According to respondents from 33 organizations, 13 approaches are most promising for reducing the time it takes to plan, design, gain approval for, and build federal highway projects. These approaches fall into three areas:

1. **Improving project management.** Most approaches (8 of 13) focused on state-level activities that could be conducted earlier than customary, with 90 percent of respondents indicating that establishing early partnerships and coordination among project stakeholders is highly important to reducing project completion time. Other approaches included added flexibility for states in determining impacts on historic properties and imposing time limits on environmental reviews.

2. **Delegating environmental review and permitting authority.** Between half and two-thirds of respondents indicated that utilizing programmatic agreements between transportation and resource agencies to address commonly occurring issues, unifying overall environmental assessments with reviews of project impacts on wetlands, and creating large banks of wetlands to replace those lost at highway project sites offered significant promise for reducing project completion time.

3. **Improving agency staffing and skills.** Nearly 60 percent of respondents indicated that using interagency funding agreements in which state departments of transportation can ensure timely attention to environmental reviews of their projects by funding staff at federal or state resource agencies offered significant promise to reduce project completion time. About half of the respondents told us that adequate training of transportation staff on the requirements of all steps in completing a highway project was also a promising approach.

For the most part, respondents were not able to estimate how much time adopting one or more of these approaches might save. Respondents’ views varied both within similar types of organizations (such as state departments of transportation) and across lines of responsibility or interest. Generally, agencies and other organizations with primary responsibilities for or interests in building and funding highways ranked certain approaches higher than did agencies and associations with a primary focus on resource issues, and vice versa. Nonetheless, most of the 13 most promising approaches had widespread support across organizations.

Although some of these approaches are in use across the country, respondents acknowledged that the usefulness of these approaches could vary by the type of project or community values. For example, projects that are not complex or contentious would not necessarily achieve the time savings that these approaches afford for projects with complex characteristics or disagreement among stakeholders.