
Localities Will Deliver the Next Wave of Transportation Investment.

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing consensus that the United States should boost investment in transportation infrastructure, but simply throwing more money at projects overlooks a crucial trend: the United States is moving into an era where more of the agenda setting and funding responsibilities are falling to local governments.

This is a natural evolution. Cities, counties, and regional governments have long had major investment responsibilities within the national transportation system: they maintain the most roadway mileage in the country, they operate most of the country's transit systems, and they own and operate most sea ports and airports. But local governments are also especially attuned to local needs. Their ability to plan and design infrastructure upgrades in light of their long-term economic development priorities have built support for some of the country's most ambitious transportation investments in recent memory, from committing over $100 billion in Los Angeles county to flexible bond issuances in Denver and Atlanta.

Yet not every locality starts from a position of strength when planning and paying for transportation improvements.[1] Fiscal conditions are far from ideal in many places, especially in those cities that still have not seen their General Fund revenues return to levels seen before the Great Recession.[2] Meanwhile, a 2016 national survey of city finance officers found infrastructure needs are a top source of fiscal burden.[3] Combined with changing demands to how people travel and how businesses and people purchase goods, many places face deep uncertainties on how to both maintain today's assets and find resources to make sensible investments for the future.

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