

## **We Must Invest in America's Infrastructure**

Political gridlock has turned the United States from the nation that led every major advance in public economic development –rail and transit, roads, sewers, utilities, aviation, shipping and so much more – into a nation that can't find the will to lead in the 21st century.

The American people want and deserve leadership that will take the steps necessary to keep our nation strong and to ensure the foundation for our economy is sound. Our leadership must begin by rebuilding the infrastructure that thrust the United States into the modern era but now is out of date and falling apart.

The 2013 “report card” of the American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that \$200 billion in additional spending is needed annually through 2020 to raise the overall grade of the nation's infrastructure system from a D+ to a B. Overall, the report estimates the United States must spend \$3.6 trillion on infrastructure by 2020 to bring our infrastructure into good condition.

The nation's roads and bridges are dangerous, economically wasteful and inadequate. Poor road conditions are a factor in nearly one-third of all traffic fatalities and cost Americans \$67 billion in vehicle repairs. Today, 42% of our urban highways are congested, costing more than \$100 billion per year, and the nation's freight efficiency continues to decline. Similarly, at a time of rising demand for their services, too many public transit systems are slashing service and jobs, and raising fares on working people.

This state of affairs cannot stand. Congress must pass a long-term surface transportation bill, backed by dedicated funding that is adequate to get the job done.

The natural gas boom brings the promise of affordable and cleaner energy for electricity generation, for manufacturing and with great potential for use in transportation. Yet our natural gas infrastructure is decrepit and wasteful, and in many cases it has become not only dangerous, but deadly. A commitment to bring our century-old system into alignment with this 21st century energy source is an essential element of a renewed infrastructure.

Likewise, the nation's electrical grid is in need of a serious upgrade. With all the advances in the use and generation of electricity, we are stuck with the grid system that Thomas Edison designed more than 100 years ago. The world is creating newer and cleaner energy sources, including renewable electricity, carbon capture and storage for fossil fuels and promising new forms of nuclear generation.

The missing link to harnessing this energy is our nation's substandard electric transmission and distribution system. We can and must find the right economic incentives to make these investments attractive to what is largely a privately owned system.

Fixing our infrastructure will not be cheap, but the cost of inaction is higher. Creative ideas like direct user fees and infrastructure banks can help, but cannot solve the fundamental funding shortfall. The nation must find the political will to directly fund our investment needs through sources that are both equitable and sufficient.

The economic promise of this public investment is undeniable. It would create millions of well-paying jobs and boost our economy now and in the future. We can and must ensure that workers on these projects earn wages and benefits with which they can support their families.

Our infrastructure is and historically has been the linchpin of American economic success. It is a purely public good that benefits everyone. The broad and deep public support for investing in infrastructure must be recognized and acted on by the federal government. Our national competitiveness and our economic future must not be held hostage by a cultish devotion to a deficit mania that benefits only a few and only the well off.

There has never been a better time to improve our infrastructure. The need is great, borrowing costs are low and there is a deep bench of talented workers ready to rebuild and supply our nation's needs. America again must become the nation that can and will invest in itself, and we must continue to fight until that promise is realized.