

Compact for the American Future

Building America's Infrastructure

America's infrastructure was once the shining example for the world. Private industries and the public sector alike invested heavily in modern, sustainable infrastructure that could serve as the backbone for a thriving society.

But in the past several decades, we've left a **\$4.5 trillion** hole in our nation's infrastructure. Crumbling roads, a vulnerable energy grid, congested airports, and aging bridges paint a picture of how far we've slid, and how monumental an investment we need to make to improve America's physical buttress.

Clipped Wings: Public Spending On Broad Infrastructure As % of GDP



Source: BEA, S&P Global Economics.
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The COVID-19 crisis has only further driven this point home. Our failing infrastructure is abetting our failed response to the pandemic. The pandemic has **exposed** our severely lacking water infrastructure, hindering families from accessing clean, safe drinking water when they need it most. It has underscored our failing broadband network, as countless Americans telecommute and millions of students working in residential environments struggle to connect efficiently online. And many more lack the basic broadband needed to flourish in our modern society — pandemic or otherwise.

It's going to take tremendous efforts to put the pieces back together after this crisis. [Building a healthcare system for the 21st century](#) and [making the economy work for all Americans](#) are two vital places to start. Rebuilding America's Infrastructure is another core piece of the **Compact for the American Future**. With bold ideas, a commitment to investing in the long-term, and an innovative mindset, we can be prepared for future events like this crisis and build America's infrastructure for generations.

The good news? There is broad, bipartisan support for rebuilding our infrastructure. According to battleground state polling from Build Together, **91% of voters** support a new infrastructure plan with policies like those below. And while large majorities of voters are concerned about the current state of our infrastructure (i.e. according to the poll 63% are very concerned about America's aging drinking water system), 90% agree that they never know how or where infrastructure investment dollars will be spent. But because of the support for new investments, there's an opportunity for an infrastructure agenda that shows voters their leaders can get something done and make a meaningful impact in their lives.

Pandemic Preparedness & Prevention

It was already out in the open, but the COVID-19 pandemic has put an exclamation mark on the scale of depletion in our nation's infrastructure. For years the federal government has quibbled over how to infuse robust funding into infrastructure programs, only to arrive at impasse after impasse. President Trump has touted his desire to improve America's infrastructure, but to date, no major bill has been passed. But leading on infrastructure works: Gretchen Whitmer (D-MI), succeeded in her 2018 election to become the Governor of Michigan in part because of her insistence to "fix the damn roads."

A successful congressional agenda should further tap into this sentiment. But it needs to go bigger: Let's build America's infrastructure for our future. Infrastructure touches every aspect of our daily lives, and it should be treated with such import. When another crisis hits, we must have executed a plan to shore up our infrastructure so our systems can respond in a crisis as effectively as possible. Here are steps we can take now:

- Seventeen million Americans make up America's infrastructure workforce. From delivering packages, to maintaining our water systems, to securing our energy grid and much more. It is critical that these essential workers, who will be asked to be on the frontlines again, are protected during a pandemic. We must **protect these workers** with mandatory paid sick leave, personal protective equipment, comprehensive health insurance, and the ability and incentive to raise concerns about their workplace health and safety.
- The U.S. should make a concerted effort to **hire and train more infrastructure workers**. Not just for temporary building jobs, but as a long-term investment to employ Americans to maintain the nation's infrastructure so it is prepared to handle future pandemics.
- **Safety must be the number one priority**. We've heard devastating stories of frontline workers, from healthcare workers to grocery store and essential retail workers, to meat plant workers succumbing to COVID-19 because of lack of protections. There must be federal protections in place that compel businesses – and make sure resources are there – to protect employees.
- The pandemic response was slowed in part due to our complicated and dated supply chains. We should go under the hood of our nation's supply chains – from medical supplies to protective equipment to treatment – to **streamline and modernize** them for future pandemics.

- President Trump likes to talk about our depleted national stockpile as a reason for the crushing delays in getting PPE to our nurses, doctors and frontline workers. But the national stockpile wasn't built to be a panacea. We should **return and exceed the levels we funded our national stockpile** in the previous administration, and it needs to be flexible enough to deploy to states and localities proactively. Moreover, it needs to run alongside typical supply chains that feed into our hospitals and local health systems.
- Testing should not be an 11th-hour invention. We need to invest in national R&D programs and **lay the groundwork for a robust testing apparatus** that can respond to a new virus expeditiously.
- The same goes for a vaccine. The only rate-limiting factor for the development of a new vaccine should be ensuring its safety and efficacy through randomized controlled trials. We must lay the **infrastructure groundwork to identify, test, produce, and disseminate a vaccine** quickly and effectively.
- Part of the challenge during COVID-19 has been our patchwork data infrastructure. And a pandemic response is only as good as its data. We need to establish **better and more cohesive state and national data systems** that allow for more fluid tracking of trends and contact tracing.
- Tens of millions of American workers and students have been forced to work and learn in residential environments. It has become evident that our broadband is not reliable, easily subject to speed declines, and grossly inequitable (the "digital divide" has the potential to set back a portion of a generation of students. We need to make **broadband internet** a reality for every household and every zip code - more on this below.
- Finally, our infrastructure is not resilient. The pandemic has displaced thousands. Natural disasters can displace even more. We need to make our **communities resilient** not just against pandemics, but also hurricanes, floods, fires, and storms that will only increase with the impacts of climate change. More on this below.

Let's Build

Infrastructure is the issue that is a bridge between all types of inconsistencies. An agenda that is bold on revitalizing our infrastructure – and one that is inclusive – can show Americans the transformational change an improved infrastructure can make in their communities. And with the current state of our infrastructure in plain sight, Congress can easily connect these changes to improving public health, improving the economy, and improving lives for the future:

- We need to repair and modernize our **roads, highways, and bridges**. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), our roads earn a D grade and our bridges earn a C+ grade. Americans lose billions of hours of productivity to traffic each year. Congress must make immediate and significant federal investments, as well as funding state and local efforts, to repair our nation's roads, highways, and bridges. Permanent or annual funds might be established to repair roads on an ongoing basis.

- Investments in **high-speed rail** are long overdue. We are lagging behind Europe and Asia in providing this safe, convenient, and more environmentally sound transportation alternative. Rail can connect the country in an instant, boost jobs from the steel production needed to lay the rails to the opportunities a more connected transportation system will open up.
- As Americans continue to flock to suburban areas, our transit systems need to keep up. We need to make **strategic investments in mass transit** – from buses, to trains, to ferries – with plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make traffic work smarter for America's commuters.
- Millions of Americans do not have access to **clean, safe drinking water**. This is an unacceptable and avoidable travesty that must be resolved. We must make comprehensive efforts to improve our water infrastructure from ridding our pipes of lead, to ensuring toxic chemicals like PFAS can't contaminate our waterways, to shoring up our faulty wastewater and irrigation systems, it's time to take bold measures to make water more efficient, less costly, and accessible to all.
- America's airports are crumbling and congested. ASCE has slapped aviation in the U.S. with a D rating, noting a \$42 billion funding gap to 2025. We need to close that funding gap to **repair and modernize airports**, connect rural communities to aviation, improve safety measures, and reduce unnecessary traffic and cancellations that stymie productivity.
- America should make **regional planning** a fixture of its infrastructure investments. Allowing states or localities to band together regionally is smart public policy that helps solve problems for more people quicker, and makes sure dollars are spent wisely. Regional planning must also bring communities to the table that are underserved or disproportionately impacted by environmental justice issues.
- We can transform cities by making them ready for emerging technologies, like self-driving cars, and expanding access to lower-impact transportation (e.g. increased bike sharing and bike lanes). American cities should have opportunities to learn from each other nationally on best practices to **build smart cities for the 21st century**.
- Climate change is a major test to our nations' infrastructure, and communities are already feeling the impacts – especially communities of color. Parallel with efforts to combat climate change, we must build **resilient infrastructure** that can withstand natural disasters, storms, extreme weather, floods, and sea-level rise. Moreover, we must **bar utilities from shutting off vital services** during extreme weather and flooding to save lives.
- **Dams and levees** are critical to our water infrastructure – from transporting goods across the country to protecting communities from floods. But there are over 15,00 high-hazard dams in the U.S. and levees are in need of \$80 billion in improvements. There must be federal investments in improving the vital infrastructure of dams and levees.
- America's ports are falling behind much of the world, and we currently have a \$16 billion gap in investments. We need to modernize and **refurbish our seaports**, so these critical points of commerce are prepared to accommodate larger vessels and keep up with global competition.

- According to ASCE, 24% of our nation's school buildings are in fair or poor condition. Students deserve healthy, clean, safe physical environments so they can focus on learning. When millions of American students return to school in person, it will become more pressing than ever that we fund the **modernization of our schools**. No school should have water systems contaminated with lead. Our schools need improved ventilation systems to curb the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases. And our schools need structures and technology to meet the challenges of the future to best prepare students for a rapidly changing economy.
- Parks are key to attracting tourism dollars and encouraging healthy living for communities. Our nation's **parks need increased maintenance funding** to keep these public spaces accessible and safe.
- Infrastructure is not always a big picture. It's also hyper-local. We need national, state, and local interventions to **tackle homelessness** and increase opportunities to access affordable housing. For starters, we can make home-buying for America's working and middle classes easier with affordable loans. We can work to reduce household expenses by making public utilities and water more affordable and make efforts to not displace those who are trying to make ends meet.

Beyond the roadways, railways, and waterways...

Shoring up our physical infrastructure is important, but it's not the whole picture. Infrastructure has other tangible impacts on individuals and communities that can be borne out with improvements for the 21st century. How does that look?

- We must finally make **high-speed internet** a reality for every single American. 21 million Americans still do not have broadband – that's almost a third of U.S. households. It's an issue that affects rural and urban communities alike. We must make significant capital investments to expand broadband to every household, while cracking down on providers to prevent monopolies that artificially inflate prices and encourage competition to innovate and increase internet speeds.
- To thrive in the 21st century, America needs to achieve a **100% clean and renewable energy economy**. 100% of our new investments must be in clean and safe energy and we must achieve net-zero emissions. In a future memo, we'll detail more solutions to America's climate crisis.
- As with all sectors, we must boost **federal research and development** spending so we can discover new technologies that help our nation achieve a more sustainable, clean, equitable and resilient infrastructure.
- Our energy grid is not meeting the demands of the 21st century. We **must invest and build a power grid** that can distribute clean energy to every single household and business across the country. The grid must be safe, resilient against attacks, and reliable. Clean energy must also be made affordable for every consumer while increasing choice and driving competition.

- We must also make our **buildings more energy-efficient**. Through incentive structures such as tax credits and tax deductions, as well as benchmarking systems, we can encourage residential and commercial buildings alike to meet clean energy standards and reduce emissions.
- Nationally, we must **modernize our data systems**, so they are more open and accessible to study patterns and implement solutions that meet the challenges we face in real-time.
- We must expand opportunities for Americans to build our infrastructure through increased **vocational and apprenticeship training** programs. In addition, we can tap into existing apprenticeship programs by employing workers on projects in registered apprenticeships programs. As we work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, programs must be stood up to **re-train workers** in the oil, gas and coal industries for new, good-paying jobs in the green economy.
- Finally, infrastructure investments **create jobs**. This is a no brainer, but of late Washington has been reticent to invest in American workers through infrastructure spending. The lack of earmarks means there is diminished incentive for elected officials to support increased spending. But we can build our infrastructure together: America has a massive demand to rebuild its infrastructure, and a supply of millions of American workers currently out of work and in need of good-paying jobs. We can get a significant return on our investment with jobs that have fair wages, worker protections and benefits, all while helping to grow the middle class. And job creation doesn't stop with the implementation of a bold plan to revitalize America's infrastructure. Maintaining our infrastructure and systems is a massive, long-term job creator and sustainer.

Conclusion

Americans want fair shot and the freedom to live the future they envision for themselves and their families. And they want to build it. Modernizing and democratizing our nation's infrastructure with real investments is one critical way to do just that. Infrastructure is the backbone of our communities – from the water we drink to the way we travel to work to our ability to get on the internet – infrastructure is necessary and right now it is failing us. So, let's build it. That is part of the *Compact for the American Future*, where expanded access to affordable, quality healthcare, an economy with opportunities for all, and a humming infrastructure can help build the American future our communities deserve.