

## **Hesitation and Deterioration: America's Aging Infrastructure**

The importance of a healthy infrastructure throughout the United States cannot be understated. Without a functioning system of roads, electricity grids, water plants, airports, and other essential components of infrastructure, modern society crumbles to pieces. An old and tired infrastructure also costs the United States trillions of dollars of lost GDP (ASCE). This realization spurred a bipartisan movement to improve the nation's infrastructure, and while the United States enjoyed a slight improvement in infrastructure quality over the last decade, the national infrastructure remains in desperate need of improvement. To ensure the Department of Transportation's \$70 billion budget is distributed fairly and efficiently among the states, I propose a program that matches state funding for local infrastructure projects with federal dollars.

One of the biggest issues facing the movement to improve American infrastructure is funding. The gap between allocated funding and the funding necessary to ensure all Americans have a safe and functional local infrastructure is staggering. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), the gap has swelled to more than 2 trillion dollars. This funding gap cannot be overcome by the federal government alone. States must dedicate a growing portion of their annual budget towards rebuilding their roads, bridges, electricity grids, etc. It is worth noting that state and local governments already account for more than 75% of total infrastructure spending according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). However, many state and local leaders also postpone infrastructure projects in hopes of someday receiving federal funds. Politicians hesitate to spend state tax dollars on infrastructure because they risk criticism for not lobbying harder for federal funding (Gribbens). As local infrastructure crumbles throughout the United States, this delay is dangerous. Roads, bridges, and electrical systems will not halt their rapid deterioration until lawmakers decide to take action.

A program that matches state funding for state infrastructure projects with federal dollars incentivizes lawmakers to make infrastructure a priority. This program would include an application process for state and local lawmakers. Infrastructure projects will qualify for funding if state and local lawmakers agree to certain criteria. For example, lawmakers must account for each dollar spent and provide an estimated budget for the project. The federal government will match this estimated budget. State and local governments are free to pursue any infrastructure related project they deem the most urgent or impactful, but they must provide a justification for why a particular project was chosen. Staff in the Department of Transportation will review the estimated budgets and justifications to ensure the money is going towards legitimate projects.

This program gives states a lot of freedom to choose which projects to pursue. This was done by design. Local government leaders are intimately familiar with the needs of their community. They have a personal understanding of the local infrastructure and are more likely to invest in projects that will impact the greatest number of constituents within their jurisdiction.

With the combination of federal funding and state direction, Americans can have access to safe roads, bridges, electricity grids, water plants, airports, and other essential infrastructure facilities. Federal investment in infrastructure through an incentivized program encourages local lawmakers to take advantage of federal funding to pursue infrastructure projects sooner rather than later before funds dissipate. The opportunity for state and local leaders to determine which infrastructure projects are chosen increases government accountability and the likelihood that funds go towards the most urgent projects.

### **Sources Cited**

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