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Detroit Showed What ‘Build Back Better’ Can Look Like.

The city’s 2013 bankruptcy ushered in a new era of problem-solving that could be a model for a national infrastructure push, says one philanthropic leader.

American cities stand at a precipice. Burdened by an overwhelming public health crisis, drained of resources by economic stagnation and torn apart by racial injustice and unrest, cities are confronting the reality that conventional formulas of municipal finance and practices of working cannot sustain our urban places.

The significance of this moment was not lost on the Biden-Harris administration, which quickly advanced an ambitious mandate commensurate with the challenge: a domestic Marshall Plan called Build Back Better. Already, the first prong — the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan — has helped shore up city budgets, restore desperately needed funding for public transportation and keep businesses open and families in homes. The second leg, the \$2 trillion American Jobs Plan, represents a bold shift from short-term recovery to long-term transformation.

Significantly, the plan defines “infrastructure” broadly, encompassing more than the rebuilding of bridges, tunnels and roads or the replacement of dangerous lead-based pipes. It includes the expansion of newer technologies such as broadband and electric car charging stations that make cities more resilient to climate change. And it proposes investments in “soft infrastructure,” the reimagining of numerous forms of home, health and family care that, while every bit as essential to communities as hard infrastructure, is too often left out of the conversation.

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