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Would Trump's Infrastructure Plan Fix America's Cities?

Public-works projects have historically improved urbanites' access to opportunity and quality of life. But they've also helped the privileged at the expense of the marginalized.

Throughout his campaign, and again in the wake of his victory, President-elect Donald Trump pledged to rebuild America's infrastructure. "We are going to fix our inner cities and rebuild our highways, bridges, tunnels, airports, schools, hospitals," he said on election night, promising to put millions of people to work building an infrastructure that would be "second to none." In the weeks since his election, infrastructure has emerged as a potential bipartisan meeting ground for Trump and national Democrats. Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, for one, said recently that Trump's trillion-dollar plan "sounded good" to him.

But would a federal infrastructure plan be good for America's cities? Infrastructure has played a crucial—yet at times problematic—role in the making, and remaking, of the modern American city. Public works have expanded access to essential goods and to economic opportunities, and they have contributed to universal improvements in the standard of living. But they have also conferred advantages on privileged parts of American society at the expense of the marginalized—a history the Trump administration would do well to consider as it plans for the future. For cities to continue growing and innovating, they need an infrastructure capable of serving as a platform for sustainable development. And they need an infrastructure that serves everyone.

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