

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

Chicago's New Transportation and Mobility Taskforce

I think what Rahm [Mayor Emanuel] realized is that Chicago, like many cities, is a transportation-centric city with cars and buses and trains and bikes, and all different kinds of transportation. I think what the mayor would like is a little bit more coordinated approach so that when they're trying to figure out if they can or how they should regulate Uber, how that fits in with bike share and how it fits in with the Chicago Transit Authority and how it fits in with Metra and how it fits in with his train from O'Hare to downtown Chicago and redoing Union Station and all of that. Chicago has always been a transportation magnet in so many ways, but the coordination of it I think is what has confused people, and I think he'd like to have a blueprint for what really makes sense in terms of coordination and cooperation, and maybe in some instances, regulations.

Transportation Innovation Key to Successful Cities

Particularly in cities like Chicago or New York or certainly LA and Denver, the people that live in these cities want them to be livable and sustainable communities, and transportation is a big, big part of it. Parks are a big part of it, affordable housing is a big part of it, having a good job is a big part of it. Obviously, healthcare is a big part of it too. I think when you look at what the mayor has done, his focus has been on schools, it's been on transportation and it's been on fiscal matters. Those are his three areas that he's really, really worked on. If you look at the Riverwalk, what a disaster that whole area was and what a magnificent walking and biking path it is today, it's extraordinary. When you look at what he's done with the Chicago Transit Authority in terms of new stations and new tracks and new trains, that's a lifeline of transportation to people who can't afford a car, don't want to drive a car. And then what's going on at O'Hare with modernization: it'll be one of the most modern airports in the country. The mayor has a vision, but I think his vision now is that a lot of this stuff needs to be coordinated.

Infrastructure is Stalled on a National Level

There was a lot of energy and enthusiasm when Trump was elected about the idea of fixing up America's crumbling infrastructure, and it hasn't happened. America's infrastructure is completely stalled out. There is no money; the Highway Trust Fund is broke. There have been no new airports; there's been no investment in projects like the Gateway project or investments that are needed with Amtrak and other rail projects. The national transportation system is completely stalled; there is no leadership at Congress, and there certainly is no leadership from the White House. I really believe that Trump, left to his own instincts, would figure out a way to fund infrastructure, would figure out a way to really upgrade infrastructure, improve infrastructure, but I think he's been held back by lots of other things. So we're stalled; we're in the stalled mode.

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Cities and States Solving Problems

In some of the cities, the mayors have really stepped up. If you look at what's happening in Los Angeles with the transit system there, if you look at what happened in California when Jerry Brown decided there was going to be a high-speed train between San Francisco and LA, when you look at what Hickenlooper has done in Denver and in Colorado as mayor and as governor, when you look at what Rahm has done in Chicago, when you look at what's going on in Washington DC, again, a transportation-centric system. Notwithstanding some of the issues with the subway system, I think Governor Cuomo has a good vision and I think when he's re-elected, will really carry out a big, bold vision for New York. The action is really in the cities and in some states, and they're not sitting around waiting for the federal government. There is no leadership right now in Washington. Congress has stalled out infrastructure. The Trump Administration has provided no leadership on infrastructure. The action is really in the cities and in the states where you have governors and mayors with a vision, using some of their own resources, using private resources, using PPP's and making things happen. You need to have leadership by elected officials, by people who are charged with the responsibility for infrastructure. Whether it's transit, whether it's airports, whether it's highways, it's incumbent upon the elected leaders to have the vision and the courage and the ability to really make things happen. Citizens really rely on the leaders in their cities and states to fix the infrastructure, improve the infrastructure, enhance the infrastructure, and it's going on in many different places around the country as there's a real void in Washington DC.

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