

News

Eric Mears appointed to federal commission that will guide policy on essential construction materials

Burlington, Mass., Jan. 16, 2025 — Haley & Aldrich principal consultant and mining industry expert Eric Mears has received an appointment to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Working Group on Covered Resources. This group will study how access to sand, stone, and gravel — otherwise known as construction aggregates — impacts federal transportation and infrastructure construction projects. Ultimately, their work will shape federal policy governing the use and protection of these resources.

Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg appointed Eric to a two-year term, which began in December 2024. Eric brings more than three decades of experience providing environmental guidance to mining companies and managing complex mining permitting and entitlement projects across North America. Eric also contributed to Arizona's Aggregate Protection Act (SB 1598) and other seminal policy and legislative efforts, which made the state one of the first to preserve the use and availability of these materials.

"Aggregates are a fundamental building block of construction, and their availability is a critical factor in the sustainability and cost of development," said Eric. "I'm grateful to accept this nomination so that I can help inform federal policy for the benefit of the taxpayers who fund and depend on cost-effective government infrastructure projects."

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Eric will continue his consulting work at Haley & Aldrich during his term. He also remains active in Arizona's professional mining community, including as a board member for the Arizona Rock Products Association (ARPA) and the Arizona Mining Association.

"Eric has deep expertise in aggregates, both with the planning decisions that impact their availability and with their real-world applications," said ARPA Executive Director Steve Trussell. "Thanks to Eric's leadership, Arizona has led the vanguard of responsible aggregate use. Eric will bring the same leadership and passion to finding the best ways for the federal government to protect aggregate resources."

The federal government currently has no policy governing aggregates, which are typically incorporated in the concrete and asphalt used to build roads, bridges, highways, ports, and other critical infrastructure projects. A highway, for example, requires about 38,000 tons of aggregates per lane mile.

Zoning, planning, and permitting decisions impact the availability of aggregates. The proximity of an aggregate source to a construction site can dramatically impact cost and sustainability metrics: Eric reported in 2022's Aggregate Protection Guidance that, for every 20 miles aggregates are transported, their cost essentially doubles, and the cost of a single mile of freeway can increase by more than $340,000. He also reported that locally produced aggregates require less fuel for transport and cut down on air pollution from transport, traffic congestion, and road wear.

"I've seen planning decisions lead to the loss of aggregate reserves — which means local material shortages and substantial increases in project costs," said Eric. "This issue affects all of us. And as someone who has studied aggregate protection practices for more than 20 years, I look forward to collaborating with colleagues from around the country on developing a sensible approach to protecting these resources that can benefit both our national and local transportation and infrastructure projects."

For more information:
Contact our Media team.