

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

Without Grid Investment, Electricity Challenges Will Only Get Worse

New Yorkers recall the brownout a few years ago; Californians have experienced brownout conditions. It's anything but smart. It's a vestige of the last century, and it's just not efficient. We are wasting a lot of time, money and energy trying to use power production facilities and an arcane way of transporting that electric into our homes and businesses. And what we've observed here, recently, is a little bit of politically driven chatter that either everything's fine and it needs to stay the way it is, by some who profit from the current way, to others—a lot of supporters of renewables, which we agree with—saying "You don't need an energy grid at all." I think both of those positions are simply untenable. And what we attempted to do in this report [[Building a Smarter Electric Grid](#)] was to say renewables, microgrids and other things are fantastic, but they have to be able to come on and off of our energy grid and to do so efficiently. Anybody who thinks we won't need a grid in the future I think is not really looking at reality. Look at what happened in Germany last year, where they almost fried their grid because they didn't have the technology that could regulate the power fluctuations they were seeing from renewable power. Just for that reason alone we need to invest in the grid, and the money we put into the grid I think will come back to us ten times in savings. If we don't do that, we're going to continue to experience outages, we're going to continue to experience price fluctuations and instability in the market, and as we start to move our vehicular fleet toward electric, the crunch is going to get a lot worse.

Cybersecurity: A Necessary Aspect of the Smart Grid Conversation

Throughout our entire history, concepts of economic resiliency or power have been tied to national security. And so as more and more automation occurs, the threat to our national security increases. We've always been concerned about sabotage or various criminal, terrorist or military attacks on our infrastructure. Imagine what would happen if Manhattan's power just went down. It would not take very long for chaos to ensue. Look at what happened during Superstorm Sandy: people started, suddenly, after a couple days, thinking they lived in a third-world country. Life as they knew it had changed. And we are susceptible to that. In the past you had to be physically here to damage something, but in today's connected world there are people who want to do us harm, and that harm in the 21st century doesn't necessarily come via an army or a ship or a tank, it comes through electronic warfare, through cyber warfare. Europe has

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been experiencing that with ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and elsewhere called asymmetric or hybrid warfare, and it's something that we ought to be talking about in the same sentence that we mention "Smart Grid" or any other type of smart technology.

Change Requires Citizen Involvement

All of us, to some extent, take infrastructure for granted on a daily basis. We jump in our cars, we walk to the subway, we get on an airplane, we take a ferry, a commuter train. People don't think of that in terms of it being infrastructure, because, really, schools didn't teach that. They are service-type facilities that we just utilize, but each one of us and every citizen has to get more involved in infrastructure. You've probably seen the John Oliver skit: infrastructure's not sexy. It's just not to a lot of people. But, really, it is, because without infrastructure we simply cannot maintain our way of life, our mobility, we can't see loved ones, we can't get to goods and services that we use every day. It's something that we, as all Americans, have taken for granted in the past, and we can't afford to do that because everything is not OK in the infrastructure world. It's getting worse. The day of reckoning is coming, if it's not already here, and we are not dedicating the resources we need to fix our crumbling infrastructure because people haven't told the politicians, "Enough is enough."

Alliance for Innovation and Infrastructure: A New Perspective

Alliance for Innovation and Infrastructure does exactly what its name sounds like. We're trying to help policymakers achieve out-of-the-box solutions for our nation's pressing infrastructure needs. Innovation means technology, but it also means just looking at an issue from a different perspective. Quite frankly, we've been talking the same talk in DC and elsewhere for decades, and we're not getting anything done, and so clearly a different approach is needed. I formed this as a former government regulator and transportation guy, and thought the idea behind it was people aren't really talking about the issues, and so we wanted to do this from a non-partisan perspective, and that's why Aii was founded.

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