

# InfrastructureUSA

## Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Kathryn Phillips, Director, California Transportation and Air Initiative,  
Environmental Defense Fund**

**Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA  
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**Kathryn Phillips:**

### **Freight Infrastructure**

I think we do tend to take for granted that the clothes we wear and the food we get just sort of show up on the store shelves, but somebody needs to haul them there, and they need to either get there by truck, train, plane or ship. That's a growing issue and a growing demand in the country. The Department of Transportation estimates that between 2008 and 2035 (and 2035 isn't too far away, by the way, it's only twenty-five years away) that by then, freight demand will have more than doubled. And that means that there will be huge demand on the infrastructure: everything from roads to rail to ports and airports.

### **Old infrastructure's environmental impact**

I know that the environmental impact is the thing that we're most concerned about, and some of that impact comes about because the infrastructure is so outdated and hasn't been developed in a way that keeps up with the growing demands of trade and the growing demands of freight. As a result, we're probably relying on dirty old trucks much more than we should. We're relying on ports that haven't been electrified. They don't have shore side power systems. We're relying on ships that are still using very dirty bunker fuel, although that appears to be changing as a result of a recent IMO decision just late last week. So it's easy if you're not right there in the infrastructure battle to forget that everything that's getting to your table or getting into your home, all those products are having an impact. Moving them is having an impact both on the environment and on the infrastructure itself.

### **Inefficiency=Increased Pollution**

I think one of the things that is kind of hard to get our arms around that's really important to remember is that the transportation system is a system. Especially in freight it's a system. And if you're not using the system as efficiently as possible, you're going to end up with a lot more pollution than is necessary, and you're going to end up with some people bearing a greater pollution burden than other people. For instance, if you are using a thirty-year-old truck to transport goods from the port of Los Angeles to Chicago, you're creating an awful lot of air pollution. You're also putting a pretty big dent on the impact to the highways. A

smarter way to move those goods would be to transport them, or shift them to rail and make sure that you get 280 containers with one locomotive going from Los Angeles to Chicago. That will reduce the pollution. If you divide it, it reduces the pollution for each container that you're moving, plus it reduces the impact on the roadways. So it makes sense, but rail isn't going to make sense if you're moving goods from the port of Los Angeles to a warehouse where it's going to be assembled and then distributed to local southern California stores. So the basic problem is that we have to think of it as a system and figure out a way to use the system most efficiently. And as we do that, make sure we have the most modern and up-to-date infrastructure that simultaneously allows us to reduce the pollution impacts of freight. Highways have their purpose, but we don't need to build new highways. What we need to do is maintain those highways that we have, and then use the other parts of the system to make sure we're not overburdening those highways unnecessarily.

### **Infra that serves the public**

I think most people's eyes glaze over when you talk about infrastructure. I get excited about it, but most people, you know, they don't. But I do think that when you talk to people about the condition of their roads, when you look at polling in California, for instance, people are asked "what's the thing about quality-of-life that bothers you the most?" and before this huge economic downturn, the thing that kept coming up more than anything was road congestion. The inability to get from point A to point B with reliably knowing how long it was going to take you to get there because the roads are so congested. I think if you're talking about congestion and you talk about potholes, I think when you hear about people talking about wanting complete streets, basically what they're saying is make sure that those roads that we have are well-paved, they don't grab our bicycle wheels, we don't trip walking across the road because there's some huge pothole, and that there's room for everybody. I think what we've done in this country when we talk about infrastructure is we've talked about it only in terms of "how do you move a lot of vehicles?" and we haven't thought about it in terms of "how do you respond to what people need?" And what people need when they're polled and every other way they're asked, what people need is to be able to get where they need to go in a reliable amount of time. Also, people don't want to have to get into their car all the time. Maybe thirty percent of people are totally wedded to their car, but most people what like to be able to walk to a destination. In some cases in this country you can't even walk across the street. . We haven't set up the infrastructure in a way that it serves people's needs. I think if we started talking about it and if decision-makers started listening and addressing infrastructure as something that actually has to serve the public and not serve any particular interest group, then I think we'd find that the public is there. They are interested. They are willing to pay for filling in those potholes, fixing those streets, putting in those bike lanes, getting better transit. People are showing with their feet that they're willing to walk to transit stops and use it more than they

ever have before. Fortunately, I do think in this round with the federal transportation bill, we've seen some response to that in the house transportation and infrastructures proposed bill, which hasn't gone through the committee process, but the introduced part starts to acknowledge that we need to think of things more as a system and that we need to remember that people get around in lots of different ways, depending on the time of day and depending on their need. I think if we start responding to what people need, that we'll find that they're very excited about infrastructure, although I doubt that they're ever going to refer to it as infrastructure.

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