Infrastructure Index

WSP USA



INTRODUCTION

In November 2021, President Biden signed the $1 trillion Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act), which involves historic levels of federal funding for backbone systems that help the nation run. It aims to rebuild America's roads, bridges and rails; upgrade the electric grid; expand access to clean drinking water; ensure every American has access to high-speed internet; address bottlenecks at the nation's ports and airports; and promote sustainability, resilience and equity.

With a capital allocation of this magnitude, funding is still rolling out, and many state and local governments are still determining precisely what the bill could mean for them. It is important for civic leaders to understand public priorities and perceptions of how the funds might be spent, which can help identify opportunities to foster understanding and engagement.

To shed new light on issues surrounding this once-in-a-generation investment, WSP—a premiere professional services, engineering and design firm—commissioned a survey to develop the WSP Infrastructure Index. The survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll among more than 2,000 US adults.



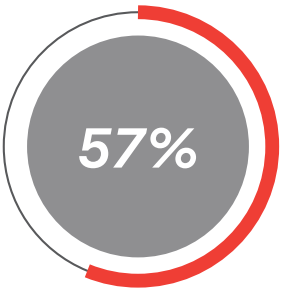
Lou Cornell,
President and CEO, WSP USA

“The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is designed to address long overdue infrastructure challenges, setting the stage for long-term growth and resilience. This provides an unprecedented opportunity to improve the lives of millions of people, yet a majority of Americans feel they don’t have enough of a say in how infrastructure budget is spent in their community,” said Lou Cornell, President and CEO, WSP USA. “With the WSP Infrastructure Index, we hope to provide insight into the priorities and concerns of people around the country, enabling decision-makers and planners to engage even more effectively. It is one way we are acting on our vision and commitment to help create more equitable, sustainable and Future Ready communities.”

TOP PUBLIC PRIORITIES FOR FUNDING

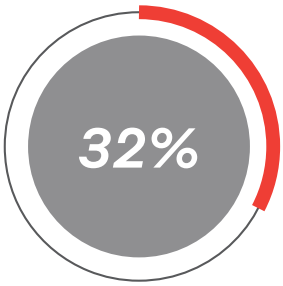
When asked for the two infrastructure spending priorities that top their list, Americans rate the following most highly:

Safety



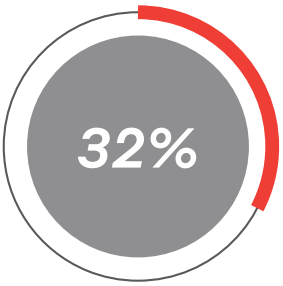
Projects most urgently in need of repair, no matter where they are located

Sustainability



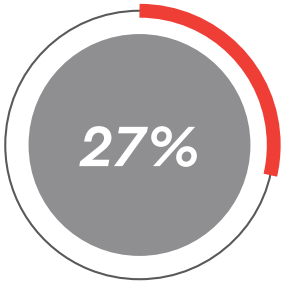
Projects that will make communities more sustainable and/or climate resilient

Access



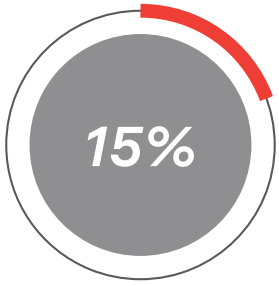
Projects that increase my ability to easily access work, school, medical care and other needs

Equity



Projects that improve equity and connect marginalized communities

Geography



Projects nearest my home

TOP AREAS OF CONCERN

Americans say they are somewhat or very concerned about the following infrastructure challenges:



Roads and bridges

Public safety on poorly designed and/or maintained roads and bridges

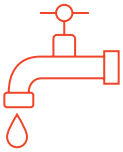
86%



Infrastructure-related supply chain challenges

The lack of availability of some products because of shipping delays in the nation's ports

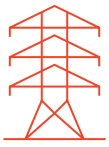
82%



Safe drinking water

The availability of safe drinking water, given aging pipes and climate and population pressures

80%



Electric grid

Reliable and sustainable electricity without service outages due to extreme weather or old power systems

79%



Sustainable rapid and rail transit

The lack of sustainable and rapid transportation via rail (e.g., subways, light rail, trains)

64%



KEY INSIGHT

What people prioritize

The WSP Infrastructure Index provides a clear signal about the ways Americans view infrastructure priorities and challenges. The research found a striking level of agreement on key issues, despite differences in geographic regions.

Key interests include:

Safety

86% of Americans are concerned about public safety on poorly designed and/or maintained roads and bridges. Additionally, ***57%*** of Americans believe that among the top priorities for infrastructure spending should be projects that are most urgently in need of repair, no matter where they are located – putting the public good significantly ahead of projects nearest their home (***15%***).

Quality

86% of Americans agree they want their community to invest more money now in quality infrastructure that will last a long time instead of saving money today with infrastructure that will need to be replaced sooner. This view was shared nearly equally across regions.

Equity

An overwhelming majority of Americans (***80%***) support equity in infrastructure spending, agreeing that "Every community should have access to quality infrastructure even if it means my community would get less funding so other communities can catch up."



FIVE UNEXPECTED FINDINGS

one.

Older generations are more likely to prioritize equity. Millennials (ages 26-41), Gen X (ages 42-57) and Boomers (ages 58-76), are more likely than Gen Z (ages 18-25) to believe every community should have access to quality infrastructure even if it means their community would get less funding so other communities can catch up (86%, 88% and 87% vs. 77%).

two.

Those with an annual household income (HHI) of more than $75k per year are significantly more likely than those with a HHI of less than $50k to prioritize spending on infrastructure that improves equity and connects marginalized communities (32% vs. 21%).

three.

Compared to younger age groups, people over the age of 65 are more concerned about infrastructure that will make communities more sustainable and/or climate resilient.

four.

More than half of Americans (56%) believe their community generally gets a fair share of funding for infrastructure compared to other communities and 60% trust their local government to spend the infrastructure budget on what is needed most.

five.

When comparing the views of parents with kids under 18 to those who do not have children, parents are more likely to say they are concerned about the lack of sustainable and rapid transportation via rail (e.g., subways, light rail, trains) (70% vs. 61%).

"At WSP, we work to ensure every project addresses challenges faced by historically underserved, marginalized and disinvested communities. So, I'm heartened by the WSP Infrastructure Index finding that an overwhelming majority of Americans, 80%, support equity in infrastructure spending, even if means their community would get less funding so other communities can catch up."



DENISE TURNER ROTH

Advisory national business line executive and director of WSP's Equity Center of Excellence

"The WSP Infrastructure Index confirms that the public prioritizes sustainable infrastructure solutions that are innovative enough to address tough challenges and resilient enough to stand the test of time. That's exactly what our Future Ready process is designed to deliver, since we can't afford to conduct business as usual any longer."



TOM LEWIS

Climate, resilience and sustainability executive lead at WSP USA

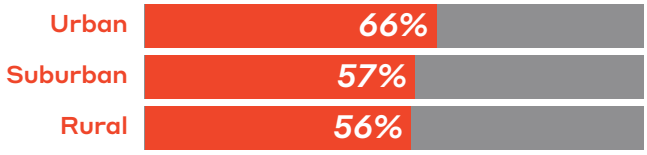
TRUST AND ENGAGEMENT

The research found that, by a relatively narrow majority, 60% of Americans trust local government prioritization and decision-making around infrastructure spending. However, nearly half (48%) don't feel sufficiently engaged in how the infrastructure budget is spent in their community.

Moreover, the WSP Infrastructure Index found that trust and engagement may be correlated. This suggests that government officials, civic leaders, community planners and others would do well to ensure infrastructure plans incorporate opportunities for input, particularly among groups that say they don't have enough of a voice.

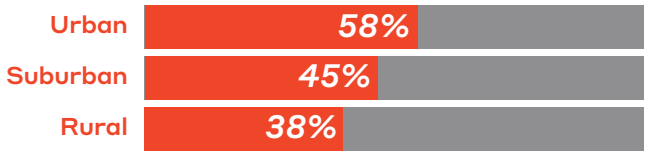
Trust

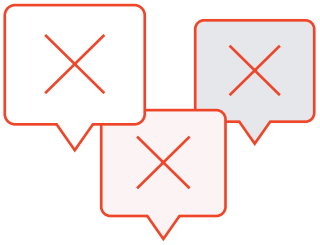
While a majority of Americans agree that "I trust my local government to spend the infrastructure budget on what is needed most," urban dwellers (66%) are more likely than those in suburban (57%) or rural (56%) communities to say this.



Engagement

That trust may be related to engagement, with 58% of urbanites saying they "have enough of a say in how infrastructure budget is spent in my community," with only 45% of suburban and 38% of rural residents agreeing.





The demographic groups more likely to report not having a sufficient voice on infrastructure priorities compared to their counterparts include women (44% vs. 52% of men), homeowners (45% vs. 53% of renters), those who aren't married (45% vs. 52% of those who are married), those who are not parents of children under 18 (41% vs. 60% of parents), Baby Boomers and Gen Xers (38% and 42% vs. 57% Gen Z and 62% Millennials) and those who are not employed (39% vs. 54% of those employed).

AGREEMENT ACROSS REGIONS

While the make-up of infrastructure can vary significantly from coast to coast, the WSP Infrastructure Index found areas of clear agreement across geographic regions.



Highlights include:

Valuing equity

The WSP Infrastructure Index found that Americans across all regions – Northeast and West (78% each) and South and Midwest (81% each) – value equity enough that they agree that "every community should have access to quality infrastructure even if it means my community would get less funding so other communities can catch up." This suggests that governmental and community leaders might do well to continue to explain how equity factors into their decision-making.

Valuing quality

In every region, a majority of Americans want to invest more money now in quality infrastructure that will stand the test of time, a view held by 86% of people in the West, Midwest, and South and 84% of those in the Northeast.

Trusting local government

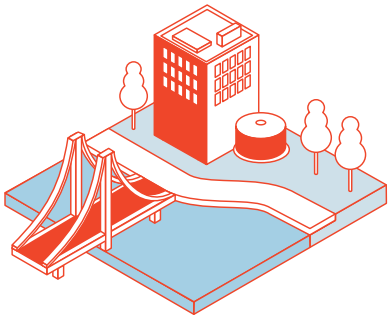
A majority in every region trust local government to spend the infrastructure budget on what is needed most, with 62% in the Northeast, 61% in the South, and 58% in both the Midwest and West.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

In a country as large as the US, it may not be surprising that there are some clear differences between regions – yet the specifics may not be what you expect.

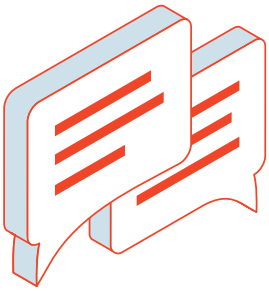
Highlights include:

Being set for growth



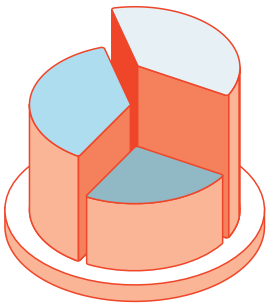
73% of those in the West say their community has the right quality infrastructure for the local economy to grow. 66% of residents in the Northeast and 68% in both the South and Midwest agree.

Having a say



People in the West (52%) are more likely than those in the Northeast (41%) to say that they "have enough of a say in how infrastructure budget is spent in my community." Those in the Midwest and South fall in between, with 48% saying they have enough of a voice on these issues.

Getting a fair share



Across the nation, a majority of people (56%) agree that, when it comes to infrastructure, their community "generally gets a fair share of funding for infrastructure compared to other communities." However, people in the West are more likely than those in the Midwest to strongly agree (27% vs. 18%).

WSP'S REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

West

"The WSP Infrastructure Index shows that the vast majority of Americans in the western United States are willing to pay more now for quality infrastructure that stands the test of time," said Christopher Peters, president of WSP's West region. "To deliver for our region, we need a range of innovative solutions that create Future Ready communities – from expanded access to safe drinking water to toll and congestion pricing to high-speed rail."



CHRISTOPHER PETERS
Western region president

Northeast

"WSP's Infrastructure Index shows that people across the Northeast are concerned about the reliability of the electric grid, safe drinking water and public safety on our bridges and roads," said Bernie McNeilly, president of WSP's Northeast region. "We can prioritize sustainable water, energy and transit solutions that advance adaptive reuse and sustainability while also helping to promote equity by addressing historically disinvested communities."



BERNIE MCNEILLY
Northeast region president

Central

"It's critical that the Central region get its fair share of infrastructure spending, and WSP's Infrastructure Index shows that can be a concern for people here. One way we support our clients is by helping them secure the funding they need for the kind of sustainable projects that will make the central states even more Future Ready," said Rebecca Nolan, president of WSP's Central region.



REBECCA NOLAN
Central region president

Southeast

"The WSP Infrastructure Index shows that our communities recognize the importance of resilient infrastructure and value investment in that space to protect and future-proof our transportation and supply network," said Stephen Dale, president of WSP's Southeast region.



STEPHEN DALE
Southeast region president

AMERICANS RALLY BEHIND RAIL

Not only is the lack of sustainable and rapid transportation via rail (e.g., subways, light rail, trains) a concern shared across all regions of the country, it also stands out as a concern for:

A majority at every income level

68% of those with HHI of more than $100,000 / year, 60% of those with HHI between $75,000 –$99,999, 59% of people with a HHI between $50,000 - $74,999, and 65% of those with HHI below $50,000 / year.

All races, ethnicities and genders

The WSP Infrastructure Index found a strong majority of people expressed concern about rail transit, with no statistical differences across race, ethnicity or gender.

Urban, suburban and rural residents

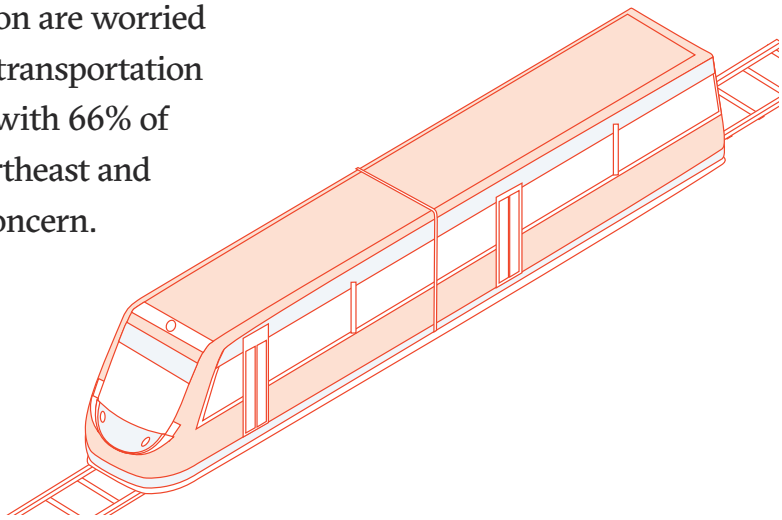
Perhaps unsurprisingly, the lack of sustainable, rapid rail transit is a concern for 71% of city dwellers vs. 62% of suburbanites and 57% of rural residents.

Parents

Generally, parents are not significantly more or less concerned about many infrastructure challenges than non-parents – with the exception of rail transport. A full 70% of parents with children under the age of 18 express concern about the lack of sustainable and rapid transportation via rail (e.g., subways, light rail, trains), vs. 61% of those without children under 18.

Every region

A solid majority of people in every region are worried about the lack of sustainable and rapid transportation via rail (e.g., subways, light rail, trains), with 66% of residents in the West, Midwest and Northeast and 61% of Southerners agreeing this is a concern.



URBAN, SUBURBAN AND RURAL VIEWS

Shared concerns

Urban, suburban and rural residents are generally equally likely to express concern about public safety on poorly designed and / or maintained roads and bridges (86% each and 82%, respectively) and about the lack of availability of some products because of shipping delays in the nation's ports (82%, 81% and 82%). Another shared priority is sustainable, reliable electricity, without service outages due to extreme weather or old power systems (81% urbanites, 79% suburban and 76% rural).

Rural residents (65%) and those in suburbs (59%) are the most likely to prioritize funding for infrastructure projects most urgently in need of repair, no matter where those projects are located – a notable contrast to those in cities (50%).

Suburbanites (34%) are more likely than rural residents (25%) to value spending on infrastructure to make communities more sustainable and / or climate resilient.

Roughly a third of all Americans (32%) say a top priority for infrastructure spending should be is increasing easy access to work, school, medical care and other needs. Those residing in rural regions are more likely than those living in suburban regions to find this a priority (36% vs. 29%).

Rural uncertainties

The report highlighted rural Americans' concern about being left behind. Only 61% agreed that their community has the "right quality infrastructure for the local economy to grow" vs. 70% of their urban and 71% of their suburban counterparts.

Rural residents (43%) are the only group without a majority agreeing that their community generally gets a fair share of funding for infrastructure compared to other communities (vs. 55% suburban and 65% urban). They also are also more likely than urban residents to say they don't know if their community generally gets a fair share of funding for infrastructure compared to other communities (25% vs. 12%).



GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Equity

Baby boomers (85%), Gen Xers (80%) and Millennials (79%) are significantly more likely to support equity in infrastructure than Gen Z adults (67%).

Sustainability

People over the age of 65 are more likely to prioritize infrastructure funding that will make communities more sustainable and / or climate resilient, with "green" considerations topping the list for 39% of that age group, but only 30% or less of 35 – 64.

Economic growth, trust and safety across generations

Gen Z adults are least likely to support investing in infrastructure, with only 77% agreeing that they want their community to invest more money now in quality infrastructure that will last a long time instead of saving money today with infrastructure that will need to be replaced sooner. This is significantly less than Millennials (86%), Gen X (88%) and Boomers (87%).

While **Millennial** concerns about housing often make headlines, 75% believe their community "has the right quality infrastructure needed for our local economy to grow," which is significantly higher than any other generation: only 66% of Boomers, Gen Xers, and Gen Z adults combined agree.

75% of **Millennials** express concern about the lack of sustainable and rapid transportation via rail (e.g., subways, light rail, trains), far more than Gen Z adults (57%), Gen X (62%) or Boomers (60%).

Gen X is the least likely to trust local government to spend the infrastructure budget on what is needed most. Only 50% of Gen X express confidence in government to do this, compared to 60% of Gen Z, 63% of Millennials and 64% of Boomers.

Boomers are least likely to prioritize spending on infrastructure nearest their homes (9% vs. 16% Gen Z, 21% Millennials and 15% Gen X), and more likely to prioritize funding for infrastructure that is urgently in need of repair (77% vs. 39% Gen Z, 41% Millennials and 58% Gen X).





DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Striking gender differences

The WSP Infrastructure Index uncovered striking differences in how women and men view some key infrastructure issues. Women feel they have less of a voice on these issues, and are more pessimistic about the current state of infrastructure in their communities and more skeptical about how future investments will be spent.

- Women are far less likely than men to say their community has the right quality infrastructure for the local economy to grow (65% vs. 72%) and are significantly less likely to trust their local government to spend the infrastructure budget on what is needed most (57% vs. 64%).
- Only 48% of women (vs. 64% of men) believe that their "community generally gets a fair share of funding for infrastructure compared to other communities."
- A minority (44%) of women say they "have enough of a say in how infrastructure budget is spent in my community," while 52% of men report having enough of a voice.
- Women are less likely than men to prioritize projects nearest their home (12% vs. 17%).



This could have meaningful implications, particularly in an election year, since women are registered to vote in the US at higher rates than men, resulting in about 10 million more registered female voters. Women also turn out to vote at higher rates in both presidential and non-presidential election years.

Race and ethnicity

Black non-Hispanic Americans are more likely than White non-Hispanic Americans to trust local government to spend on infrastructure that is needed most (68% vs. 59%).

White non-Hispanic Americans are significantly more likely to express concern about the availability of safe drinking water (83%), even though they are statistically less likely to experience water quality issues than non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic adults, who express concern at lower levels (80% and 73%, respectively).

Hispanic Americans say their community gets a fair share of funding for infrastructure compared to other communities, with 28% strongly agreeing vs. only 19% of White non-Hispanic respondents.

OTHER NOTABLE DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Education levels correlate with trust levels

Trust in government decision-making on infrastructure spending is highest among the college educated (65%) vs. those with only a high school education or less (55%), suggesting an opportunity for greater outreach to less educated constituents to explain decisions about infrastructure spending. Additionally, 20% of Americans with a high school education or less express prioritized spending on infrastructure projects nearest their homes, compared to only 12% with greater educational attainment.

The affluent prioritize equity

If it promotes equity, more affluent Americans are willing to wait for infrastructure spending. 86% of those with an annual HHI of $100,000 or more agree that every community should have access to quality infrastructure even if it means their own community would get less funding so other communities can catch up (vs. 77% of those with an annual HHI less than $100k). That said, 68% of wealthier people (those with an annual HHI of $100k+) believe their community generally gets a fair share of funding for infrastructure compared to other communities, while just half (50%) of less affluent households (those with an annual HHI of less than $100k) can say the same.

Parents prioritize equity more than safety

Parents with kids under 18 are statistically more likely than those without children to prioritize projects that improve equity and connect marginalized communities (31% vs. 25%). In contrast, those without kids under 18 are more likely than parents with kids under 18 to value spending on infrastructure that is most urgently in need of repair (63% vs. 46%).



About the WSP Infrastructure Index

Research methodology

The WSP Infrastructure Index is based on a survey conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of WSP from April 26-28, 2022, among 2,069 adults ages 18+. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within + 2.8 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact

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About WSP USA

WSP USA is the U.S. operating company of WSP, one of the world's leading engineering and professional services firms. Dedicated to serving local communities, we are engineers, planners, technical experts, strategic advisors and construction management professionals. WSP USA designs lasting solutions in the buildings, transportation, energy, water and environment markets. With more than 12,000 employees in over 200 offices across the U.S., we partner with our clients to help communities prosper.

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