

# InfrastructureUSA

## Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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

**Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA**

**Pete Ruane**

### **Long-Term Commitment Still Needed**

In my judgment the nation has not shown any serious commitment to long-term sustainability and growth in our transportation infrastructure in any way that's at least the sector that I'm in most familiar with. I think the evidence shows that the US is not committed overall. There are some states that are, but the US national government, to say they're committed: I think that can't be proven, it can't be supported. If it were we wouldn't be three years late in getting a surface transportation bill reauthorized. We're playing at the margins. Evidence of true commitment would be to pass these legislations on time, fully fund them, and if there are issues with the funding then find alternative ways to pay for it because it's a fundamental responsibility of government.

### **What is Required to Move Forward?**

A sustained leadership at the national level as well as a group of credible leaders at the state/local level who would take on this issue as a long-term commitment and not something they talk about in an election cycle and respond to the press after a crisis or bridge collapse. I mean look, attention span even on the I-35 thing; the attention went away after a few months. And to sustain the interest and to win this battle requires a long-term commitment by our leaders. We're not a partisan organization - but the president a number of times made some very good presentations on the need to invest in infrastructure, but they haven't sustained, they haven't even put forward a proposal. And so, it requires sustained national and state leadership and not as part of an election cycle or trying to make political points by separating one cut to spending from the other. This is a long-term challenge. You look at the whole stimulus deal, the infrastructure part of it, which people are still criticizing, was 5-6% out of over \$800 billion. Come on, that's a joke. That was not evidence of long-term commitment.

### **So Much is at Stake**

Our physical infrastructure is like our bodies. If we don't take care of it, if we don't improve it, if we don't keep it lean, mean, and in good working order, it's going to collapse. That's what's gone on around here. The diet has been lacking,

investment in has been lacking and that's why it's in such bad shape, in some places decrepit shape. The only thing that has brought the citizenry into this in the past has been tragedies, whether it's been collapses or tragic accidents that highlight the need for repair and the inattention to this whole issue. We're not praying for a series of that to get the public's attention. We are really just advocating that our elected representatives take this on as a sustained effort, not just at an election time, that they see the value of it; they recognize the impact that this is having on our competitive situation overseas. They see these other countries investing massively as a percentage of their GDP and it's all going to catch up to us and we're going to suffer as a result in terms of our productivity, our competitiveness, and maybe that's when some of the politicians will wake up.

### **Politics**

Right now they're treating all government spending alike and it's not. This is investment. And we can make a solid intellectual and political argument that this is the right thing to do. But to get people to pay attention to it? Well that's the presidential election. The president's made some statements, Governor Romney's made a few, but nothing concerted. We've met with them, we've argued our issues, and we'll see if they come out and what they do if there is a change in this in their first year. That's the true test, but you know, it's all about spending and not investment — we still haven't won that argument and until we do they're going to hide behind the nation's deficit situation and argue we can't afford to; well, we can't afford not to.

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