

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

James Brainard, Mayor of Carmel, Indiana

Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

Successful Cities Are Built Around Solid Infrastructure

The Romans built roads throughout their empire because they realized it was critical to be able to move goods, commerce, and people around quickly and efficiently. That's why they were successful. If we want to be successful and competitive as a nation today, we need to be able to move goods, we need to be able to move people efficiently and quickly throughout the country. We're a big country and we need to hold it together by making certain our transportation systems are connected. Now given that, I think we need to look at the most efficient ways of doing that. We need to be careful that we don't build so much sprawling infrastructure that we can't afford to maintain it. I think that's a problem today. We need to focus on what's been built, making sure it works well. A lot of times, a lot of retrofits are necessary, but certainly infrastructure is absolutely necessary for this country to remain competitive.

Success Story: Carmel, Indiana

I'm in my sixth term as mayor, been elected six times. For a small city under 100,000—when I became mayor we were only 30,000—we have probably invested well over half a billion dollars in our infrastructure, our bridges, our highways. We have more roundabouts than any city in the United States regardless of size; we keep our growing population served by our sanitary, sewer and water infrastructure. Why we've grown so quickly is we've built the infrastructure in the ground that we need before we have a problem. It's allowed us to become one of the most competitive cities in the country, and people here, it's in their DNA that infrastructure is important.

Stimulating the Economy with Infra Investment

We put \$108 million into a five-mile stretch of highway during the height of the great recession; put hundreds of people to work and continued to attract business to this community. Once the recession was over it put us in a tremendous position, but we did recognize that this was a good time to stimulate our local economy by doing a project that we needed to do, and I think if you look back at the Great Depression you see a lot of economic stimulation by money that was invested in infrastructure during that period of time as well. We saw that this was as good a time as any, and got it done, and it's paid dividends. You know, to those folks that suggest that we can't afford infrastructure, what more basic function of government is there than to make sure people can get from place to place, and commerce can get from place to place? If we don't do that, the economy is never going to get better.

Local Government Taking Action

Our system is one that's supposed to involve citizens. That's why we're a republic. We need to listen to the professionals as to how best to do something, but at the same time

the citizens need to challenge those professionals and engineers and architects and builders to do a better job with their infrastructure, to make sure it works both at the local level and at the federal level. There's no *our* way, or *the* way, to fill a pothole or build a road. Local mayors and city council people see their constituents in the grocery store, in the barbershop, around the city every day of the week. They are getting the business of government done at a local level. It's unfortunate that more isn't getting done in Washington, but mayors, and I'm a member of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, a trustee of that organization, and I see hundreds of mayors every year at various meetings, work is continuing just fine at the local level. It'd be nice if the feds helped us more, but they have a choice. They can either do it or not do it, but we're going to continue to move ahead at the local level.

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