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# An Infrastructure Plan for America

How Investing in Infrastructure Will Lay the Foundation for Prosperity, Advance Environmental Goals, and Rebuild the Middle Class

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# Introduction and summary

*Rhetoric is a poor substitute for action, and we have trusted only to rhetoric.  
If we are really to be a great nation, we must not merely talk; we must act big.*  
Theodore Roosevelt<sup>1</sup>

*The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done, but cannot do at all, or cannot so well do, for themselves—in their separate, and individual capacities.*  
Abraham Lincoln<sup>2</sup>

Infrastructure is the foundation that makes everything in the U.S. economy possible. Infrastructure is also essential to our national competitiveness. When done right, infrastructure investments produce broad-based prosperity for American businesses and workers, facilitating social mobility and enabling access to opportunities, people, and ideas.

At every stage in our national development, infrastructure has played an essential role. Yet, today, many of our most valuable and productive national assets are coming to the end of their useful life and are in need of major repairs or reconstruction. Moreover, our growing population will require system expansion. For too long we have ignored the rising backlog of maintenance, preferring a reactive, patchwork approach that struggles to respond when critical systems fail—often without warning. That is why it is time to build the next generation of American infrastructure that will power our economy in the 21st century.

The need for investment is overwhelming. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, American infrastructure across all sectors needs more than \$3 trillion in investment to both bring systems up to a state of good repair and accommodate population growth.<sup>3</sup>

In order to advance effective infrastructure policy that addresses current concerns and meets future needs, Congress should take the following three steps:

1. Increase annual federal expenditures across infrastructure sectors by a total of \$500 billion over 10 years—fiscal year 2017 to FY 2026—through a combination of increased user fees and tax code changes to raise general fund revenues
2. Establish a national infrastructure investment authority, or NIIA, to provide competitive grant funds, low-cost financing, and expedited environmental review and permitting for infrastructure projects of regional or national significance
3. Reform federal infrastructure programs to increase accountability and ensure that each dollar produces the greatest possible social, environmental, and economic return on investment

The concrete and steel that make up infrastructure projects are prosaic elements of our daily lives. However, they reflect the deeply American tradition of always looking to the future and making thoughtful investments that will pay dividends for generations to come. Taken together, the investments detailed in this report will serve as a significant down payment on America's continued economic prosperity. Moreover, investing in infrastructure will provide for more strong, middle-class jobs capable of supporting a family, with money left over to save for the future. Finally, the policy reforms will address many of the shortcomings of existing programs, ensuring that increased federal outlays are well spent.

Now is the time to put rhetoric aside and act big.

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## Our Values

As progressives, we believe America should be a land of boundless opportunity, where people can climb the ladder of economic mobility. We believe we owe it to future generations to protect the planet and promote peace and shared global prosperity.

And we believe an effective government can earn the trust of the American people, champion the common good over narrow self-interest, and harness the strength of our diversity.

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We develop new policy ideas, challenge the media to cover the issues that truly matter, and shape the national debate. With policy teams in major issue areas, American Progress can think creatively at the cross-section of traditional boundaries to develop ideas for policymakers that lead to real change. By employing an extensive communications and outreach effort that we adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape, we move our ideas aggressively in the national policy debate.

