



May 24, 2022

Stoyan Bumbalov, Managing Director
Washington State Building Code Council
1500 Jefferson St. SE
P.O. Box 41449
Olympia, WA 98504

Re: Embodied carbon for steel and concrete

Dear Director Bumbalov and members of the Building Code Council Technical Advisory Group,

The Washington State Building and Construction Trades Council (WSBCTC), AFL-CIO, is comprised of 47 affiliated unions representing over 80,000 union members and their families in nearly every construction industry and every community in Washington State. We are writing you today to express our concerns about two petitions submitted to the Building Code Council regarding the embodied carbon content of steel and concrete, and whether the Council should adopt rules preferencing materials based on that content. While the Washington State Labor Council and many of its affiliates have supported *legislative action* to this end, we at the WSBCTC, do not believe it is wise for the Building Code Council to do so, and would ask that you reject the notion of unilateral Council action.

The WSBCTC has continued to participate in well-stakeholdered, nuanced, and thoughtful conversations about the implementation of carbon content standards for certain building materials through legislation – most recently HB 1103 (Duerr) – which included input from industry, environmental protection organizations, and the workers who use these materials to build our cities, transportation networks, and carbon free energy facilities. Conversations around this bill, which did not pass, informed budget provisos providing platforms to gather more information to assess the impact of such policies. Those actions were taken by the Legislature with a good-faith understanding of the long-term plan by engaged stakeholders. An understanding that includes the notion that future action would be predicated upon an intentional, informed, and well understood analysis of the impacts of this policy.

Our interest in the development of building materials carbon content standards is multifaceted. It certainly includes the importance of reducing the carbon impact of construction, but it is also about promoting standards for the workers who manufacture those materials, the quality of those materials, and the reliability of material supply chains. Policies that promote the use of low-carbon building materials can help build a clean and robust manufacturing sector; they create markets for manufacturers that invest in reducing carbon pollution and promote fair competition by holding all products to the same standard, regardless of where they're made.

However, details matter; it is important that we get these policies right. For example, the New Building Institute's proposals single out concrete and steel and exclude wood products (three major structural materials and direct competitors), which undermines the goal of promoting fair competition. Any policy should address all structural materials simultaneously based on the reality of their carbon content, and their importance to building out the infrastructure we need to transition our economy – including denser cities, more rail options for transportation, low-and-no carbon energy sources, and alternative fuel facilities.

We are also concerned about the State Building Code Council as an effective platform for stakeholder engagement. Washington is home to many leading experts in embodied carbon and several world class material manufacturers. They and other stakeholders should play an active role in shaping any policy, as well as other key impacted groups (labor, environmental groups, members of design and building community). This engagement has begun as a function of Legislative action. We believe it is unwise to attempt to shift that work toward the Council at this time.

We appreciate the important mission of the Building Code Council, and the role it plays in ensuring safe, reliable, and long-lived buildings in our communities. We ask that the Council not take up this proposal, and allow other deliberative processes to explore the wisest course of action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. L. Riker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark L. Riker, Executive Secretary
Washington State Building & Construction Trades Council

opeiu8/afl-cio