

The Long Strange List of Industries Pushing for Improved Infrastructure—But Is It Enough?

The Trump administration's infrastructure package has garnered lots of attention from the traditional constituencies like labor unions and the construction and engineering firms that build roads and bridges. State and local governments focused on airport improvements and water projects are also watching closely. But the list of stakeholders is much broader than that.

Here's a sampling of the diverse list of industries focused on the potential infrastructure legislation:

Telecommunications: Rural broadband has become a reliable part of most infrastructure plans over the last several years. Telecom providers are watching closely to see if these government subsidized programs will compete with private companies providing broadband services—or if new broadband will be focused on unserved areas only. The impact of new federal funding in this arena will be determined in large part by the definition of “underserved” or “unserved” and the judgment that is made about what acceptable broadband speeds are.

Tourism: The tourism industry relies on people (i.e., customers) being able to travel efficiently to travel destinations. Areas that rely on tourism will benefit from better roads and improved airports and therefore they are tracking the legislation. Companies that benefit from the traveling public—either domestic visitors or international jetsetters—are pushing for improved infrastructure without additional fees and costs piled onto tourists.

Environmentalists: One proposal in the administration's infrastructure package is streamlined permitting. Environmental groups are concerned this could lead to reduced environmental review or limits on the ability to raise environmental objections to infrastructure projects that have environmental impact. There is consensus that permitting can take too long, but the details of fixing that problem are much more controversial.

Technology Companies: The administration's proposal highlights “transformative projects” that could include high-tech demonstration efforts like autonomous vehicles and smart city initiatives. Technology companies want to be at the table if this funding comes through.

Financial Services: Banks that provide loans, bonding and other financing for state and local governments are focused on how the package would impact their industry. Will public/private partnerships fundamentally change the equation? Or will more traditional funding be used for these projects?

The litany of companies watching this infrastructure package closely—and rooting for its passage—should give it momentum because of the potential impact for so many varied industries. Traditionally, a strong coalition like this would push legislation forward. The fact that the outlook for infrastructure is still so uncertain signals the significant hurdles that the package faces.

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