

Infrastructure



Circulatory System of Our Democracy

any reduction of investment leads to lost revenue opportunities.

The U.S. is hardly a leader in infrastructure spending compared to its peers. The Council on Foreign Relations stated that “U.S. lags behind other developed countries in infrastructure spending.” ([Council on Foreign Relations](#)) What this means in more concrete terms is transportation, energy, internet, and water sanitization systems are in a poor state.

“One in four bridges are deficient, with 10 percent categorized as structurally deficient and 14 percent categorized as functionally obsolete,” says the [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#). Furthermore, the digital divide not only persists, but also remains woefully wide. The vast majority of poor and rural Americans remain without access to the internet, a particularly serious problem in South Carolina.

The lack of action to resolve this problem is a result of faulty access data from internet service providers. Their current metric is that if a single person in a census block has access, then the agency assumes total access for all members of that block. A census block which is 0.69 - 0.92 acres minimum has no maximum size. In an urban area, a census block could encompass hundreds of families. The Federal Communications Commission, in its 2020 Broadband Deployment Report, indicated that “the true number of people without broadband access is 42 million or even as high as 162 million.”

South Carolina

South Carolina fares little better. In his 2020 State of the State address on January 22, 2020, Gov. Henry McMaster mentioned the health and expansion of the Port of Charleston and other inland ports as economic drivers, but did not mention the vast digital divide between poor and affluent, rural and urban citizens in terms of their access to broadband internet.

Infrastructure goes beyond mundane projects like roads and bridges. It protects the health and safety of citizens through clean water & sewage treatment. It drives economies through freight, commerce, tax revenue, and tourism spending. It educates the electorate through access to internet resources and educational alternatives during the current pandemic crisis. It insures access to medical treatment, safe passage from natural disasters, and the protective services of police, fire fighters, or the military free from gridlock or distances too great for those of us without reliable means of transportation.

These basic needs and their accompanying services rely on a stable, modern, and protected infrastructure system. The United States and South Carolina are fairing very poorly compared to the rest of the developed world, and in South Carolina especially, we need to do better.

The U.S. currently ranks 13th in infrastructure in the world, according to the [World Economic Forum - The Global Competitiveness Report 2019](#), which notes that the U.S. is second only to Singapore in overall global competitiveness.

Infrastructure directly impacts overall economic health. The Business Roundtable noted that “an infrastructure investment boost by 1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) each year could generate \$320 billion in economic output in 2020 alone” ([Business Roundtable - Road to Growth](#)), thus

While Lieutenant Governor Pamela Evette is tasked with transportation governance, the American Society of Civil Engineers highlights troubling deficiencies in the Palmetto State's infrastructure systems.

Of the state's over 9,000 bridges, nearly 10 percent are deemed structurally deficient and 359 of the state's 2,343 dams are labeled as high-hazard potential. And, of our over 77,000 miles of public roads, 18 percent are in poor condition leading to motorist costs of \$557 per year.

The U.S. News & World Report ([Infrastructure Report Card](#)), which ranks states, placed South Carolina 36th with regard to its infrastructure.

In terms of energy, South Carolina sits in the middle of the pack (e.g. 26th in price, 28th in grid reliability, 26th in renewable energy usage).

While ultra-fast internet exists in population centers (17th), access is very limited (40th). Transportation is also a mixed bag, with an overall ranking of 35th (25th in commute time, 40th in public transit usage, 20th in road quality, and 32nd in bridge quality).

The Democratic Party's Approach

The Democratic party believes strongly that to progress as a nation we must have strong and modern infrastructure. Not only does that provide equal access to services, employment, education, health care, and general freedom of movement, it also ensures a strong and vibrant economy. In fact, strong infrastructure is a hallmark of the healthiest economies in the developed world.

The impact on the health and well-being of all American citizens is dependent upon safe roads, clean and reliable energy grids, pollution controls, effective transportation systems, public transit, and high-speed internet access.

Issues of social justice, the environment, unemployment reduction, and education all tie to our nation's infrastructure. By directly addressing our crumbling infrastructure we can provide good paying jobs, equal opportunity, reduce the impact of and the rate of acceleration of climate change, and provide

high quality instruction to all students during the unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

South Carolinians deserve elected officials who recognize the real dangers of inaction with regards to our infrastructure: increased flooding, displaced citizens due to storm damage, students unable to access remote learning, increased highway fatalities, traffic congestion, unsafe drinking water, and an unreliable energy grid during record heat waves.

South Carolina's population is the sixth fastest growing in the U.S. How can we maintain the current level of infrastructure at this rate without significant and immediate investment? The short and only answer is: We can't.

The Democratic party is the only political party willing to do what's needed to improve our aging roads, bridges, harbors, waterway, airports, energy grids, broadband internet, and water treatment and make sure that all citizens benefit from them.

Sources:

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