

# InfrastructureUSA

## Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Rob Gramlich, Senior Vice President, Public Policy, American Wind Energy Association**

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

### **AWEA: Bringing Wind Energy to the Mainstream**

The American Wind Energy Association is focused on growing the market for wind energy, which involves a lot of public policy and public education. We are trying to get support for wind energy as a resource in our electricity next, including incentives as well, as we work on a lot of issues that we view as barriers to growing wind energy in the country. For example, we have a fairly big electric transmission-line focus that we work on. We've had very impressive growth. It's gone from 4,000 megawatts to 60,000 megawatts just in the eight years I've been in the industry. And we've had a number of years of being about 35% of all the new electricity generation being installed in the country. We were even number 1, the leading source, in last year.

### **Challenges to Wind Energy: the Myth and the Reality**

We look at it as there are some real barriers that we work on and some mythical barriers that people tend to focus on and talk about. The mythical barriers are pushed, sometimes, by proponents of other energy sources who don't want to see wind take out such a big market share. Of course we're saying we are part of a balanced portfolio; we're not saying we're everything, that all electricity should be supplied only by wind. There are opponents now who spread some myths about it, but we do work on certain challenges in the industry. For example transmission, again, is a barrier, and transmission solves a lot of things. The obvious one being there are a lot of windy, remote places where we can put wind farms, but then you need to deliver the power to population centers: that's one. But another one that people don't think about is that if we have a robust, region-wide transmission grid, if the wind stops blowing in one place it's most likely blowing somewhere else around that region and therefore across the region, and these are regional electricity markets that we have in the country. Across the region wind itself is not variable, or people say intermittent. It's not really like that if you spread it out with transmission across such a wide region.

### **Wind Power in Your Back Yard**

There is some local opposition on occasion and, certainly, local communities need to think about what the benefits and impacts are of wind farms. Generally, we find that the public opinion and approval is much more strongly positive after a project is there than before, and that reflects typical nervousness about new things and we understand that. But communities that have wind now can share their experiences with communities that are considering wind. So you know that's one, it takes some communication and work, and also recognition on our industry's part that it's not appropriate to have a wind

turbine in every location. Our developers very carefully consider whether each location is appropriate and work with the communities about whether they want to have it.

**Apathy is Easy, But We're Getting Better**

One of the things that we often find is everybody wants infrastructure but nobody wants to pay for it, and it's so easy to free-ride on infrastructure. You can always depend on somebody else picking up the tab and, if you're not the squeaky wheel, kind of sit back and somebody else will take care of it. That may make sense for each individual, but in the aggregate for society that's how we get neglected infrastructure. We see that, for example, on the transmission grid, so you know we have been working hard to correct that. We have made some progress though; it used to be that the country spent about 4 billion dollars a year on the transmission grid and in the last few years that's been up to more than double that in the 8 to 10 billion dollars a year range.

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