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TRUMP INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN CRITICAL BUT "NO IDEA" WHAT WILL DO, CITY PLANNERS TELL NATIONAL PRESS CLUB NEWSMAKER

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President Trump's infrastructure plan would make critical improvements in the nation's decaying infrastructure, the chief city planners of Philadelphia, Washington, and New York City all told a National Press Club Newsmaker Tuesday. However, they all agreed they have no idea what the actual plan will do, since neither President Trump nor any cabinet officer has told them. Club President Jeff Ballou opened the program by asking how the real infrastructure need meshes with "what President Trump laid out." Anne Fadullon, Philadelphia's Director of Planning and Development, offered, "We have no more information than you do."

Fadullon added, "Whether you get to a trillion dollars (President Trump's promised national number) depends what you count in the trillion. I'm cautiously optimistic. The hope is significant."

New York City's immediate past City Planning Chairman, Carl Weisbrod, said that "infrastructure has suffered from decades of disinvestment." He said that President Trump was correct to say that "tiles on the ceiling are missing in the Lincoln Tunnel." Weisbrod asserted, "Bridges and tunnels are in dire need."

The federal government should help with "direct federal funding rather than loans or tax credits," Weisbrod said. "Tax credits are more useful to new projects where there's a public-private partnership than crumbling infrastructure." Eric Shaw, DC's Director of the Office of Planning, said that there has been "flat federal funding" and "the government needs to be a partner."

Weisbrod and Shaw both agreed that infrastructure needs to protect from flooding and climate change. All three planners called for "green" programs. Each used the term.

All three planners also agreed that they are ready to fix infrastructure, and they need immediate help before long term. "If we can't support the infrastructure we have now, how can we support future infrastructure," Fadullon stated.

Fadullon said that infrastructure funding has been "federal 15% and 65% city funding," with the remainder from private companies. Weisbrod and Shaw said their funding ratios were similar.

When asked how to work through earmark bans when the proposals go through the legislative process, Weisbrod said, "It requires revenue sharing with a flow to the cities, so each city determines its own priorities." Weisbrod and Fadullon stated that the Northeast Rail corridor was a priority. Fadullon talked about reconnecting her city's waterfront with the city.

The three planners said that updating current city transit systems was a priority. In addition, they agreed infrastructure spending if direct federal funds will create many jobs in current construction and a better future economy. They said that a better rail system and subway will allow people to get to their jobs. Fadullon added that, for as many as 75-85% of the city's residents, better public transit would "improve access to their jobs. It has huge jobs potential."

When asked if protection against cyberattacks on power and water system grids would be an important part of infrastructure, Weisbrod said yes, but added that the New York City Police have been outstanding in this area.