



Fostering Excellence in GIS

[www.URISA.org](http://www.URISA.org)

July 7, 2015

Dear Senator Hatch, Senator Warner, and Members of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA) to voice our support for the Geospatial Data Act of 2015 (S.740).

URISA's members are geospatial professionals predominately working for cities, counties and state governments, as well as the Federal government, utilities, private companies, and non-profit service organizations. We see first-hand the value of federal data when access and compatibility are working well, and problems when they are not. We understand the costs of redundant data and the problems created when trying to mesh data from different sources. For example, street centerlines on a national highway going through a city should have the same coordinates whether that data comes from a federal agency, state agency, county or city. But that is rarely the case because the requirements for accuracy and the sources of information vary with different agencies' needs, data sources, schedules and available budgets. Nevertheless, when every agency maintains its own version of centerline data individually, the costs expended, as well as the additional effort for keeping it compatible with other agencies, burdens all of us needlessly.

In its current form, S.740 offers a vital step to fix the federal data problems by making our government agencies collect and use geographic data more efficiently. S.740 will reduce data duplication, save taxpayer money, and enable greater consistency of policy and actions among government agencies.

Federal efforts regarding geospatial technologies have been guided over the past twenty-one years by **E.O. 12906** which was first issued in 1994 to **direct the development of a National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI)**. It called for a national geospatial data clearinghouse and partnerships for data acquisition among federal agencies. When fully implemented, the NSDI would assure that spatial data from multiple sources (federal, state, local, tribal governments, academia and the private sector) are **readily available** and **easily integrated** through shared data themes, metadata documentation and shared standards. Additionally, **OMB Circular A-16** (last revised in 2002) **established the Federal Geographic Data Committee** to outline requirements and implement building the NSDI.

Geospatial data includes aerial photography, road centerlines, elevation, streams and water bodies, government boundaries, land ownership and geodetic control. URISA members rely on these kinds of data to do their work. Geospatial data are critical to maintaining our national infrastructure and our economy.

Unfortunately, multiple versions of these data are routinely acquired, at duplicative cost, by various levels of government to meet specific agency missions. It is feasible to build multi-purpose national data layers that meet the requirements of most stakeholders, but more oversight and accountability are needed to coordinate these efforts.

The Federal Geographic Data Committee has worked since the 1990s to coordinate the development of the NSDI, but has never had a mandate to hold agencies accountable for collaborating with other agencies before acquiring new data, nor for conforming to shared data standards that would enable the data to be used by multiple government agencies. In its current form, S.740 looks to be a bi-partisan, positive response to the recent GAO report that documents this weaknesses in our national geospatial information system, "Geospatial

Data - Progress Needed on Identifying Expenditures, Building and Utilizing a Data Infrastructure, and Reducing Duplicative Efforts" (<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-193>). The geospatial data insufficiencies which weaken our entire nation are also documented by the Coalition of Geospatial Organizations' "Report Card on the U.S. National Spatial Data Infrastructure" ([http://www.cogo.pro/uploads/COGO-Report\\_Card\\_on\\_NSDI.pdf](http://www.cogo.pro/uploads/COGO-Report_Card_on_NSDI.pdf))

S.740 will help to resolve these issues by making federal agencies specifically accountable for coordinating their geospatial data acquisition as part of the budget approval process. The Bill codifies various executive orders that have been the basis for acquiring data, and directs the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and the Secretary of the Interior to oversee a coordinated implementation of the NSDI, including populating each of its National Geospatial Data Asset themes (formerly known as "Framework" themes). In addition, the National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) has a designated advisory role, to assure that the concerns and interests of non-Federal geospatial data stakeholders are considered as well. This bill seeks to assure:

- (A) the privacy and security of the personal data of individuals
- (B) free access for the public to geospatial data
- (C) the protection of proprietary interests related to licensed information and data
- (D) the interoperability of Federal information systems

To reduce duplication of federal funds, the OMB will require federal agencies to "search all sources, to determine if existing federal, state, local, or private geospatial data meets the needs of the covered agency before expending funds for geospatial data collection."

With better implementation of the NSDI, cities, counties and regional councils could use publicly available geospatial information, collected and published by federal agencies, in their work at the local level. Government agencies at every level could share costs better, saving taxpayer money. We need strong national leadership in the development of the NSDI to reduce waste and duplication of effort. It will come from passage of S.740. I encourage your support of that legislation.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. I may be reached by e-mail at [carldvg@gmail.com](mailto:carldvg@gmail.com), or by phone at (404) 906-3470.

Sincerely,



Carl Anderson, URISA President

*The Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA) is a nonprofit 501(c)3 association of professionals using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other information technologies to solve challenges in state/provincial, regional and local government agencies and departments. URISA is over 50 years old and is considered to be the premier organization for the use and integration of spatial information technology to improve the quality of life in urban and regional environments.*

*URISA promotes the effective and ethical use of spatial information and information technologies for the understanding and management of urban and regional systems.*

SPONSORS:

[Sen. Hatch, Orrin G. \[R-UT\]](#) (Introduced 03/16/2015)  
[Sen. Warner, Mark R. \[D-VA\]\\*](#) 03/16/2015 (original co-sponsor)  
[Sen. Merkley, Jeff \[D-OR\]](#) 06/16/2015  
[Sen. Boozman, John \[R-AR\]](#) 06/01/2015  
[Sen. Wyden, Ron \[D-OR\]](#) 05/11/2015  
[Sen. Heller, Dean \[R-NV\]](#) 05/11/2015

Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee:

**Majority Members**

[Chairman John Thune](#) South Dakota  
[Senator Dan Sullivan](#) Alaska  
[Senator Cory Gardner](#) Colorado  
[Senator Marco Rubio](#) Florida  
[Senator Jerry Moran](#) Kansas  
[Senator Roger Wicker](#) Mississippi  
[Senator Roy Blunt](#) Missouri  
[Senator Steve Daines](#) Montana  
[Senator Deb Fischer](#) Nebraska  
[Senator Dean Heller](#) Nevada  
[Senator Kelly Ayotte](#) New Hampshire  
[Senator Ted Cruz](#) Texas  
[Senator Ron Johnson](#) Wisconsin

**Minority Members**

[Ranking Member Bill Nelson](#) Florida  
[Senator Richard Blumenthal](#) Connecticut  
[Senator Brian Schatz](#) Hawaii  
[Senator Ed Markey](#) Massachusetts  
[Senator Gary Peters](#) Michigan  
[Senator Amy Klobuchar](#) Minnesota  
[Senator Claire McCaskill](#) Missouri  
[Senator Cory Booker](#) New Jersey  
[Senator Tom Udall](#) New Mexico  
[Senator Maria Cantwell](#) Washington  
[Senator Joe Manchin](#) West Virginia