

Testimony of Bryan Jones
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House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
“Water Resources Development Act of 2026: Stakeholder Priorities”

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Chairman Collins, Ranking Member Wilson, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning on the importance of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). We appreciate the Committee’s commitment to enact this important bill into law every two years - a vital cadence that keeps critical water infrastructure projects moving, provides certainty to local communities and ensures the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, along with state and local partners, can respond effectively to the nation’s evolving needs. This legislation advances goals we all share: making our communities safer, increasing the resilience of our infrastructure and improving our supply chain and trade routes through strategic investments in America’s ports and waterways.

My name is Bryan Jones, and I am the President of HNTB’s Mid-Atlantic Division. HNTB is a U.S. employee-owned infrastructure solutions firm that has provided planning, design and construction management for large-scale public and private projects for more than 110 years. We have extensive experience partnering with the Corps to design and deliver major civil works and military construction projects - building stronger levees, smarter drainage systems and resilient ports. The bottom line is driving outcomes: reducing flood risk to communities, keeping local economies moving after storms and strengthening America’s competitiveness. As the President of our Mid-Atlantic Division, I directly oversee our work across seven East Coast states, from Pennsylvania to South Carolina, and support our work with the Corps firmwide.

This work is personal to me. I grew up in south Louisiana. I’ve seen what a storm surge or stalled rainstorms can do when defenses fall short - specifically Katrina in 2005 and the catastrophic flooding in 2016. Those experiences shaped my understanding of water resource policy and belief that well designed water systems are foundational to resilient transportation systems and a strong American economy.

These systems are critical to our nation’s economic competitiveness, and WRDA’s dependable two-year authorization cycle provides for the necessary long-term planning and investment that sustain them. The work of this subcommittee in reliably enacting WRDA allows private-sector partners such as HNTB to support communities, local leaders and the Corps in advancing projects that drive economic growth and strengthen supply chains.

Members of this subcommittee know all too well that this work is never finished and there’s no such thing as “fast enough” when it comes to infrastructure improvements. We continue to see greater demand for investments in infrastructure to meet needs we have now, as well as the needs of future generations. Proactively addressing these needs at the Federal level helps maximize local investments as well and reduces the likelihood of having to rebuild following disaster

events, increasing the stability of local communities; this is critical in an environment where every dollar counts.

As agencies such as the Corps are challenged to move quickly and stretch limited resources, expanding private-sector partnerships and innovative financing and delivery tools are critical to meeting the nation's growing water resource challenges. Firms such as HNTB are essential to providing necessary experience and capacity both to the Corps and its non-Federal sponsors. We have a deep bench of talent nationwide, and are efficient and nimble, with the ability to respond and adapt to evolving market conditions.

Legislation that supports tools such as non-traditional funding and innovative project implementation approaches within the Civil Works program can accelerate project delivery, reduce risk and improve overall outcomes without diminishing accountability. The Fargo-Moorhead Flood Diversion Project provides an example of how public-private partnerships can leverage non-Federal capital and expertise to advance a complex, nationally significant project, while preserving the Corps' central role in safety, engineering oversight, environmental compliance and protection of the Federal interest. Similarly, authorities enacted by Congress, including section 1043(b) of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014, allow non-Federal entities to carry out water resources projects consistent with Corps standards when Federal appropriations, alone, are insufficient to meet pressing infrastructure needs.

Stakeholders also strongly support the Corps' expanded use of innovative contracting and funding mechanisms that reflect the scale and complexity of the Civil Works portfolio. Integrated Design and Construction contracts offer important advantages on technically challenging projects by improving coordination between the design and construction phases, accelerating timelines and reducing schedule risk while promoting cost discipline. In addition, incremental funding approaches - such as those currently being demonstrated on the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir - provide a practical means of sustaining progress on large, multi-year projects in the context of annual appropriations. The use of P3 structures and other collaborative contracting methods, when applied thoughtfully, can enable delivery of more work, faster, and with more sophisticated risk transfer.

From the standpoint of project sponsors and external partners, broader and more consistent use of these tools represents a prudent evolution of the Civil Works program, enabling the timely delivery of public benefits, reducing long-term cost escalation and maximizing the return on both Federal and non-Federal investments.

Delivering on time and on budget is important to HNTB because we know that communities can't afford delays. With tremendous thanks to this committee and Chairman Sam Graves for their work in authorizing the project, HNTB was able to build on our decades of working with the Kansas City District Corps of Engineers to design levee, floodwall and railroad closures. This project made huge strides in reducing flood risk to the community and in protecting more than \$10B in infrastructure. Our team partnered closely with the exceptionally capable Corps team, combining our collective deep expertise with our innovative approaches to deliver resilient, risk-informed solutions for the community.

Another key project to highlight is our work in New Orleans, which is a vital gateway for U.S. commerce, requiring flood risk reduction systems and navigation projects to support one of the world's busiest ports. HNTB planned and designed projects such as the West Closure Complex Pump Station, Seabrook Gate Complex and Morganza to the Gulf floodwalls, which strengthen storm surge defenses while safeguarding shipping routes. The upcoming IHNC Lock Replacement - long overdue after being authorized in 1956 - will modernize failing infrastructure, remove persistent navigation bottlenecks and protect the reliability of cargo movement vital to the Mississippi River system and the national economy.

While outside the purview of WRDA, HNTB is also proud to support the expansion of Arlington National Cemetery, preserving its sacred legacy. In partnership with the Corps, we honor the military community while leveraging private-sector innovation to deliver timeless solutions that accelerate progress for our nation's military families.

As we look ahead to WRDA 2026, we ask this subcommittee...

- To support clear and streamlined permitting reforms to enable the Corps to deliver its regulatory mission efficiently, promoting economic development with the appropriate protection for the aquatic environment;
- To recognize that design maturity funded adequately during the feasibility phase enables a more robust, timely and technically accurate outcome and to seek ways to reform the feasibility study paradigm allowing sufficient authorization to complete large-scale, technically complex engineering analyses in support of national needs;
- To continue enabling the Corps to focus on delivery of complex, large-scale water resources infrastructure solutions, including by expanding authorities enabling concurrent reviews, greater use of programmatic approaches and pilot innovations; and
- To support allocation of resources for initiatives and tools that facilitate use of innovative funding and financing methods (including public-private partnerships) to optimize project delivery.

Thank you for your time, consideration and work in shaping the future of our nation's water resources infrastructure. It has been an honor to speak with you today about WRDA's role in shaping our communities and supporting economic growth. I welcome any questions that you may have.