

Reclaiming the Proud American Tradition of Thinking Big

BY FORMER GOV. EDWARD G. RENDELL



hen I was 8 years old, my father, despite never being involved in politics, deeply believed in the Democratic Party, and he imbued me with that same belief. But

things were different in 1952 when we went out and handed out campaign fliers for Adlai Stevens. On election night, we didn't have a television and there were no exit polls, so my dad and I went to the neighborhood grocery store to hear the election returns. At the store, the radio blared that Gen. Dwight Eisenhower had just captured enough states to win the presidency.

On the way home I saw tears flowing from my father's eyes. That's the only time I saw that in our life together. The memory of his tears still make me yearn for the days when the Democratic Party

thought big and was much less shy about demanding that government do what is necessary to grow the economy and produce enough decent jobs so that every able-bodied American can find work.

As bad as that election loss was, President Eisenhower turned out to understand that in order for America to prosper, he needed to take bold action. His experience leading the troops in Europe during World War II made it clear to him that world-class infrastructure was essential to strong economic growth. Fortunately, in those days, being a Republican didn't mean being antigovernment. Today, Ike shares the prize with Abe Lincoln for taking the lead in paving the way for this nation to have the largest economy in the world—Lincoln by successfully campaigning for federal funds to construct the transcontinental railroad linking the nation's booming East

with its expanding West, and Eisenhower by building the national highway system.

It wasn't easy for President Eisenhower to persuade Congress to pass the Federal Highway Act in 1956. It was a slog, where the needs of the nation were subject to the needs of politics. But he was dogged and found a way to build a consensus to get something big done, something that would secure a brighter future for generations to come.

I was only 12 years old at the time that the Act passed. I was too young to really grasp what building a national highway system really meant, but not too young to be impressed with the general's grand vision, moxie, and persistence. Even in my solidly Democratic household, the National Highway Act was hailed.

For the next 35 years, the federal government led the charge to physically connect America's cities and towns with more than 47,000 miles of interstate highways and local roads—a stunning achievement envied around the world. The highway system built the modern economy by opening up new markets for entrepreneurs, facilitating interstate commerce, and creating pathways for millions of people, including the thousands of workers who built our national road system, into the middle class.

Much of the impact of this great national building campaign wasn't so obvious to me growing up in Manhattan. I took for granted the 660 miles of subway tracks that made it possible for me and my fellow New Yorkers of every class and race to travel the

boroughs of the Big Apple with ease. Later in life, after serving as Philadelphia's mayor and then as governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, my appreciation of President Eisenhower grew, and his powerful vision and political skills really hit home.

When I became mayor, Philadelphia's transit system was subpar and we lacked the funds to make it great. Despite my best efforts, with only 2 of 15 seats on the regional transit system board, Philadelphia's transit needs played second fiddle to the suburban demands for increased services. Our city roads, potholed and puckered, needed upgrading as well, but here again Philadelphia was outnumbered on the



Regional Planning Organization's board responsible for allocating federal highway system dollars across seven counties. This is not a blame game, but the cards are stacked against cities when it comes to tapping federal funds for the essential transportation improvements needed by cities—where most of the residents are people of color and families who are increasingly poor or struggling.

Finally, I became governor and I thought I could really level the playing field for cities and poor rural communities. For these communities I wanted to improve public education and rebuild their infrastructure. While I can proudly say that I accomplished much of what I set out to do, when it comes to infrastructure, many of our best proposals were left on the cutting-room floor. Not because the ideas weren't sound or too expensive. They were not adopted because too many elected officials were afraid to think big. And worse yet, I faced a growing cabal of elected leaders dead set against the government serving as a partner with the private sector to build the infrastructure necessary to grow the economy.

That's some bad Kool-Aid! It's especially bad for those seeking to expand economic opportunity for all.

In 1952 when President Eisenhower was elected, the Hearst Newspapers wrote:

The obsolescence of the nation's highways presents an appalling problem of waste, danger and

death. Next to the manufacture of the most modern implements of war as a guarantee of peace through strength, a network of modern roads is as necessary to defense as it is to our national economy and personal safety.

We have fallen far behind in this task—until today there is hardly a city of any size without almost hopeless congestion within its boundaries and stalled traffic blocking roads leading beyond these boundaries. A solution can and will be found through the joint planning of the Federal, state and local governments.

Much worse could be said about much of our infrastructure today. Without real leadership, by 2050, when our population will be nearly 100 million people larger, more urbanized, and majority people of color, our infrastructure will be completely obsolete and overburdened.

It's time to reclaim America's proud bipartisan tradition of thinking big. It's time to reaffirm that government is a useful lever for growth so all Americans can share the great promise of opportunity. It's time for our elected leaders on both sides of the aisle to lead in the tradition of President Eisenhower and put the interests of this great nation first above all and any other parochial interest. It's time to rebuild America. ■

CHAPTER FOUR

**Infrastructure:
Supporting
Communities So
All Can Thrive**

BY SARAH TREUHAF



Infrastructure only makes headlines in the wake of disaster. The levees and floodwalls breached by hurricanes Katrina and Sandy. The collapse of the I-35 bridge over the Mississippi River in Minneapolis. These events, which are becoming more and more frequent, expose the poor and uneven quality of so much of our infrastructure and spark urgent calls to address the situation. But when infrastructure works well, no one thinks much about it.

Take a moment and reflect on your morning routine—your trek from bed to work, school, or errands around town. It's probably safe to assume that infrastructure is not the first thing that comes to mind.

But go a little deeper. Before you even made it to the shower, you probably checked your email messages, caught a snippet of the morning news on TV, or listened to a radio traffic report. Maybe you walked your dog in your neighborhood park, or took a quick jog around the nearby school track. Next you bathed, brushed your teeth, washed dishes, and perhaps did a load of laundry. Then you most likely ate something—your bowl of cereal, some fresh fruit—that was trucked in from another part of the country. Finally, you scooped up your keys, got in your car, and either drove to work, dropped the kids off at school, headed to a doctor's appointment, or went to visit friends and family. Or maybe you left the car in the garage and walked or biked to the transit stop to catch the bus, light rail, or subway.

Economic benefits of investing in infrastructure

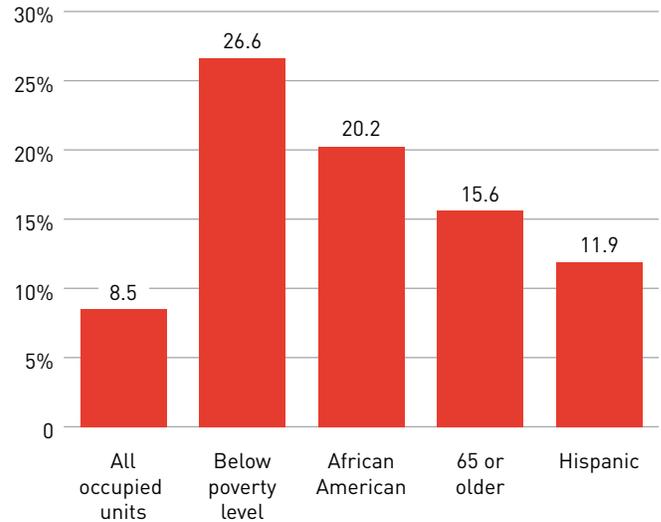
- A \$1 billion investment in infrastructure creates about 18,000 jobs, while the same size tax cut would generate 14,000 jobs and no new public assets.¹
- Every \$1 invested in public transit brings nearly \$4 back to a community's economy in business activity and tax revenues.²
- Making the investments needed to renew the nation's infrastructure would create an additional 2.4 million jobs per year.³ Most of these jobs would pay good wages and provide a path to the middle class, particularly for families of color.

None of these routine activities would have been possible without the cable, broadband, telecommunications network, parks, sidewalks, water and sewer lines, schools, roads, bridges, and transit systems that make up our national public infrastructure. Infrastructure is the invisible support that helps you to show up ready and able to work, learn, and interact with your family and participate in the life of your community. And it is the same for millions of others every single day.

Added all up, infrastructure is the foundation of so much of what defines us as Americans, including our economy. Our public infrastructure is the skeletal support that makes movement, interaction, and innovation possible—connecting individuals to each other, to economic opportunities, and to regional resources. It underlies the health, vitality, and productivity of the people, communities, and businesses that make up our national economy.

But for the increasingly diverse communities that are quickly becoming the majority in America—communities that are also disproportionately low income—this foundation is often shaky. Streets are pitted with potholes, sidewalks are cracked and uneven, water mains are rusting, and park structures are dilapidated. We know, for example, that people of color own fewer cars than whites and are more likely to rely on buses and rail lines, yet a spotty public transit system leaves many people stranded.⁴ Bus routes, if they exist, provide infrequent service and constantly face budget cuts. Rail stops are few and far between or missing altogether.

FIGURE 1
Percent of households without a vehicle, 2005



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, American Housing Survey for the United States, H150 (via U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Transportation Statistics Annual Report, 2006).

Aging water systems often fail to deliver clean water to neighborhood homes and schools. Under these conditions, the regular routine you likely carried out this morning becomes impossible.

Take Juventino Gonzalez's situation in Lanare, a rural, low-income, unincorporated community in California's Central Valley. Juventino moved to Lanare more than 40 years ago to get a job as a farmworker, and as a retiree has been leading community efforts to improve the town's water, sewer, and road infrastructure.

Lanare lacks the basic necessities that most of us take for granted, such as clean drinking water, sewer systems, sidewalks, streetlights, and storm drains. Its water is contaminated with arsenic and bacteria, and smells of sulfide, yet the water treatment plant built in 2007 to fix the problem had to be shut down just six months after opening because of high operation costs.⁵ Juventino and his neighbors, most of whom live in trailers, pay \$54 a month for tap water that's too contaminated to drink. As a result, they shell out about 10 percent of their income for bottled water while struggling to pay for septic tank repairs and medical bills that stem from preventable health issues.⁶ Juventino describes the dire tradeoffs: "People here are poor and they fend for themselves how they can. I can assure you that plenty of people are drinking the contaminated water in this community. We are contaminating ourselves."⁷

The residents of Lanare are hardly alone in facing such challenges. Across the state of California, 1.8 million people live in similarly neglected low-income, unincorporated communities, and a rough estimate puts the number at 10.6 million nationwide.⁸ And the challenge of clean water extends into many other urban and rural communities. A *New York Times* investigation of water pollution found that the drinking water for 1 in 10 Americans contains dangerous chemicals or does not meet federal quality standards for a host of other reasons.⁹ Studies suggest that low-income communities and communities of color face the most severe drinking water contamination.¹⁰

Infrastructure deficiencies in urban and rural communities of color often stem from years of inequitable and discriminatory land-use planning. Ill-conceived downtown redevelopment projects built in the decades immediately following World War II tore apart many urban communities of color. Highways were rammed through dozens of African American communities like West Oakland in California; Overtown in Miami, Florida; North Nashville in Tennessee; and St. Paul, Minnesota's Rondo community—displacing thousands of residents and small businesses and ripping apart the fabric of these long-established neighborhoods.¹¹ These infrastructure projects were implemented with little, if any, community input and they contributed to white flight, disinvestment, and severe patterns of racial segregation and isolation. Decades later, many of these neighborhoods bear lasting scars to their urban landscapes that prevent them from fully realizing their potential as neighborhoods and economic centers. Among residents of these once-vibrant communities, the legacy of mistrust often runs deep.

Crumbling infrastructure also burdens many of the nation's older, diverse suburbs and small towns—places such as Madeira, Ohio, outside of Cincinnati; Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, less than three miles from downtown Philadelphia; and hundreds of other so-called first suburbs.¹² Aging water and sewer systems, bridges, roads, sidewalks, homes, and parks are a huge fiscal burden for their governments and taxpayers. New investments in roads and other infrastructure in outer-lying, more modern suburbs made moving



Chris Doherty, who rebuilt on the existing foundation of his destroyed home, cleans his porch in the Lower 9th Ward, the New Orleans neighborhood that was hit the hardest when Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast

AP PHOTO/GERALD HERBERT

out a good proposition for people with means, leaving these older communities with populations that were not only shrinking but also had lower incomes to contribute to the tax base.

Lack of infrastructure also plagues tribal communities. Among Native American households, 14 percent lack access to electricity and 12 percent lack complete indoor plumbing compared to 1 percent of households nationally.¹³ Two-thirds of reservation roads are unpaved, making it difficult for many Native Americans to access employment, stores, medical care, and other needs.¹⁴

The potential of infrastructure investments

Sound, well-planned infrastructure investments can transform struggling communities of color into healthy, thriving neighborhoods by linking them more firmly with their regional economies. But this will only happen if infrastructure investments are targeted to these communities and carried out in a way that benefits their current residents.

The case of a new transit investment in St. Paul illustrates many of the opportunities and challenges posed by infrastructure improvements in communities of color. A new \$1 billion Central Corridor light-rail line is currently being constructed along St. Paul's University Avenue, one of the region's busiest thoroughfares, to connect its downtown to the downtown of neighboring Minneapolis, with service slated to begin in 2014.

The "Green Line," as it is known, cuts through some of the most diverse neighborhoods in the region, with a mix of Hmong, African American, Latino, college students, and working-class white residents. But when the first project plans were announced in mid-2006, the train was slated to completely bypass three of the lowest-income, most diverse, and most transit-reliant neighborhoods without stopping to pick up their residents. The residents of these communities reacted, organizing a "Stops for Us" campaign to ensure the new transit line provided them with service. One of their rallying cries was "We don't want another Rondo!", referring to the 1960s freeway project that shattered St. Paul's tight-knit African American community of Rondo, displacing thousands of residents.

After four years of concerted organizing and advocacy, the campaign was ultimately successful.¹⁵

After successfully fighting to get the rail stops built, neighborhood advocates are now working to make sure that longtime residents and the many small, ethnic businesses located along University Avenue can benefit from the new transit infrastructure. Two major potential benefits are jobs and business contracts associated with the new construction. Connecting local workers to the 4,000 construction jobs being created through the project, and making sure that small local contractors have a fair shot at accessing the contracts for the work are community priorities.¹⁸ So far, the Green Line rail project is meeting its hiring and contracting goals, with people of color performing 18 percent of the work hours on the project, women performing 6 percent of work hours, and disadvantaged businesses—small

companies owned by people of color or other economically disadvantaged groups—securing 15 percent of the contracts.¹⁹ The Metropolitan Council, the regional agency overseeing the rail line’s development, estimates that minority- and women-owned firms could fulfill \$70 million in subcontracts.²⁰

How the construction of the Green Line will affect housing costs in the surrounding neighborhoods is another area of community concern. Building a new transit stop in a neighborhood can generate new economic, social, and cultural activity—attracting new residents and businesses and strengthening the housing market. This can be positive for existing residents, bringing in needed shops, services, and new neighbors. But it can also push vulnerable low-income residents out. Studies show that new transit stops often spark an increase in housing prices and rents, causing them to rise at a much faster rate than residents’ incomes, leading to neighborhood gentrification and the potential displacement of low- and fixed-income residents.²¹ To address this issue, a number of St. Paul community groups are working to make sure that existing affordable homes are preserved and new affordable homes are built along the line so that longtime residents are not pushed out as the neighborhood improves.

Improving the infrastructure planning process

To fully realize the promise of infrastructure investments for communities of color, infrastructure



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decisions need to be coordinated, representative, and inclusive. Despite the importance of infrastructure decisions for the health and well-being of people and communities, these decisions are often made in an uncoordinated, piecemeal fashion, and take place in boardrooms and committee meetings that are attended by few community members and receive little public scrutiny.

There is no single place where decisions are made in a transparent manner about the various pieces of infrastructure that make up a community. Often-times, a dizzying patchwork of government agencies at the local, state, and federal level, special districts, and private service providers decide the particulars of infrastructure provision.

Washington, D.C.'s iconic, century-old Union Station illustrates the typical complexity of urban infrastructure provision. Opened in 1907, Union Station, built in the grand Beaux-Arts style, is the transportation hub for city bus lines operated by two transportation companies, six regional bus services, two regional rail lines, the Washington Metro subway, and the Amtrak national passenger rail line—a total of 11 separate public, quasi-public, and private transportation providers all come together in this one terminal.

On top of the jumble of local transportation operators that cobble together the transit infrastructure in any given place, regional and federal agencies play major roles in governing and funding transportation systems. Regional planning and

Metrics matter: Federal policy and the case of the missing stops

One of the main barriers to getting the three additional transit stops built in St. Paul was the formula used by the Federal Transit Administration to determine eligibility for \$477 million in federal funding. Beginning in 2005 the agency used a cost-effectiveness index that measured cost per travel time saved for commuters as a pass-fail test for whether a project was eligible for federal funds through the New Starts program.¹⁶ This metric favored longer distances between stops and did not consider the consequences for local residents. Community advocates took the issue to the agency head, Peter Rogoff, who visited St. Paul in 2010 to learn more about the missing stops and that year changed the formula used to determine funding eligibility to assess a broader range of criteria to measure how a project will improve community livability, mobility, and economic development.¹⁷

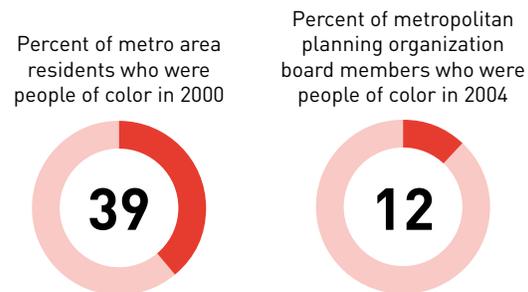
transportation agencies decide where to develop and prioritize which projects to build. And the federal government sets the rules for many transportation projects and often provides a critical piece of the funding. The Department of Transportation, for example, spends about \$50 billion a year and determines how the money will be split between roads and transit and how projects proposed by state and local governments will be evaluated.²²

Within all of these various decision-making bodies, the people making decisions about infrastructure are generally not representative of the communities they serve. Metropolitan planning organizations, or MPOs, for example, exist in every metropolitan region of the country and guide billions of dollars in federal and state investments in transportation and air quality, but the leaders of these organizations rarely mirror the diversity of the population served by the projects they fund. A Brookings Institution analysis found that metropolitan planning organization boards underrepresented urban residents and residents of color compared to suburban and white residents. For example, while 39 percent of metro-area residents were people of color in 2000, only 12 percent of the board members of metropolitan planning organizations in 2004 were people of color.²³ Local school boards are similarly unrepresentative. In California, for example, only about 15 percent of school board members were Latino in 2008–2009, while the state’s student population was 49 percent Latino.²⁴

Because low-income communities of color have less representation on these critical decision-making

bodies and less political power to influence decisions, these communities often do not get their fair share of infrastructure investments. And without sufficient investment, they miss out on the potential benefits. The Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, a nonprofit focused on urban economic development, calculates that deficient infrastructure in inner-city areas has cost these communities 2 percent to 3 percent of their total job base, or about 250,000 jobs in good-paying industries such as transportation, logistics, and professional services.²⁵

FIGURE 2
Residents of color under-represented in regional decision making



Source: Thomas Sanchez, "An Inherent Bias? Geographic and Racial-Ethnic Patterns of Metropolitan Planning Organization Boards" (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2006), available at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2006/06/01transportation-sanchez>.

What is happening now on the Lakota Sioux Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota exemplifies the promise that inclusive infrastructure planning processes hold for building strong regional economies. Pine Ridge is one of the more than 140 regions nationwide developing collaborative and



This photo released by DTE Energy Co. shows crew members working to clear broken utility poles in Sterling Heights, Mich., on Sunday, Jan. 20, 2013.

AP PHOTO/DTE ENERGY CO.,
MARK HOUSTON

community-driven regional development plans thanks to the federal government's Sustainable Communities Initiative. (see page 55)

The challenges facing Pine Ridge, however, can't be downplayed. It is one of the 10 poorest census tracts in the nation, nearly half of its residents are unemployed, and life expectancy is nearly 30 years lower than the national average.²⁶ But in the Pine Ridge community, Lakota leaders have shifted from reacting to the deep-rooted poverty that has been plaguing their community for more than a century, to proactively planning for the tribe's strong and viable economic future. Using the sustainable communities planning model, the Lakota people are building the infrastructure needed to get them there. One economic development strategy in the works is a community food processing facility, which will allow tribal members to process and distribute game. A new regional planning office will also support the construction of thousands of new, sorely needed quality homes.

Building the foundation for tomorrow

The infrastructure deficit in urban and rural communities of color reduces the chance that the nation's fastest-growing communities can achieve economic and social success. And that means that public investments are not laying the groundwork for a robust and sustainable economy that works for everyone.

While communities of color are often far behind when it comes to infrastructure investments, the focus cannot only be on catching them up. Yes, we must address the most dire infrastructure deficits, and that needs to happen immediately. But we must also build new infrastructure that allows these communities to leapfrog into a "next economy"—a future economy that is driven by innovation, shared prosperity, and sustainability. Deliberate and thoughtful public investments can make this possible.

Rebuilding the infrastructure in communities of color would generate much-needed new jobs and business opportunities in addition to creating or revitalizing valuable public assets. Making the investments needed to renew the nation's infrastructure—bridges, roads, schools, water and sewer systems, rail and public transit—would create an additional 2.4 million jobs per year, the majority of which would pay good wages to workers who have some advanced training but not a college degree, and provide solid stepping stones to the middle class.²⁷

Achieving equitable infrastructure investments will take deliberate policy strategies and robust community organizing and engagement. History shows that neither the new and improved infrastructure nor the jobs created through infrastructure investments will automatically benefit the communities that need them the most. An analysis of how the stimulus dollars under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 were spent, for example,

found that black- and Latino-owned businesses each received less than 2 percent of the funds, even though they represent 12 percent of all businesses.²⁸

In recent years, state and local governments—together with advocacy groups and private-sector investors—have led the way in creating equitable infrastructure policies through several policy strategies, including:

- **Targeting investments to the diverse communities most in need of jobs and reinvestment.** Last year responding to advocacy from many organizations promoting economic and social equity, the state of California specifically targeted \$45 million in sustainable communities planning and urban-greening project grants for economically disadvantaged urban and rural communities.³¹

- **Linking local residents to jobs, training opportunities, and career pathways generated by infrastructure investments.** Several cities, including Cleveland, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, and Portland, as well as the state of Oregon, have implemented “community workforce agreements” on public-works projects that include targeted hiring goals, job-quality standards, and workforce-training strategies.³² Groundbreaking transportation departments in Missouri, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have agreed to devote a share of some of their infrastructure project budgets to job-training efforts that get workers who are underrepresented in the construction workforce into apprenticeships.³³ And since the mid-1990s, 140 cities and counties have passed living-wage laws

Expanding infrastructure job opportunities

Before the Twin Cities community organized itself around equitable hiring and contracting on public works projects related to the Green Line and other investments, the Minnesota transportation department was not meeting its goals for contracting with disadvantaged businesses.²⁹ Community pressure and oversight—including a campaign begun by HIRE Minnesota in 2009—along with more ambitious department policy goals, has dramatically changed the picture: In 2011 about 12 percent of workers on the state’s top 14 transportation construction projects were people of color, compared to about 6 percent department-wide in 2008.³⁰

requiring that companies that receive contracts or subsidies from local governments pay wages that allow workers to meet their families' needs—generally ranging between \$9 and \$16 per hour.³⁴

- **Creating economic opportunities for local and minority-owned businesses along the infrastructure supply chain.** Cities and states are setting goals for contracting with companies owned by people of color and women. Among states, Maryland has set the highest bar, aiming to direct 29 percent of its \$8 billion in annual contracts to minority- and women-owned companies.³⁵ Other communities are revising their contracting policies to create a more level playing field for small businesses (New York City, New Orleans) or prioritize companies that are creating the most local jobs (Los Angeles, Houston).

Policy recommendations

The federal government should learn from these local innovations and establish a policy framework to renew America's infrastructure in a way that consciously connects the nation's diverse, vulnerable communities to economic opportunities and ushers in a new era of equitable growth. This framework would incentivize and prioritize infrastructure investments that are targeted to the communities most in need, improve the health and vitality of those communities, move the nation toward a clean energy economy, maximize the number of good jobs created that go to local workers, and create business opportunities that allow small, minority-owned enterprises to sustain themselves and grow.

CAP and PolicyLink suggest six infrastructure investment priorities that will uplift communities of

Targeted hiring goals

Goals for hiring underrepresented and vulnerable workers on infrastructure projects vary widely. Portland, Oregon's workforce agreement for its home energy retrofitting program requires that local residents perform at least 80 percent of work hours, with 30 percent of those hours going to historically disadvantaged and low-income residents. So far, people of color have performed almost half of work hours.³⁶ Missouri's workforce-development program for the \$524 million I-64 highway project, completed in 2009, also exceeded its hiring goals for people of color, aiming to hire 14.7 percent people of color and actually hiring 19.8 percent people of color.³⁷



In this Aug. 26, 2011 photo, commuters get on board a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) train at the Civic Center stop in San Francisco.

AP PHOTO/PAUL SAKUMA

color while strengthening our institutions, revitalizing the economy, and benefiting all.

Modernize the nation's infrastructure according to national infrastructure objectives that include clear measures to assess progress toward inclusive and equitable growth

Federal infrastructure investments need to be distributed in a manner that is transparent, accountable, democratic, and with a focus on achieving clearly articulated outcomes that ensure the economic prosperity, health, and vitality of all communities, including growing communities of color. The federal government can begin to move toward a results-oriented system by taking actions focused on job creation and economic opportunity outcomes.

- Invest an additional \$129 billion annually over the next 10 years to repair the nation's infrastructure, increase economic competitiveness, and grow 2.4 million additional jobs per year.³⁸
- The Office of Management and Budget should require every government agency to develop a plan outlining how its spending choices can maximize local job creation and business development for small, minority- and women-owned firms, and what it can do to eliminate barriers to and create incentives for hiring workers from low-income communities of color.

- Federal agencies should develop methods for distributing infrastructure funds that are based on objective measures of need, such as infrastructure quality, unemployment, and poverty rates. A significant portion of infrastructure funds—CAP and PolicyLink recommend 50 percent of all funds—should be targeted to underinvested areas, and the local matching funds requirement should be waived or adjusted as needed.

Build a transportation system that promotes access, mobility, health, opportunity, choice, and good jobs for all

Transportation is a crucial link to opportunity, yet communities of color often face transportation options that are unaffordable, unreliable, or nonexistent. Federal transportation policy choices—what we build, where we put it, who builds it, how we operate it, what energy powers it—need to increase access and opportunity for these communities.

- The Department of Transportation should develop and use an equity-analysis tool to evaluate how well funding proposals submitted by local jurisdictions and states reach access, mobility, health, choice, and economic-opportunity goals for the diverse communities the projects will serve.
- Implement a construction careers program replicating successful local and state models that create career pathways for underrepresented workers in

the construction trades. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) recently introduced legislation that can serve as the basis for a federal program.³⁹

- The Department of Transportation should develop a procurement best practices program for transit agencies' rail and bus purchases that maximizes the creation of good career-path jobs, incentivizes bringing bus and rail factories to this country, and includes specific requirements for training and hiring disadvantaged workers. This program should provide agencies with a model Request for Proposal, or RFP, for transportation equipment purchases.

Retrofit America's homes and buildings

America's building stock accounts for 39 percent of our carbon emissions—more than industry or transportation.⁴⁰ Improving the energy efficiency of homes and buildings would help achieve climate change goals while reducing government waste, cutting family utility bills, and creating hundreds of thousands of good union jobs and career paths for workers without college degrees. Federal policy should support retrofits in the communities where the cost savings and renewed infrastructure are most needed through financing programs, tax incentives, and pilot programs to expand and spur local innovation.

- Continue support for utility assistance and weatherization programs for low-income homeowners via the Low-Income Housing and

Energy Assistance Program and Weatherization Assistance Program. Incorporate incentives in the Weatherization Assistance Program for local governments to develop creative financing mechanisms to help low-income homeowners retrofit their homes.

- Promote public-housing finance reform legislation that preserves long-term affordability and leverages private-sector investments for capital improvements, including energy-efficiency upgrades.
- Advance commercial energy-efficiency retrofits through the Better Buildings Initiative, which facilitates public-private partnerships to retrofit commercial buildings, and better incentivize commercial retrofits by restructuring the energy-efficient commercial buildings tax deduction into a credit.

Upgrade and green the nation's water infrastructure

The nation's water systems are in sore need of upgrading and repair—especially in the older urban and rural areas that are home to many communities of color. Revamping water infrastructure creates an opportunity to improve health and sustainability, since stormwater runoff is a major cause of water pollution in urban areas.⁴¹ Pioneering cities like Cincinnati, New York, Seattle, and Tucson have begun greening their stormwater infrastructure by using vegetation, soils, and natural processes to absorb

water and reduce pollutants in the water supply. Green-stormwater management can also create new jobs that lead to stable careers.

- Prioritize funding water projects that protect health, expand drinking water access, and generate new jobs for underserved communities.
- Provide greater flexibility to states in awarding funds through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, providing 20 percent of federal awards in the form of grants and targeting at least 10 percent of those grants to underserved communities. Further incentivize investment in underserved communities by providing a 2-to-1 federal match for local investments.
- Establish a clean water trust fund for water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure, with

dedicated funding to small (less than \$5 million) projects with the above-mentioned priorities.

- The Environmental Protection Agency should move forward stormwater-runoff regulations already under its review and develop standards for innovative green-stormwater projects.

Promote integrated regional planning for sustainable communities

To support community vitality, the plans and priorities for various pieces of community infrastructure need to be coordinated and inclusive. The federal government plays an important role in helping regions build infrastructure efficiently, democratically, and in ways that meet national infrastructure objectives. Two important ways to do this are by strengthening the Partnership for Sustainable

Facilitating integration: The Partnership for Sustainable Communities

In 2009 the federal agencies in charge of the environment, housing, and transportation came together to form an unprecedented partnership to help communities better coordinate their infrastructure investments in ways that improve environmental and public health, economic vitality, and social equity. The partnership aims to meet six “livability principles”: 1) provide more transportation choices; 2) promote equitable, affordable housing; 3) enhance economic competitiveness; 4) support existing communities; 5) coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment; and 6) value communities and neighborhoods. The partnership has provided \$3.5 billion in grants and technical assistance to more than 700 communities across the country.⁴²

A National Infrastructure Bank

Economists and policy experts have long advocated the creation of a National Infrastructure Bank to overcome two major infrastructure challenges: attracting private investment and ensuring that investments go toward worthy projects that produce clear economic, environmental, and social benefits. A National Infrastructure Bank would be a government entity run by appointees that would supplement the current system of appropriating infrastructure dollars.⁴³ It would provide a mix of financing options including grants, loans, and loan guarantees, in order to support a mix of projects that can and cannot raise revenue (via tolls, taxes, or other mechanisms).

Communities (see text box below) and by setting guidelines for effective and representative metropolitan planning organizations.

- Expand the Partnership for Sustainable Communities regional-planning grants to additional regions, with a continued focus on ensuring that plans achieve equity goals and are developed with robust participation from diverse community residents.
- Foster greater fairness in regional metropolitan planning organizations by stipulating that federal funds be allocated based on county population density and requiring metropolitan planning organization boards to submit annual reports to the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development on the geographic and racial/ethnic

composition of their boards in relation to the populations they serve.

- The Department of Transportation should issue administrative guidance on equity in the governance and performance of metropolitan planning organizations, and provide financial incentives for metropolitan planning organizations that are representative of their populations.

Develop equitable, long-term infrastructure financing mechanisms

The federal government should take immediate steps to establish robust mechanisms for financing the public infrastructure needed to connect all communities—including fast-growing communities of color—to their regional economies and, by so doing, to the global economy.

- Congress should renew and make permanent the Build America Bonds program. These taxable municipal bonds were established by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 and funded \$181 billion worth of infrastructure investments before the program expired at the end of 2010.
- Congress should establish a National Infrastructure Bank that would:
 - Use objective criteria for selecting projects that advance equity, economic competitiveness, and environmental sustainability
 - Give preference to projects that are located in underserved communities, meet community economic needs, reduce poverty and inequality, create or retain jobs, expand workforce training, have robust minority-contracting plans, improve public health, and engage community stakeholders in the planning process
 - Clearly define “public-private partnerships” in order to protect the public interest
 - Ensure that the process to evaluate, allocate, and evaluate projects is open and transparent to the public

Conclusion

While infrastructure is rarely at the forefront of our minds when we think about America’s changing demographics, it should be. The nation’s infrastructure deficit is often worst in communities of color, and closing that gap—by repairing streets and bridges, building 21st-century transit systems, making buildings more energy efficient, upgrading and greening water systems, and more—can physically connect the people who are leading the nation’s growth to the opportunities they need to participate, contribute, and thrive while meeting national goals for sustainability and economic competitiveness.

In the process of closing the country’s infrastructure deficit, we can also make significant progress in meeting our challenges of unemployment, poverty, and low-wage work. When made in a thoughtful and transparent manner, infrastructure investments can link unemployed and low-wage workers to living-wage jobs and careers, and help small, local, minority- and women-owned businesses expand, growing local jobs. By promoting innovative local strategies that tie infrastructure investments to the prosperity of the workers, communities, and businesses that have been left behind—and setting a policy framework that encourages further local innovation—the federal government can put every infrastructure dollar toward building an economy that works for everyone. ■

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QUICK VIEW

Infrastructure—Supporting Communities So All Can Thrive

Infrasturcture—bridges, roads, schools, water and sewer systems, rail and public transit—is the foundation upon which our nation moves, interacts, and innovates. High-quality infrastructure is also the key to a productive and thriving economy. But much of America’s

infrastructure is crumbling, especially in low-income communities and communities of color. Robust and targeted infrastructure investments that bring jobs and connectivity to the communities most left behind are critical to creating a robust and sustainable economy that works for everyone. ■

Facts at a glance

- **2.4 million:** The number of new jobs created every year by making the investments needed to renew the nation’s infrastructure¹
 - A \$1 billion investment in infrastructure creates about 18,000 jobs, while the same size tax cut would generate only about 14,000 jobs and no new public assets²
- **12 percent:** The share of U.S. businesses owned by blacks and Latinos, although just 2 percent of infrastructure contracts under the 2009 economic stimulus went to these firms³
- **\$4:** The amount a community’s economy gains in business activity and tax revenues for every \$1 invested in public transit⁴
- **1.1 million:** The number of new transit-related jobs that would be created in just five years if the nation’s 20 largest metro areas shifted 50 percent of their highway funds to transit—and that’s all without a single dollar of new spending⁵
- **\$15 billion:** How much the city of Philadelphia will save over the next 25 years by adopting green stormwater infrastructure strategies, which will also employ 250 people per year⁶

Call to action

Smart, deliberate infrastructure investments can create millions of good jobs and transform struggling communities of color into healthy, thriving, economically vital places. Congress and the administration should work together to:

- Modernize the nation's infrastructure according to national objectives for inclusive and equitable growth
- Build a transportation system that promotes access and equity
- Retrofit America's homes and buildings
- Upgrade and green the nation's water infrastructure
- Promote integrated regional planning for sustainable communities
- Develop equitable, long-term infrastructure financing mechanisms

Endnotes

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