

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

Milo Rivero, Ph.D., P.E., CCM, Chairman of the New York Building Congress (NYBC)

Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

The Right Way to Win Infra Funding

[Congressman] Shuster, when he was in Pennsylvania, used to advise us that when you go to Washington and you're asking for dollars for infrastructure, it seems a little self-serving when the professionals who are designing the infrastructure are asking for it. He says it's always better if you get the business owners who are trying to build their businesses, whether it could be truck drivers and transporters, to go and advocate for the infrastructure improvements because they are the ones who suffer when a bridge is taken out of service because it no longer meets code or can no longer sustain the weight rolling over it. They're the ones who have to drive 25, 30 miles out of the way of that bridge to get around it and continue on delivering their goods. The New York Building Congress really is advocating for that regional development and the role that the infrastructure plays in the regional development.

Recent Strain on New York Transportation Systems

For the last 35 years, I left my house at 6:15 to get to work. I used to get to work and be at my desk by a quarter to seven. For the last two or three years, the traffic has gotten so dense that I'm lucky if I can get to my desk at 7:30 when I leave at the same time. To a degree, that's the city doing well. To a degree, it's modifications in transportation. The oncoming of Lyft and Uber. What that does is it stresses our infrastructure systems. Our two tunnels crossing the Hudson were subjected to damage by Sandy by exposure to the saltwater. They do need to be taken out of service and repaired. The Portal Bridge is 107 years old. That needs to be upgraded. The Gateway Project is designated as a project of regional and national significance on DOT's own website. If we have failures, it will be at a point where 10% of America's gross domestic product will be in jeopardy. If there's ever a need for the federal government to step up and partake in their share of that project, it's now.

Time to Fund the NYC Subway Action Plan

The subway system is one of the wonders of the world in New York City. It's a large system, and it's time that we make the investments to take us into the next century. Replacement of the old subway cars with newer, more reliable ones; the installation of new technology signals to increase the number of trains that can be run. We've gone through periods of expansion in the subway system. We've gone through periods of investing in the maintenance of the subway systems but we're at the point where we have to do both. The growth of the number of people in the city, the number of tourists, the population growth in New York City is increasing astronomically. It's putting stress on that system. The system has to address both its expansion mode and the refurbishment of the existing system. They've come up with a subway action plan. I think it's to the tune of \$800 million and it needs to be funded to push forward the repairs that will take us into the next century. There are switches and signal systems that are over 100 years old in the New York City subway system. They were reliable and they worked for a long time, but they will not take us the next 100 years. People are insisting on reliability, as they should in service, and it's up to government to provide it for them.

The MTA Dream Team Needs Funding to Perform

Over the years, the agencies can grow very, very large. People can read into it, that they're not seeing the efficiencies and nimbleness of smaller agencies. When there are smaller agencies, people read into it that there might be benefits of conglomerating the agencies and the purchasing power of that. I think we're at a time where there's been a lot of investment in the new leadership of the transit authority as a whole. It's a very strong and powerful team. It was assembled with people who have been very, very successful in other roles. With this leadership, I really think the government needs to invest their dollars so that this team can perform. I've never seen such a strong team assembled in one agency all at once. They'll be able to drive the efficiencies and the productivity downwards, but we have to give the money as a tool to do what they need to do.

New York Building Congress: Infrastructure is Investment

The New York Building Congress really believes in the investment in infrastructure. We don't look at infrastructure as being an expense. We look at it as being an investment because of the impact it has on regional development, on businesses, on people's lives, going to work, living within a certain commuting distance or in the city. When we talk about infrastructure, we're talking about everything from water to energy and electricity, to schools, hospitals, bridges, tunnels, subways, trains. All the things that produce a thriving economy.

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