



City planners call infrastructure improvements critical; don't know Trump's plan

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President Donald Trump's infrastructure plan could make critical improvements in the nation's decaying infrastructure, the chief city planners of Philadelphia, Washington, and New York City told a National Press Club Newsmaker March 7.

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." Trump was correct to say that "tiles on the ceiling are missing in the Lincoln Tunnel," he said. "Bridges and tunnels are in dire need," Weisbrod asserted.

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, D.C.'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.

All three planners also agreed they were 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 her infrastructure funding has been "federal 15 percent and 65 percent city funding," with the remainder from private companies. Weisbrod and Shaw said their ratios were similar.

When asked about earmarks in legislation, which specify and limit use of funds, Weisbrod said of the best procedure, "It requires revenue sharing with a flow to the cities, so each city determines its own priorities." Weisbrod and Fadullon both agreed the Northeast Rail corridor was a priority. Fadullon talked about reconnecting her city's waterfront with the city.

All three planners said that updating current city transit systems was a priority. In addition, they agreed infrastructure spending—if by direct federal funds—will create jobs in current construction and a better future economy. A better rail system and subway would allow people to get to their jobs, all three agreed. In Philadelphia, better public transit would "improve access to their jobs for 75 to 85 percent of workers It has huge jobs potential," Fadullon said.

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.