

*“In this time of economic prosperity we are not spending money to repair, maintain, and improve infrastructure. If not now, when?” Louisville Session**

Growing Needs

- Although Americans spend \$59 billion every year for clean water, the country faces an annual shortfall of \$23 billion.
- Metro areas have grown from 9 to 19% of U.S. land area since 1960.
- From 1970 to 1990, more than 30,000 square miles (19 million acres) of once rural land in the U.S. became urban.
- As development extends outward from the core, city infrastructure service and maintenance costs increase exponentially.

Lacking Infrastructure

- Approximately 17 million people in the U.S. are served by sub-standard facilities.
- Public infrastructure investments have declined from 3.9% of the Federal budget in 1960 to 2.6% today. Of this amount, the share for water resources has declined from 1 to .2%.
- Approximately 900 U.S. cities have combined sanitary and sewer systems, creating sewage overflows during major storms.
- The U.S. has more than 74,000 dams, of which approximately 2,000 are owned by the Federal government. The average age of the dams is 40 years.
- Approximately 1,600 significant hazard dams are within one mile of a downstream city
- The U.S. has about 450,000 brownfield sites encompassing 5 million-acres.

**Topics in this paper were identified at 16 Listening Sessions between June and November 2000. The purposes of the Listening Sessions were to start a dialogue and to provide citizens an opportunity to tell us what they believed the Federal role should be in addressing water resources.*

Developing the water supply for an expanding population

Participants at the listening sessions spoke of environmental, economic, and quality-of-life concerns related to population growth, land use changes, and infrastructure planning and investment. Often these concerns centered around developing sufficient water supply for an increasing population. Several participants noted that increasing urban development can negatively impact water quality. Participants at all of the listening sessions expressed concerns about overall water resources infrastructure in the United States. They noted that current infrastructure is not meeting needs and that this situation was placing property, lives, and livelihoods at risk.

A major issue was the perceived lack of funding available to meet infrastructure maintenance and new construction needs. As a result, many participants discussed the importance of funding prioritization.



Clean drinking water is basic for life. The infrastructures of many communities are old and are being tested by growth.

Several commented that an objective system of project prioritization was necessary to identify the most vital national concerns. A few participants believed that political influence skewed the prioritization of infrastructure development. Some participants expressed the opinion that too many infrastructure projects were benefiting local special interests and that care should be taken to fund only projects that are truly in the Nation's interest. Some felt that growth should be controlled to prevent new problems through strict land use regulation. Others believed that more planning and infrastructure investment are needed for inevitable population growth. The unintended subsidization of unsustainable sprawl-type growth by government programs was a concern voiced by several participants.

Comments from the Listening Sessions

“The most important challenges facing the nation is aging infrastructure, urban sprawl, combined sewer overflows, dam maintenance, and stressed water supply systems.” State Government, Woburn Session

“Develop public awareness of the competitive uses of water so that people can make informed choices of the trade-offs.” Dallas Session

“Equitable distribution of resources while taking into consideration historical issues (lessons learned from past mistakes).” Atlanta Session

“Many communities lack safe drinking water and sewer systems.” Atlanta Session

“Provide adequate infrastructure so infrastructure can keep up with economic growth and while conserving the environment.” Anchorage Session

“Protect water supplies from contamination resulting from increasing development.” Honolulu Session

Others noted the backlog of infrastructure construction and maintenance, with some stating that a moratorium on new project authorizations was necessary.

Many participants believed that the Federal government should provide more funding for infrastructure projects. They thought that the Federal government should take more responsibility for maintaining projects that the Corps has constructed and should also be available to assist in maintenance of non-Federal projects. Several participants felt that the Federal government should provide more infrastructure funding assistance to rural and poor communities. A few participants suggested that the private sector could help support infrastructure needs. Some participants expressed opinions about brownfields cleanup, noting that cleaning up and reusing such properties could boost the local economy, help prevent sprawl-type development, make use of existing infrastructure, and reduce contaminant runoff that could end up in dredge material.

According to some participants, maintenance of aging infrastructure should be a priority, as it can be more expensive to replace completely debilitated projects than to maintain them. Several participants were concerned that older infrastructure is no longer fulfilling current needs, however, and felt that these projects should be “deauthorized” or modified for other purposes. In particular, participants noted that older infrastructure often does not serve environmental needs. Several advocated that construction and maintenance projects be designed for multiple purposes whenever possible.

Regional Concerns:

Participants in Anchorage, Alaska were especially concerned with a lack of basic infrastructure funding in rural communities. Another important Alaskan issue was the deterioration of sections of infrastructure due to lack of maintenance of other infrastructure components and brownfields cleanup in remote, rural areas were concerns raised in Anchorage, Alaska.

Americans say the Federal government should:

- Develop an objective infrastructure project prioritization system.
- Increase financial assistance for water infrastructure in poor and rural communities.
- Consider multi-purpose water resources projects.
- Fund upgrades to water/sewer systems in older urban areas and fund development in growing areas.
- Assist states and local governments in developing “smart growth” programs that balance protection for the environment, economy, and quality of life.
- Encourage development practices that minimize environmental impacts.
- Provide funds for buying and cleaning brownfields.

Development of recreation infrastructure such as parking areas and concessions was a concern for Washington, D.C. participants. In Dallas, Texas, many were concerned about the impacts of population growth on existing infrastructure.

People in Atlanta, Georgia commented on the need to plan for sustainable water resources, transportation, and economic growth. New Brunswick, New Jersey participants focused on urbanized waterfront issues, including flooding, brownfields, and environmental justice.



Investments in urban water systems provide a return on investment to the environment, public health and the economy.