

Meet Our Infrastructure Needs

By Algernon Austin

Despite being a very rich country, US infrastructure is far from world-class. The World Economic Forum rated US infrastructure significantly worse than all countries in Western Europe and also behind Canada. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), American infrastructure is “mediocre,” “show[ing] general signs of deterioration,” and “exhibit[ing] significant deficiencies.” ASCE gives American infrastructure a C grade. The Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021 (also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) was a step in the right direction, but it was only enough to move US infrastructure from a C- to a C grade.

As long as the United States continues to underinvest in infrastructure, Americans will face worse health, safety, and economic productivity outcomes than would be the case with good quality infrastructure.

The United States needs greater infrastructure investments:

- As a percentage of GDP, the United States invests about half as much on transportation as France, Italy, Japan, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
- The growing use of artificial intelligence and cryptocurrencies place increasing strain on our energy systems which are only rated a D+ grade by ASCE.
- Infrastructure graded D+ or below: Aviation, Dams, Energy, Levees, Roads, Schools, Transit, and Wastewater.
- Over half of the nation’s water systems need rehabilitation and replacement. Because of our aging water infrastructure, breaks and leaks cause the US water system to lose over 100 billion cubic meters of water annually, wasting nearly \$200 billion.
- In 2020, the Government Accountability Office found that 41 percent of school districts needed investments in school heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems.
- The US Chamber of Commerce finds that every \$1 invested making infrastructure resilient to climate disasters saves \$13 due to reduced damage after the disaster and saved economic output.

Solution: Invest More in Infrastructure

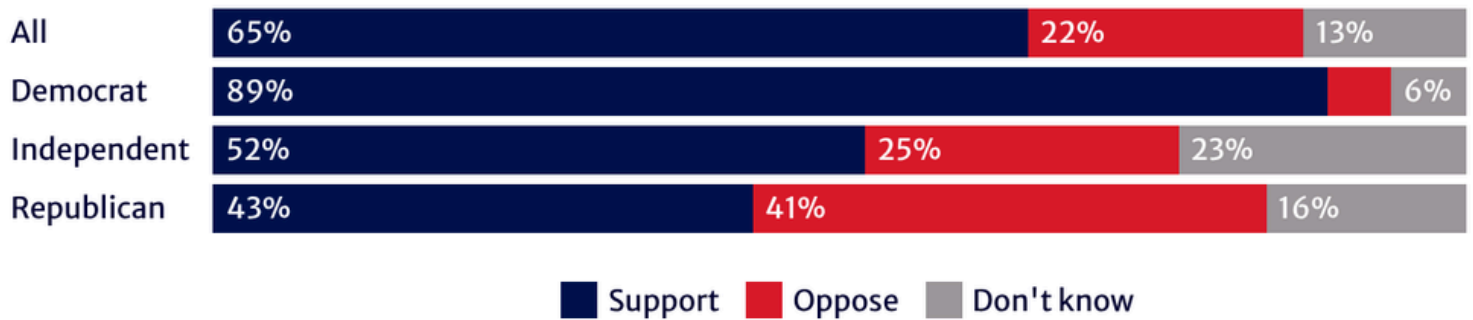
ASCE provides a clear guideline for how much investments are needed in which areas. The United States made infrastructure investments with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the IIJA, and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. The efficiency and effectiveness of these investments should be studied to help determine best practices. Countries with better infrastructure ratings like Canada, Denmark, and Switzerland should also be studied to see if there are any lessons to be learned.

Public Support

Only a third of Americans are satisfied with the state of the country's infrastructure. On the other hand, multiple polls show that a majority of the American people recognize the need for greater infrastructure investments and are in favor of making those investments.

A Majority of Americans Support Investing in Infrastructure

Share of registered voters who support or oppose the goals of the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law



Source: Navigator Research, November 9–13, 2023 survey of registered voters.



With smart and sufficient investments, US infrastructure can be as good as that found in Western Europe. The people of the United States would experience better health and safety, and a better quality of life. Given that the United States is a very rich country, it can afford to make the needed investments.

Resources:

- [Global Infrastructure Index](#), Ipsos, July 2024.
- [A Comprehensive Assessment of America's Infrastructure](#), The American Society of Civil Engineers, 2025.
- [The Historic Opportunities for Racial Equity in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#), Anaïs Goubert and Algernon Austin, CEPR, February 2, 2022.
- [How Federal Investments in Safe Drinking Water Infrastructure Are Improving Public Health](#), Center for American Progress, February 5, 2024.
- [Appalachian Climate Infrastructure Plan](#), ReImagine Appalachia, March 9, 2021.