

## Oregon's infrastructure needs are vast

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Nearly 10 years ago, the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department (now known as Business Oregon) worked with special districts and local governments across the state to gain a better understanding of Oregon's public infrastructure needs.

Public infrastructure means things like schools, airports, water and sewer systems, communications systems, roads, bridges and highways.

At the time the review was complete, these governments identified nearly \$30 billion in needed maintenance, modernization or new construction to bring Oregon's public infrastructure up to a quality that would increase public safety, as well as improve the quality of life for all Oregonians. Today, the need and the costs only continue to increase.

Unfortunately, we have become accustomed to seeing the subpar conditions of our roads and bridges, watching public buildings deteriorate, reading about water systems that fail, and dealing every day with increasing traffic congestion caused by too many people moving into a region with a transportation system that is too small.

For the construction industry, while projects are in progress all year, summer is the key season to work on Oregon's infrastructure system. And make no mistake about it: the volume of work needed to keep our highways, roads, bridges, dams, levees, solid waste plants and aviation systems in good repair is enormous.

Oregon has 7,656 bridges and 74,493 miles of roadway. Per the American Society of Civil Engineer's Infrastructure Report Card, these roads and bridges are rated a C-, which is slightly better than the nation's overall infrastructure rating of a D+.

Approximately 23 percent of our bridges are either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. With existing funding mechanisms, Oregon's bridges will become structurally deficient at a rate of 25 per year by the year 2018. Of the state's 59,262 public roads, 7,841 are major roads, and 6 percent are in poor condition. Without a comparable increase in funding, road conditions will continue to deteriorate even faster.

The outlook is bleak for many of our state's systems as well. Located mostly in rural Oregon, 61 dams across the state are considered high hazard. Our drinking water systems will require \$5.6 billion in infrastructure needs over the next 20 years and our wastewater systems will require \$3.8 billion in new investments over the same time period. Oregon's schools have \$2.5 billion in estimated infrastructure needs and our public parks have over \$21 million of unmet needs.

Historically, Oregon has been a state based on natural resources extraction. To support this economic base, a strong physical infrastructure of roads, bridges, railroads, water supply, wastewater, and electrical transmission systems was built, and its maintenance has been essential to our economic success.

We now face a crossroads. The economic base of the past is no longer supporting the state and the initial investment made by the postwar generation in our state's roads, bridges, power lines, water systems and wastewater treatment plants is now reaching the end of its useful life.

The ultimate solution to this failing infrastructure is expensive. It will take billions of dollars to replace and repair all of the failing pipes, bridges, roads and dams throughout the state. The need to invest in our state's infrastructure system is not — and should not be — a partisan issue. Investment in any kind of public infrastructure is a public duty. Finding resources to pay for infrastructure maintenance, modernization and operations is a fundamental obligation of government — arguably one of the most important obligations our government has.

Right now the economy is doing fairly well, but there are sectors that are still recovering from the "Great Recession" of 2007–2013. Companies have become very lean, profit margins are tight and costs are increasing. Additionally, we are facing a serious fiscal problem in Oregon: while public revenues are up, costs to government driven by the Affordable Care Act and increasing retirement system costs mean we are still more than \$1 billion short of what we need to just maintain what we are currently doing.

Oregon has always been a leader in creative and innovative ways to meet the needs of our people while maintaining a world-class quality of life. We have been blessed by the presence of people with vision willing to step forward, work with others, and craft a state we are proud to call home and that is an example for other states — indeed, other nations — around the world.

Today, in a world that has developed a global economy, Oregon's need for such vision and leadership is even more urgent. While we should have confidence that the work to meet our infrastructure challenges will be done, it needs to begin now.

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