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Pandemic Relief? Infrastructure Is the Far Bigger Prize.

The payoff for states and localities from federal infrastructure legislation is likely to be many times more than COVID stimulus aid. Governors and local leaders need to play their cards wisely.

The first major fiscal legislation to come out of the Biden era will likely be some version of its pandemic stimulus bill, already in the congressional hopper. States and local governments are almost certain to receive some level of federal aid, though nobody will be surprised if the number gets trimmed by GOP opposition and the compromise efforts of moderates in both houses.

But while governors, mayors and other local government officials cannot help but lobby fiercely for immediate help for their 2021 budgets, those numbers are chump change compared with what is potentially coming down the pike for infrastructure funding. The federal dollars at stake for the Biden administration's forthcoming infrastructure bill are likely to be five to 10 times greater than the pending stimulus bill will provide, if intergovernmental public-finance strategists play their cards wisely.

So state and local government leaders and their policy associations will be smart to immediately lay out and buttress their lobbying and advocacy plans for the infrastructure bill. To deflect and rebut newly reborn congressional deficit hawks, a fallback tax plan to pay for the federal share will require both savvy and moxie, and the state and local lobbyists would do well to be in the room for those discussions as well.

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