

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

Howard Jennings, Managing Director, Mobility Lab

Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

People are Finally Waking up to the Crisis

The basic infrastructure is something that people find pretty easy to take for granted, and it creeps up on them and they don't realize that it's getting worse and worse and worse. And so we at Mobility Lab are trying to put the emphasis back on helping people recognize that their quality of life is eroding and their ability to spend time with their family, the stress of their day-to-day lives and all these things are a result of our collective failure to invest in infrastructure, in our roads and in our mobility systems, but it's also really impacting their quality of life and the quality of their communities. We're trying to tell stories, put it in people terms so that people can tune in and realize, "Wait a minute, I can do something about this. And I also should agitate for more support for it from the government." Fortunately I think they are beginning to wake up finally. That's one of the things that's putting the spotlight more on the value of transportation options or demand management, and also there's a lot of emphasis on performance measurement in all areas of endeavor these days it seems. And employees in particular are demanding commuter benefits as part of their benefits packages, and so all of this is kind of culminating in more focus on, "why is my daily life out of whack, because the infrastructure is not here to support my need to move around?" And so part of what we're trying to do is get the message out there that we all, most of us do have options that we can take that do take some of the stress out of our lives and the stress off of our transportation systems by switching over into other modes than just driving along: taking transit, biking, walking, carpooling, or tele-working. We try to help people realize the pain that they somehow don't seem to realize they're feeling until they suddenly get confronted with, "Wow there is a better way."

Local Governments Can't Afford to Pass the Buck

The Mobility Lab is a project of Arlington County Virginia's Commuter Services Program. We're the research and development center, and we do research on transportation options that are available to people in the region and the impact of their using them, and we also beat the bushes to look for innovative, new means of travel to help put less stress on our infrastructure and give people better mobility. With the diminished federal role we've seen a great many more state and local funding issues, sales tax referenda and things like that, to try to fund specific improvements that they want in their areas and the great majority of those ballot initiatives are passing, and in fact transportation initiatives are passing at the rate of about 75% which is much higher than schools — or anything else, really. The local governments and the people in the localities recognize they have needs and so they're willing to pay for them, and it's clearly laid out what are the benefits and what does it cost. They can't pass the buck down the road.

Investing Now to Ensure the Future

There's no free lunch. Our children and grandchildren are going to suffer and our economy is going to suffer if we don't step up to the plate and make good business investments in what drives our economy and our quality of life. It's those kinds of messages that I think we collectively need to hammer home better.

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