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What Regional Leaders Want From Biden's Infrastructure Bill.

Federal infrastructure policy has the power to transform America's cities and suburbs, including where they grow and who benefits from federal investments. But leaders in Washington can't achieve that transformative impact without understanding the needs of regional leaders who grapple with infrastructure challenges every day.

Today, we are living with the legacies of the federal government's last grand infrastructure vision developed over the past century. Transportation investments such as the interstate highway system and port expansions boosted business competitiveness and accelerated the development of suburban housing, but also uprooted families and increased pollution. The National Flood Insurance Program and other environmental regulations aimed to reduce climate risks in neighborhoods, but often failed to insulate households from harm—particularly, homes constructed in flood plains and sensitive coastal areas. Too often, 20th century federal policies incentivized metropolitan economies to expand outward but did not offer enough flexible resources to help independent jurisdictions coordinate regional strategies.

Now with a major congressional negotiation on infrastructure underway and a new presidential administration in place, federal leaders have a historic opportunity to revisit past policies to better support today's metropolitan leaders and their contemporary ambitions. That process, though, must start with a clear understanding of what regional leaders need—and not just infrastructure agencies, but also the business leadership and community groups that all collaborate to build competitive, inclusive, and resilient economies.

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