efficient infrastructure delivery supporting economic growth and trade competitiveness
- Enhanced opportunities for strategic regional planning

If effectively implemented, these reforms will assist Canada to advance nationally significant transportation infrastructure more efficiently while maintaining environmental and Indigenous consultation obligations.

B. General Impressions Regarding Regulatory Efficiency Proposals

WESTAC supports the Government's objective of improving the efficiency and predictability of major project review processes.

Canada's ability to deliver strategic transportation infrastructure in a timely manner is increasingly important for economic competitiveness, supply chain resilience, trade diversification, and national productivity.

C. Requirements to Advance Major Projects Within Shorter Timelines

To successfully advance major projects within shorter timelines, WESTAC believes businesses and Indigenous communities require:

- clear and consistent regulatory requirements
- early engagement and issue identification
- stable policy and investment frameworks
- appropriate federal staffing and technical capacity
- coordinated federal-provincial review processes
- adequate Indigenous participation funding and consultation capacity support
- transparent decision-making criteria and timelines
- efficient dispute resolution mechanisms
- continued opportunities for meaningful collaboration throughout project development and construction

Conclusion

WESTAC supports the Government of Canada's efforts to modernize federal project review and permitting systems and recognizes the importance of improving the efficiency and predictability of infrastructure development processes.

Transportation infrastructure will play a critical role in Canada's long-term economic growth, trade competitiveness and supply chain resilience. Regulatory reform can support these objectives if it improves coordination, reduces duplication, increases certainty, strengthens accountability and creates a more predictable pathway for investment.

Across the proposed reforms, WESTAC encourages the Government of Canada to focus on outcomes: faster decisions where appropriate, better decisions in all cases, and a more predictable pathway for projects that advance Canada's trade, transportation, energy, and economic objectives.

WESTAC encourages the Government to ensure that reforms are supported by sufficient operational capacity, meaningful Indigenous partnership, strong intergovernmental coordination, and continued transparency and accountability. Canada's ability to deliver major infrastructure is a competitiveness issue. WESTAC and its members are ready to work with the Government of Canada to help ensure these reforms lead to faster decisions, better decisions and practical improvements in the delivery of nationally significant transportation infrastructure.