

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

Infrastructure Week 2014

Infrastructure Week is a unique confluence of all those who have a stake in our infrastructure. It's bringing the business community into the conversation as well as those that build infrastructure. Hopefully it will help to speak to the investors, to taxpayers in particular, as to the real need of infrastructure and how it affects our ability to have a strong economy. People see it as free, but I do think that if we can get the business community in with the policy makers, the governors, and those that build infrastructure, that's a really good way to start that conversation so that people can see how it affects their everyday lives.

Infra Is an Investment, Not a Cost

One of the main things I see is that we continue to look at infrastructure rehabilitation and expansion as a cost rather than an investment. And I think that it's difficult for many people in the electorate to understand the return on investment we get. I think some of us are guilty of perpetuating that thought because we always talk about what you won't have rather than talk about what you get by investing in infrastructure. A main theme of what I've been trying to preach is that let's look at return on the investment, let's look at what you get. I think the best example of seeing how that works is some of the local initiatives that have been passed, where you get down to the local area and those who are moving funding for infrastructure tell people exactly what they're going to get. It seems to pass and people seem to get behind it. I think we need to change how we talk about infrastructure and start telling people less about what they won't have and more about what they'll get in return for their money. Another point in that is I think that a lot of infrastructure issues, certainly on a political level, have been miscast, if you will, as being a way of increasing "big government," when infrastructure has always been a bipartisan way of investing in America. So I think we're caught up in a couple areas here but part of it is the fact that we haven't really explained to people how infrastructure is such a critical component to the country's competitiveness, to how it's a political component in our resiliency, from natural or man made disasters, how it creates jobs, and how it just effects the quality of life.

Local and National Interests Need to Work Together

One of the things that I think about all the time is that there certainly needs to be a national system of infrastructure in the United States. There is a need for local funding, and that local funding needs to meet the needs of the local populace, but I also think that there is a strong need for a national transportation grant that's funded on a national basis. Really, to get on the surface transportation side, which I'm most familiar with, to get our resources to our manufacturing centers to our markets to our ports in an efficient way. I think there are two issues that run here: the need for a national transportation system to maintain our competitiveness and then the needs of the local populace. I think they need to work hand in hand, truthfully.

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