

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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Sam Schwartz spoke with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA, at the 2010 New York State Transportation Summit, sponsored by New York State Department of Transportation, held at McGraw-Hill Conference Center, NYC, 9/24/2010.

Sam Schwartz:

Funding is our greatest challenge

I think we've made the case. I think the public really knows that infrastructure needs to be attended to. However, it is a political process and, while I'm not taking any sides, I worry about the momentum of the tea party saying, "No new taxes, no taxes!" We depend on taxes to maintain our roads, to maintain our bridges and take care of our subway systems. The history of our country is that public transportation has been a public function and we can't just sell all of our roads in fifty states and all of our transit systems. So, we're going to have to look towards funding sources, because we're already broke when it comes to the gas tax. We're going to really need to make some hard decisions, maybe we call them "user fees," call it by another name that doesn't begin with the letter "T." We've made progress on one front. I think there's going to be a setback in terms of public works bills going forward.

We need to communicate!

We may have to figure out a way to create a show, instead of an *LA Law* or *NYPD Blue*, maybe *City Engineer*. We need to educate people in all different ways and if it's on the web, in the classroom, or Twitter, we need every possible way for the public to understand. The public that is suffering understands. Those are the people that, unfortunately, some died in the Minnesota bridge collapse or the people that were stuck on I-95 when Philadelphia had to shut it down or the bridges in Louisiana that were closed this week. People understand that this is a very local problem. Somehow we have to collectively get our elected officials to say, "let's fix it" and we're going to have to pay for it someday.

Infra investment pays for itself

I think when we look admiringly at other countries, like, "Wow, look what China is doing with their form of Capitalist Communism!" They're investing 9 percent of their GDP in infrastructure. Japan, during its heydays, was also in the 6 or 7 percent and Europe is in 5 percent. We're investing 2 percent. We know that every economist has said that good infrastructure—I'm not talking about the

“bridge to nowhere”—but good infrastructure has such a spin-off, an economic spin-off, a spin-off to the health of the communities, a spin-off in terms of the jobs that are created. It’s just about all-positive if you do good infrastructure. We need to get that message across.

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