

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Infrastructure Principles

Our nation's infrastructure consists of the arteries that move people, goods, and information across our country and the spaces necessary for people to thrive. A strong and safe infrastructure network is critically important to the growth of our economy and the overall well-being of each and every American. This is especially true for Americans in low-income and otherwise vulnerable communities struggling to access the rest of the world.

The Congressional Black Caucus has developed the following infrastructure principles to help guide this Congress on building a stronger, more effective nation that works for every American—not just a select few.

- 1. Redefining Infrastructure.** In the traditional sense, the term “infrastructure” has been largely understood to include our transportation infrastructure (roads, bridges, rails, airports, ports/waterways), electrical grid, telecommunications (landline phone, cable, satellite), and public buildings. A 21st Century economy demands a broader, more inclusive definition to ensure that we are fully considering all of our infrastructure needs. A newer definition should be expanded to include the following: sidewalks and other pedestrian infrastructure; bike lanes and other cycling infrastructure; energy-efficient and safe housing; broadband; educational facilities, including access to traditional universities and community colleges, as well as Historically Black Colleges and Universities; health care facilities and connections to health care services; forest roads and hiking/bike trails; parks; safe and affordable drinking water; waste removal and treatment facilities; and programs connecting seniors to their communities.
- 2. Providing Robust, Long-Term Federal Funding.** Any legislation to rebuild our nation's crumbling infrastructure must include robust funding provided over the long term—delivering reliable infrastructure requires the certainty and confidence that can only come through a federal statute that guarantees federal dollars for many years. Privatizing our nation's infrastructure revitalization would shift the burden to cash-strapped states and cities while leaving out communities with the greatest need: rural and low-income populations. Additionally, states and cities are less likely to take a regional approach to investment, which is critical to ensuring national connectivity. Any infrastructure legislation must take a thoughtful approach to public-private partnerships (P3s). These arrangements are often more expensive than conventionally funded projects, with limited competition and potential conflicts of interest. In limited circumstances, P3s can accelerate the delivery of high-cost, complex projects. They can only succeed if private businesses are truly sharing risks and profits with taxpayers, public ownership is maintained, and the projects are held to the same standards as traditionally funded projects for labor, consumer and environmental protections, as well as Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) participation. Additionally, to ensure public needs are prioritized over private returns, any P3 process must require a finding of public interest determined according to a transparent public process.
- 3. Connecting People with Opportunity.** No matter how state-of-the-art, infrastructure only serves its purpose if it effectively connects people with the places and resources they need to build human capital and live better lives. Federal infrastructure investment must prioritize and incentivize projects that will result in as many Americans as possible being able to more easily and safely access good jobs, health care, education, housing, and all of the necessary components of the American Dream. All economic development must be infrastructure-oriented, and all

infrastructure must be economic development-oriented. This interconnected infrastructure and economic development must be truly inclusive of poor, rural, disability, and elderly communities. Bringing opportunity to areas that have experienced persistent poverty must be a priority. All infrastructure investments should seek to promote the social determinants of health—including conditions in which people are born, grow, and live; socioeconomic status; education; employment; and social support networks—which have been too often neglected at great cost to minority health outcomes. Opportunity has been hindered for far too long for some of our nation’s most vulnerable populations by dangerous and unhealthy living conditions caused by lead, asbestos, PFAS, and other dangerous chemicals. As we invest in affordable housing across the country, we must ensure no harmful toxins threaten the safety and well-being of our communities. A 21st Century economy must not exclude individuals from full participation on the basis of demographics, geography, or financial means.

4. **Promoting Inclusion in Infrastructure Building.** Often, the economic benefit generated by infrastructure construction does not accrue to the poorest communities, and the infrastructure workforce traditionally lacks gender and racial diversity. Minority contractors and local small businesses are the backbone of our economies and should have the opportunity to rebuild their communities and employ hardworking Americans along the way, while growing their businesses and benefiting from direct and indirect investments. Infrastructure investments should be disseminated through a transparent procurement process with aggressive contracting goals for DBEs and MBEs and effective enforcement to root out fraudulent firms and ensure that subcontracting and hiring commitments are being met. Contractors and subcontractors should have the ability to employ local hiring preferences and subcontractors should receive prompt payment when services are rendered. Meaningful community benefits agreements are an essential tool to ensure these goals are met, and once agreed to, they must be adhered to. Any infrastructure package must also include innovative job training and workforce development initiatives to promote a diverse and inclusive labor pool—including young African Americans, foster youth, homeless youth, and other disadvantaged workers—with particular emphasis on developing the skilled technical workforce, commonly known as the “blue collar STEM” workforce. By ensuring all individuals are able to gain the skills they need to perform this work, and then ensuring they are hired for jobs taking advantage of the skills gained, we can provide equal opportunity for each and every American to contribute in meaningful ways to both the economy and the communities they call home.
5. **Building for Sustainability and Resilience.** The effects of climate change are already being felt through more intense storms, rising sea levels, storm surges, wildfires, and other extreme weather events; these effects disproportionately impact the most vulnerable. Combating climate change must be a priority in every infrastructure investment, and the full environmental impact of every project must be assessed before construction. The energy and transportation infrastructure policies we enact now will have community-altering consequences for many years to come. At the same time, even if we make all the right decisions from this point forward, changes in the climate will still occur that will place an immense strain on our nation’s infrastructure and the limited resources that we have to build and maintain it. As we plan for the future and conceptualize how we will build up our infrastructure, we need to consider the long-term viability of these projects to ensure that they are resilient to extreme weather. We must also invest in flood prevention, fire protection, and other initiatives to protect vulnerable communities from disasters.
6. **Planning Multi-modal Transportation Networks.** A robust transportation network must consider the changing demographics of its users and the subsequent changes in demand.

Conventional transportation planning relies heavily on motor vehicle traffic. However, many communities—particularly in urban areas—must now consider pedestrians, cyclists, public transit riders, ridesharing, and other users when evaluating the effectiveness of the transportation ecosystem. In addition to taking current users of these modes of transportation into account, federal policy must also promote opportunities—including in non-urban areas—for those who may wish to walk, bike, or ride public transit but are currently limited in their ability to do so by a lack of safe and accessible infrastructure.

- 7. Future-Proofing for All.** The development and adoption of autonomous vehicles, positive train control, NextGen, Smart City planning, 5G, and other technologies is vastly altering the way we conceptualize, plan, and execute infrastructure policy. The unique challenges that we face as a nation will only grow increasingly more complex as the population grows and the nature of our infrastructure becomes more interconnected. Any infrastructure package must not only address the immediate needs of our crumbling system, but also anticipate the needs of generations to come in all communities.

Infrastructure impacts every American—regardless of background, economic status, or political affiliation. The Congressional Black Caucus welcomes the opportunity to work cooperatively with our Republican and Democratic colleagues on these principles so that we can keep America moving forward to the benefit of communities across the United States, as well as present and future generations.

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