

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Anthony Foxx, United States Secretary of Transportation
Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA**

DOT Bus Tour: Invest In America, Commit to the Future

The purpose of the bus tour is to raise awareness and focus some attention on the part of the public on this massive problem we have with our infrastructure. The good news is that when you get out on the road people can tell you stories. They tell me stories all the time about traffic jams and potholes and other problems that they experience because we're not investing enough and we're not really setting up the next generation for the bright future we should expect them to have. This is a phenomenon of a slow burn. It's a problem that has been creeping up on us, and it's almost been invisible as it's been creeping up on us. Folks have learned to tolerate intolerable traffic, intolerable road conditions and intolerable risk in our system including the fact that a quarter of our nation's bridges are in poor condition. And on top of all of that the national government hasn't prioritized this. We've had thirty-two short-term measures in the last six years. We're more than a decade since we've had a six-year transportation bill. All of this is sort of a recipe for disaster, but to the average member of the public, they're seeing little spots of things here and there but they think largely that it's localized to them. But when you start connecting, as we're doing on this bus tour, communities as diverse as Tallahassee, FL; Savannah, GA; Columbia, SC; Raleigh, NC; you start seeing that the same things are happening in all of these places. Then the public starts to realize that this is a much bigger story, and it's a much bigger challenge, and that's why the president and I think it deserves a big solution like the Grow America Act.

Growing Public Support Through Education

We appreciate all efforts to educate Americans about our infrastructure. Frankly, our forebearers have done such a good job of giving us a great transportation system that we've learned to take the system we have for granted. But we can't do that anymore. We have to not only take better care of what we have, but we really need to begin developing a vision for what we want to have and need to have in the 21st century, and get about building it. So, we just appreciate all the efforts to educate folks and to help folks understand that they can play a role in moving America forward. One of the biggest problems we have in infrastructure right now is how to pay for it, and when you start peeling the onion back it gets back to whether the public is actually going to support and get behind efforts to actually pay for what we need. Part of what we're doing is trying to educate people and connect the dots so that they see that these investments that happen at the federal level aren't some kind of smoke and mirrors. It's stuff that actually helps them on the ground. It helps deal with some of the problems they have.

Transportation Improves More Than Just Commutes

Transportation packs a powerful punch. It creates jobs in the process of getting projects done, it makes jobs possible in terms of the connections that we create, and we also

know that when we make smart choices about infrastructure that it improves the places in between. There are an awful lot of great examples of the catalytic impact that transportation has on land use and economic development in between the places it connects.

Now Is The Time to Invest In Transportation

It is a very important time for American infrastructure—maybe the most important time that we’ve ever had, because we have this incredible legacy infrastructure that’s been bequeathed to us by previous generations. They built it, they paid for it, and they had a vision for how the country would be better connected. That system is starting to deteriorate, and we have to take care of it. At the same time we’ve also got tremendous growth that we’re experiencing as a country—70 million more people over the next 30 years. So, whatever bottlenecks we have today are going to get worse. If we have crumbling roads, that’s not going to help us. We’ve got new capacity needs, we’ve got to take care of what we have, and we also have to make sure that we are thinking smartly about where we choose to invest the limited dollars that we do have.

Without a Long-Term Plan, We Can Only Fail

Think back historically at the trans-continental railroad, for instance, which was led by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. It’s emblematic of the fact that there’s never a perfect time to take a big project on and to create a national vision for transportation. But at the same time we’ve always found a way to do it. I have to tell you that right now the really dangerous point we’re at is that we just don’t have a plan. And, frankly, not having a plan is a plan. It’s a plan to fail, but it’s a plan.

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