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Trump's Infrastructure Plan Puts Workers at the Bottom. They Should Be at the Top.

Less than two weeks after President Trump's State of the Union in which he declared that "American heart, American hands, and American grit" would rebuild the country's infrastructure, workers barely register in his administration's newly-released infrastructure plan. Out of the plan's 53 pages, it is not until page 51 that workforce development even gets covered, with little public attention beyond that. Instead, the vast majority of the plan focuses on reforming permits to get projects done more quickly and new programs to boost infrastructure investment.

Given the ongoing need for infrastructure investment nationally, it's not surprising to see new funding and financing strategies gaining most of the limelight. But relegating workers to the bottom of the plan underplays the enormous opportunity for future infrastructure programs to promote shared prosperity.

In an economic era defined by inequality, infrastructure jobs offer one of the more stable, competitive career pathways to workers across all skill levels. The infrastructure sector employs over 14.5 million workers, most of who fill long-term, good-paying jobs with low barriers to entry. Moreover, there is a huge need to hire and train a new generation of workers in transit agencies, water utilities, and other sectors experiencing a wave of retirement in coming years. Even though a huge boost in construction hiring seems unlikely given the robust labor market at the moment, the presence of infrastructure jobs in every corner of the country makes workforce development an obvious candidate for federal action.

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Feb 28, 2018

The Brookings Institute

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