

A majority of mayors recently surveyed agree that aging and underfunded physical infrastructure is the greatest shared challenge, with roads as their first priority.



Transportation I

The Growth Imperative

An unending battle for transportation funding

By Linda Mastaglio

Mayors Agree: Infrastructure Is Greatest Shared Challenge

Findings were recently released from the 2015 Menino Survey of Mayors, a study to identify challenges and policy issues common to many cities. Eighty-nine U.S. mayors from 31 states participated. According to the final document, the “majority of mayors surveyed reported that aging and underfunded physical infrastructure is the greatest shared challenge facing their city and [they] identified specific projects they would prioritize for investment.” Roads remain their first priority. When asked where they would prioritize spending if they received a large unrestricted capital grant, their highest, most urgent needs focused on mass transit (22%), roads (20%), and water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure (18%). When asked to consider the same scenario but with a small capital grant, their answers still focused on infrastructure issues: bike and pedestrian infrastructure (20%), parks (19%), roads (15%) and municipal buildings (14%).

Here are reactions to the study from industry leaders:



Michael Melaniphy, President & CEO, American Public Transportation Association

“It’s not surprising to see that mayors are very concerned about the aging and underfunded infrastructure in their respective cities. Transportation is the backbone of the economy and is vital to a community’s economic competitiveness and prosperity. It’s just not acceptable that in the public transportation industry, there is an \$87-billion backlog in state of good repair needs.

“Our national campaign slogan, Where Public Transportation Goes, Community Grows, says it all. Without sufficient funding for transportation infrastructure, a city’s competitive edge could be lost.”



Pete Ruane, President & CEO, American Road & Transportation Builders Association

“The mayors survey demonstrates that, despite 23 states passing over 30 ballot measures to increase transportation revenues in 2015, generating an estimated \$11.3 billion in new revenue, the nation’s physical infrastructure—and particularly transportation infrastructure—remains a major challenge at all levels of government.

“At the federal level, Congress continues to rely on temporary budget gimmicks to largely maintain status quo levels of investment. The sooner elected officials realize this problem is not going away and that someone else is not going to fix it for them, the sooner we can start making the investments

needed to ensure the U.S. infrastructure network promotes economic growth and quality of life instead of hindering it.”



Anthony Freeman, P.E., Transportation Committee Chair, American Public Works Association

“While enterprise utility funds (sewer, water, etc.) provide sustainable rate-based revenue, street funding is limited by a declining gas tax and the general absence of street utility revenue. The built street environment is key to community mobility, health, safety and commerce, and consistent funding approaches need to be at the forefront of future federal, state and local discussions. Solutions would be indexing the gas tax to inflation, consideration of vehicle miles travelled, revenue systems and the creation of local street utilities.”



Gary C. Thomas, P.E., President & Executive Director, Dallas Area Rapid Transit

“Mayors know their cities. They also know greater investment in public transportation will transform our cities. It is essential that public transportation operators and the leaders of the cities they serve work together to secure the sustainable funding we need to meet a growing demand.”



David A. Raymond, President & CEO, American Council of Engineering Companies

“A U.S. city is in the headlines because its residents can’t drink the water. This situation illustrates our national infrastructure crisis that requires a robust response from all levels of government. Just as the federal government needs to step up its game, so do governors, mayors and city councils. Local water rates, for example, don’t reflect the true costs of the systems.”



Andrea Eales, Government Affairs Director, American Public Works Association

“As the 2015 Menino Survey of Mayors shows, the key challenges noted by mayors are the physical, fiscal and social infrastructure projects needing attention in their cities. National legislators are mindful of aging and underfunded infrastructure projects and overall do support multi-modal transportation, bike and pedestrian-friendly policies, and the critical need for financial investment in infrastructure as we move forward in the 21st century.”



Lee Weintraub, Chair, Florida Council for Public Private Partnerships

“Tight public budgets combined with aging infrastructure and the need for new public improvements has put a lot of strain on the elected stewards of public assets. If they procure projects using traditional approaches, they are expected to completely fund the design, construction, and subsequent operations and maintenance of the facilities. With public-private partnerships, the private sector assists in the financing of the project. In these tight fiscal times, as long as the criteria for public-private partnerships are met, public agencies can maximize their capital improvement plans by adding P3s to their toolbox.”



Thomas W. Smith III, Executive Director, American Society of Civil Engineers

“In the American Society of Civil Engineers’ 2013 Report Card for America’s Infrastructure, roads and transit—two of the sectors identified in the mayor’s survey as being the most critical—received a grade of D. As cities continue to face shrinking budgets, the need for improved partnerships with federal, state and local governments to fund infrastructure is paramount. Without a

renewed partnership and focus, the nation’s roads and transit systems will continue to languish.”



Bruce D’Agostino, CAE, FCMAA, President & CEO, Construction Management Association of America

“Significant and stable long-term funding is critical, not just because infrastructure construction creates good jobs, but also because so much of our national economy and international competitiveness depends on our being able to move people and goods efficiently. Just as important as money, though, is flexibility. Owners at all levels, from federal to local, should be empowered to take full advantage of diverse project delivery methods, emerging technologies and professional services that can boost productivity and make the available dollars go farther.”

The Menino Survey of Mayors was initiated in 2014 by the Boston University Initiative on Cities, cofounded by former Boston Mayor and U.S. Conference of Mayors President Tom Menino. Financial support is provided by Citi. ■