Statement for the
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine
Infrastructure, Safety, and Security
U.S. Senate
September 18, 2015
Pipeline Safety: State and Local Perspectives
The National Society of Professional Surveyors (NSPS) is the national voice of land surveying professionals throughout the United States.

As Congress acts to reauthorize the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) as well as activities and programs related to pipeline safety and operation, NSPS is deeply concerned about the lack of location data on pipelines, as well as other underground infrastructure and utilities.

We bring to the attention of the Committee the challenges in accounting for and coordinating location data for all such pipelines as aggregated by Federal agencies as such data is gathered from state and local government entities, or other non-Federal sources.

In April 2015, the Obama Administration cited “approximately 2.6 million miles of pipeline” given that there is not a comprehensive inventory or database for all such pipelines and related surveying and mapping data. Citing past disasters caused by factors such as extraordinary natural events, and ever-aging infrastructure, the White House urged in the Quadrennial Energy Report (QER) a $2.5 to $3.5 billion investment to replace the most at-risk natural gas pipelines — a number that is only a fraction of the $270 billion the report says is needed to address leak-prone distribution mains across the country. The report painted a stark picture of the state of that infrastructure, citing aging and increasingly unreliable steel and cast-iron pipelines particularly prone to rupture, often with devastating consequences. In a tragic example, a 30-inch underground natural gas pipeline exploded in September 2010 in San Bruno, California, causing a fire that killed eight people, injured 58 and destroyed 38 homes.

Discrepancies exist with regard to mileage and classification data, related to location data, as compiled in two governmental reports in 2013. The Congressionally authorized National Academies of Science (NAS) report found that:

“Most of the estimated 55,000 miles of crude oil transmission pipeline in the United States are interconnected to form a national network that links oil production regions, storage hubs, and refineries. This extensive network accounts for more than 90 percent of the ton-mileage of crude oil transported within the United States.”

Additionally, the report stated:

“Pipeline systems traverse different terrains and can vary in specific design features, components, and configurations.”

A January 2013 Congressional Research Service (CRS) report said that:

“Nearly half a million miles of pipeline transporting natural gas, oil, and other hazardous liquids crisscross the United States...Recent pipeline accidents in Marshall, MI, San Bruno, CA, Allentown, PA, and Laurel, MT, have heightened..."
congressional concern about pipeline risks and drawn criticism from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).”

The CRS report went on to articulate the role of geospatial data in recent law:

“In 2006, questions were raised about the accuracy of pipeline location data provided by operators and maintained by PHMSA in the National Pipeline Mapping System (NPMS). At the time, agency officials reportedly acknowledged limitations in NPMS accuracy, but did not publicly discuss plans to address them. P.L. 112-90 authorizes PHMSA to collect additional geospatial and technical data from pipeline operators to achieve the purposes of the NPMS. Congress may review whether these or other statutory measures are sufficient to verify that pipeline operator information is complete and correct, particularly for older parts of the pipeline network.”

NSPS urges Congress to enact safe corridor utility distribution legislation whereby the expertise found in the professional surveying and mapping community is robustly engaged to enhance pipeline and underground utility safety.

Once again, thank you for your leadership and NSPS stands ready to work with the Senate and the committee to enact legislation allowing for safer operation of pipelines.

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