

# EQUITABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

## **THE PROBLEM**

From collapsing roads to unsafe water systems and crumbling school buildings, communities across the country are grappling with failing and outdated infrastructure. The American Society of Engineers estimates that a \$4 trillion investment is needed over the next 10 years to bring our infrastructure up to date and prepare for the future. While the needs are great, the Trump Administration seems uninterested in promoting a real plan that will provide the level of public investment needed to address the country's urgent infrastructure needs.

## **SOLUTION**

The United States needs a people-centered plan for real public investment in infrastructure that will support healthy communities and a sustainable economy. In addition to roads and bridges, investments should be made in schools, broadband access, and energy and water systems. Investments should empower women and communities of color while protecting the planet and public health. This includes ensuring that all communities have affordable access to new infrastructure, that career pathways to family-sustaining jobs are created for disadvantaged workers, and that investments are directed to communities that have suffered from a lack of investment. The best way of ensuring these outcomes is by creating meaningful roles for communities to provide input and act as decision makers. Lastly, local governments that retain public control of their infrastructure and aren't bound by public-private partnership arrangements that hand control to private corporations are better able to ensure that infrastructure meets community needs now and can adapt to changing needs in the future.

## **POLICY ISSUES**

Local officials are well positioned to ensure that the community's voice is included in infrastructure decisions, that investments reflect community need, and

that as a public good, infrastructure is democratically controlled. Local officials can:

**TAKE A BROAD APPROACH TOWARD DEFINING INFRASTRUCTURE.** New infrastructure investments should promote access to clean and safe water, affordable broadband, updated and safe schools, affordable housing, and community facilities like parks and libraries. Investments should also address the threat of climate change by prioritizing clean energy and public transportation infrastructure in addition to resiliency infrastructure.

**ENSURE INVESTMENTS ARE MADE IN COMMUNITIES THAT NEED THEM THE MOST** and that projects deliver concrete community and environmental benefits. For far too long low-income communities and communities of color have suffered from a lack of infrastructure investment and have borne the brunt of environmental degradation. New infrastructure investments should prioritize the needs of disadvantaged communities. Local officials can also encourage the use of community benefits policy tools to ensure that new projects deliver concrete benefits including affordable housing, environmental remediation, and community facilities and services.

**MAXIMIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE GOOD JOBS.** In addition to failing infrastructure, too many cities are grappling with a lack of quality jobs. Infrastructure investments provide an important opportunity to create family-sustaining jobs, particularly for disadvantaged workers. There are a range of policy tools local officials can use to ensure both high-quality job creation and that pathways are created for low-income workers, people of color, women, and other groups of disadvantaged workers. Community Workforce Agreements provide a comprehensive policy tool that establishes a range of job quality and access standards in addition to conflict resolution provisions that ensure high quality projects are delivered on time. Where these policies aren't feasible, local officials can pursue job quality standards that ensure workers earn a living wage

with benefits, have access to training and apprenticeship opportunities, a safe work environment, and have a voice on the job.

**PROMOTE MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & TRANSPARENCY** throughout every phase of an infrastructure project to ensure that investments produce vital environmental, economic, and community benefits. Meaningful community engagement in infrastructure projects should begin with early community input and should focus on articulating community needs as well as project selection and design. Legislators can also take several steps to promote a high level of transparency that begins with how community members will access information about a project, which should include early and complete disclosure of the project's anticipated impacts on community and the environment. The public should also be informed about the financing arrangements and procurement methods, including any proposed public-private partnerships. The ultimate goals of transparency and community engagement are to create accountability among all stakeholders and to building beneficial projects. To this end, local officials can include meaningful consequences for failing to meet obligations. Consequences can include clawbacks of public funding, debarment from public contracts and appropriate judicial remedies for those harmed.

**USE FINANCING MEASURES THAT ENSURE AFFORDABLE & ACCESSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE.** Infrastructure must be affordable and accessible to those who use it, especially to those in low-income communities. However, financing arrangements such as the use of private equity financing through public-private partnerships often rely on high user fees to maximize corporate profits. Furthermore, these contracts may give the private entity wide latitude to raise rates over time, making fees like bridge tolls, water bills, and transit fares expensive and inaccessible. Progressive affordability policies are easier to create when using financing arrangements such as low-cost municipal bond financing.

### ***POLICIES IN ACTION***

**NEW YORK CITY.** Superstorm Sandy caused \$19 billion in damage and shined a light on deep inequality in the city. Low-income residents, communities of color and immigrants were hit hardest by the storm. In its wake, the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding, , advocated for a range of policies that would ensure that the communities hit hardest had access to the relief spending and that the recovery efforts did not further perpetuate pre-existing inequality. In addition to a range of housing and environmental remediation demands, the coalition also won a 20 percent local hiring requirement and the first disaster relief project labor agreement in the country. The Alliance also secured funding for pre-apprenticeship programs and the creation of the Sandy

Funding Tracker, which makes comprehensive reporting on recovery job creation and spending available to the public.

**LOS ANGELES.** In 2012, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro) became the first transit agency in the country to adopt a Construction Careers Policy for all major construction projects, including the \$2.4 billion Crenshaw/LAX Transit Project, an 8.5-mile light-rail line that runs through the heart of LA's Black community. This project improved access to public transit for residents of color and represented an opportunity to address elevated poverty and unemployment rates. Building on a decade of successful targeted hire policies, the Construction Careers Coalition, pushed for a policy that would create pathways for low-income residents and people of color and serve as a template for major infrastructure investments. To date, 58% of work hours on the Crenshaw/LAX Transit Project have been completed by economically disadvantaged workers and 69% by workers of color.

### ***RESOURCES***

**The Campaign to Defend Local Solutions**, based in Florida, is one of the nation's leading organizations devoted to supporting cities and local elected officials facing preemption, by providing communications, media, and litigation support, research, and resources

**Preemption Watch** helps advocates better understand and counter preemption by providing tools, research, and case studies and a bi-weekly newsletter with coverage of federal and state preemption threats. The Partnership for Working Families provides legal, communications, and organizing support to campaigns to stop state interference with progressive local measures.

**The Partnership for Working Families and In the Public Interest** have produced several publications useful to local officials who want to pursue equitable infrastructure. These include:

- Building America While Building Our Middle Class: Best Practices for P3 Infrastructure Projects
- A Guide to Understanding and Evaluating Public-Private Partnerships
- Community Benefits Toolkit

*Co-authored by the Partnership for Working Families*

