



Urban & Regional Information Systems Association

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To Members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

Local, state, and federal agencies increasingly rely on spatial data for a number of mission-critical operations, such as emergency response, taxation, and facility management. Yet, the process of compiling the data on which these operations rely is, at best, a hodgepodge of disconnected activities across all levels of government without any coordinating capabilities. As a result, data are often unavailable at the most critical times, such as in response to a natural or manmade disaster. A voluntary system of spatial data, called the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI), was proposed in the 1990s as a data sharing mechanism. The problem with such a voluntary approach is that no one has the job of providing the data everyone wants to use.

The proposal for Building a National GIS establishes the required balance of authority and responsibility. The Board of Directors of URISA - The Association for GIS Professionals welcomes the opportunity to endorse the National GIS as a rational approach to populating the NSDI. Rather than pursuing piecemeal projects that address the needs of only one user group, we believe that a comprehensive solution is required. The National GIS proposal sets up a mechanism to create and maintain critical spatial datasets, such as property records, aerial imagery, and topography. It is very likely that the savings from operational efficiencies will substantially finance the project.

The National GIS is an idea that is rational in its approach, reasonable in its reach, and vital in its deliverables. We urge the Congress to take up legislation that will start the country on the road to spatial data sufficiency. We also urge the Congress to specify that any related procurement be accomplished through a method that includes consideration of the vendor's technical capabilities along with price. Only a national effort will allow us to develop and maintain a complete set of data as we chart a new path into the future. And only a competitive procurement process can ensure that we get the right data at the best possible price.

URISA and its 2,500 members stand ready to provide whatever planning and operational support we can provide.

On behalf of the URISA Board of Directors and Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wendy Nelson
Executive Director

cc: Coalition of Geospatial Organizations