

# InfrastructureUSA

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**Interview by Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA  
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**Andrés Duany on:**

## **Funding, and public consent for infra development**

We simply need to reallocate our public funds to infrastructure rather than to a whole lot of other things that we're doing—such as war, for example. I think that any society needs to do that, and we need to allocate for maintenance, not just for building. There's too much of a tendency to cut the ribbon, to cut the inaugural ribbon. You keep building and building and building, rather than fixing, and we need to rebalance that. And there's one thing that I think is much more important, which is the energy infrastructure of the future. For example, if we're going to have a solar-based energy economy or a wind-based sustainable energy economy, the wind farms and the solar farms are not where the existing power plants are located. They're in new places. They're in places like Oklahoma, in different areas. And from these new areas of generation we're going to need to transmit power to the cities, so we need a huge number of new right-of-ways, of new easements for power transmission. And there is a terribly difficult problem putting them in because there's citizen opposition to this. There is citizen opposition to everything. There is citizen opposition to highways, which I don't suppose we need any more, but there's also citizen opposition to these new power easements.

## **Rail...not high-speed rail**

First of all I think you should get the "high-speed" off the table because the "high-speed" costs multiples more than regular-speed rail. We do not need high-speed rail; we need rail. We need rail that is dependable, we need rail that happens often, we need rail that is comfortable. Actual added efficiency of high-speed rail, which is measured in terms of minutes, is not worth the additional investment. We have perfectly good rail tracks that are good for regular rail and we don't need to have huge investments to make them high-speed. What we do need is obviously to invest in the companies that provide regular rail service. There are a couple of very glamorous projects in France and a couple of glamorous projects in Japan and so forth and we have one or two in this country, I think, there's the Acela, but half the time it's not going high-speed and it's just fine. And I think we'd do a lot better if we took the high-speed portion of that off the table and just spoke about dependable, elegant, comfortable rail service that costs a lot less.

### **Accepting change**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century wasn't afraid of the future. The 19<sup>th</sup> century loved the future. They loved the idea of the train arriving in the city. They loved the idea of the skyscraper replacing the townhouse. They loved the idea of embanking the river and building the power plant and building the dam. They were incredibly positive about the future. What's happened since the 1970s, most markedly in California, California is terrified of the future. They can't stand one more road being built, they can't stand one more—they can't stand a rail being built either—they're hugely in opposition to the building of the subways and so forth, and it's because we, as a nation, have lost any notion that the future can be better than the past. You know, we've become a really old culture, an old, decrepit culture unable to see the future and those newer cultures, those younger cultures like China are going to outstrip us absolutely.

### **How to (and how NOT to) create jobs with infra investment**

Building highways is one of the ways that creates the least number of jobs per expenditure. It goes to a very, very narrow range of industries. It goes to specialized concrete industry and specialized asphalt industry. If you want to subsidize something, which is to create jobs, housing is pretty much the way to go. That has a huge distributive ability. There are many, many trades, many craftsmen, many small purveyors, and many factories that actually make what is necessary for housing. It really spreads...It's spread very widely on the economy. Roads are very big hits of money that actually create very few jobs. Just look at a work crew. How many people are working on a highway? A couple of dozen. You have a couple of dozen people on any single-family worksite. I would say investing in the building of roadways to create jobs is not very good policy.

### **Our most valuable investment: schools**

There is a danger that others will catch up to us and have as much clean water as we do and as many highways as we do, but I don't feel—and I travel very extensively in this country—that you can't ever, anywhere drink the tap water. Nowhere in this country can you not drink the tap water. Nowhere in this country can you not flush the toilet. Everywhere in this country we have highways, and it's just fine if others catch up with us. Where I think the great American advance took place was the investment that we, from 1880 to 1930, made in schools. No other country in this world established a public education system and a University education system even remotely equal to ours, and that has made all the difference. It is that that has made the difference, and not all the highways.

### **New Urbanists and seeing the big picture**

The problem with the current discourse now is that we get people that are practically maniacs about infrastructure, or maniacs about high-speed rail, absolutely monomaniacs about this or that small agenda, and they can't see

beyond that which is their primary concern, and the New Urbanists—whether you start out as an engineer, or an architect or a sociologist or a developer—we gradually become generalists, and we’re always balancing out things. We’re balancing out not only the building of physical infrastructure but also, let’s say, the building of intellectual infrastructure. We’re conversant with law, we’re conversant with technical issues, we’re conversant with sociological issues and we can balance things out. What I most dislike about the current discourse, the current debate, is that a whole bunch of very specialized interests, i.e., our democracy of interests, and everybody knows what they know and they don’t care about anybody else. And that’s the great difference. That’s what makes a New Urbanist.

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