

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

Guest on The Infra Blog: Richard A. Davey, CEO of Boston 2024 and Former Massachusetts Transportation Secretary

Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

Hosting the 2024 Olympics Will Help Rebuild Boston

I really believe that there are only two ways to motivate both public support and elected leadership to do things, and that is with crisis or opportunity. In infrastructure and transportation in particular, too often we're motivated by crisis but we always fall short. So I remember the Minnesota Bridge collapsing tragically, people were killed, and the federal government responded with no new surface transportation long-term bill. There was a MetroLink accident that killed people in Los Angeles back in 2005, again tragic, and the response was to put in positive train control around the United States with no federal dollars—unfunded mandate. And so we can't respond to tragedies like that without some leadership investment. I think the Olympics are an opportunity. We are thinking about where our stadium is going to be temporarily, but more importantly what kind of neighborhood could be built around this large swath of land that is really, for the most part, underutilized. Or can we use the Olympics as a deadline to get infrastructure projects done. There is nothing like a deadline to make government move in the right direction. And you can't postpone the Summer Games in 2024; they are going to start in the summer of 2024, and so keeping people on target and on deadline is important. I see the Olympics as one of those big opportunities to move the public and to move government and to move the private sector in a really compelling way.

Planning for the Long Term

The Olympics are all about, in Boston, thinking about and planning for our future—not the future being tomorrow's rush hour, but 9 1/2 years from now, and 10 years from now, and 20 years from now. That's what infrastructure is about: it's about investing for the long term, taking the long view. So we've argued that the Olympics can be an opportunity for the city of Boston and the state of Massachusetts to push harder, think bolder and bigger about where they want to be and then what kind of infrastructure, what kind of transportation network should be there to support that vision. And the Olympics are ancillary; it's only a four-week event and 9 1/2 years from now. That infrastructure that we build both before and after the games has to have a long-lasting impact to our city. I'm sitting in the Innovation District right now where our offices are, which is one of the hottest real estate markets in the United States. It is one of the hottest real estate markets because of the state's investment in a convention center, in the Central Artery/Tunnel Project, and it's creating a whole new neighborhood. So we see the tangible benefits in Boston for investing for the long term. It just returns. It's greater returns in taxes, jobs, and economic improvement, so we can't take the short view; we have to take the long view.

Even Boston's World-Class Infrastructure Needs Maintenance & Upgrades

I spent five years both running the MBTA in Boston and as Transportation Secretary, and stepped down back in October. I did have a front-seat view of both the opportunities and the significant challenges that we have infrastructure-wise in Massachusetts. Our system—there's a real legacy that we're proud of: President Eisenhower built the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s; the MBTA was the first subway system in America, built in 1897. But not a lot of investment has occurred in the Interstate Highway System or our transportation, our transit networks that were built 100-plus years ago. I think between superstorms in New York and New Jersey, and most recently this winter in Boston we've seen that, sure, these were historic storms, but boy our infrastructure just could not hold up. Fortunately it's not a surprise, but I think it's something that we really need to wake up to.

Getting Ready for 2024

One question is: can we do it? Can we be prepared for the games in 9 1/2 years? The answer is of course we can. 9 1/2 years is a lot of time to make the investments that we need to make. And the good news is the team is already on its way, buying new subway cars, upgrading power and rail. Sort of the unsexy stuff, you know—there aren't a lot of ribbon cuttings for putting in a new power system. But you need to do that in order for the system to run, and the MBTA is moving forward with some capacity improvements as well, so you'll be able to add some service on both lines in the next 5 to 7 years. And then there's another question: there's a big project here in Boston we've been talking about for a long time which is expanding South Station, which is basically our Grand Central Station. And so we use the Olympics as an opportunity to gain both financial and political support to work with the post office and some other impacted agencies to get that project moving, so again I think those are certainly some of the hurdles, but I think the Olympics give us a special moment to really finally get over some of those hurdles that have been around with us for so long.

Boston and the Olympics Just Make Sense

Boston is good for the Olympics and the Olympics are good for Boston. I think Boston's bid is completely aligned with where the International Olympic Committee has their vision. They want sustainable games, they want walkable games, they want games that have a great legacy value for the city and the state and the country that they're held in. You know that they are rejecting the kind of games in the past that have led to significant expenses and not a legacy value for the country, and Boston's bid is a direct response to the IOC's agenda. We thought about the Olympics in the context of: does this make sense for where Boston wants to go in the future? If it didn't align with that vision we were not going to bid, but speaking to the mayor and speaking to other elected officials and citizens we believe that the bid does align with where the city wants to be in 2030 and beyond. 2030 is the 400th birthday of Boston, and so we are thinking about our fifth century as a city and how can the Olympics harness the kind of vision and implementation of that vision we want to be. And we welcome the world to Boston today, whether it's the Boston Marathon in a couple of weeks, one of the best international sporting events in the world, or being a great sports town. You can't find an athlete who hasn't participated in a sort of championship recently in Boston to know that

this is a really passionate city who roots for the underdog, who roots for the unknown. I think Olympic athletes, when they come to Boston, will have really the experience of a lifetime competing in front of Bostonians, New Englanders, and so I think that's why this bid makes sense. Boston is good for the games, and the games are good for Boston.

Hosting the Olympics is an International Competition in Itself

There's a whole process that occurs. The first step was for the United States Olympic Committee to decide whether or not it even wanted to submit a bid. For the 2020 Summer Games, the USOC decided not to do that. For the 2024 Summer Games they put out a call to actually 50 American cities to see if they were interested, and ultimately received four serious proposals: Boston, Washington, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. We went through a competitive process with those three great cities, but the United States Olympic Committee designated us their choice back in early January. So the USOC will officially submit our name to the International Olympic Committee this fall, and then we will know who our competitors are. The likely competitive cities include Hamburg, Germany, Paris, Rome, potentially Istanbul, potentially Budapest—a few others are considering it. So this is really going to be a great international competition, great cities who are competing, and frankly I think we'll make our bid better.

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