

September 8, 2017 NAIOP NJ WeekEnder Guest Column:

## **Our Next Governor Must Focus on Infrastructure**

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Set along the Northeast corridor in one of the most populated regions of the country, New Jersey has long been a critical pathway for commercial, public, and private travel. We must address the condition of our heavily traveled roads and bridges, as well as aging airports, railways, ports, and other infrastructure to continue to support the efficient transport of goods and services and effectively serve residents, commuters, and visitors. The next state administration must address four key topics: surface transportation, water and wastewater, resilience, and ports and intermodal.

**1. Surface Transportation:** The Transportation Trust Fund (TTF), reauthorized in 2016, increased a gas tax through 2024 and constitutionally dedicated those funds for transportation purposes. However, this is only enough to sustain the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and NJ TRANSIT capital programs at the current levels through the eight-year period. The fund does not support a long-term solution to significantly improve our important transportation infrastructure. The NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT need to be allowed to keep the project pipeline full through increased funding for design and construction new starts.

**2. Water and Wastewater:** Since the tragic findings in Flint, Michigan, a continued focus on lead in water has brought renewed scrutiny of New Jersey's own aging water infrastructure, which is also in need of improvement to ensure drinking water safety and availability. For example, New Jersey American Water is currently investing more than \$70 million to upgrade 300,000 linear feet of aging water treatment system assets, buried pipe, service lines, hydrants, and valves that maintain and improve water quality, service reliability, and fire protection. Funding is also needed to meet new treatment regulations, like lower nitrogen and phosphorus removal level requirements. New Jersey's cities and towns face a multi-billion-dollar price tag to fix drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. The cost of not fixing them will be even higher.

**3. Resilience:** A recent White House executive order repealed measures put in place in 2015 in the wake of Superstorm Sandy to address climate change. The order required public structures such as subsidized housing or water treatment plants to be built at least 2 feet above the 100-year flood standard, whereas critical infrastructure, such as hospitals, must be built 3 feet above that line. This federal mandate had a rippling effect throughout the construction industry with many state and private entities adopting this standard in order to collectively improve resilience, especially in urban areas where adjacent infrastructure works together. We must now look to New Jersey lawmakers to

uphold the resilience standards as well as lead the charge to protect our critical assets, including the beloved New Jersey Shore.

**4. Ports and Intermodal:** Collaboration is the key to port growth. Port leaders recognize that in order to be in a position to handle denser freight activity as a result of Neo-Panamax vessels, they need to create a more seamless process of ship-to-truck/rail transfers. In an effort to improve the process and meet productivity goals, one terminal has been testing a truck gate appointment system. The system cuts in half the time that it takes a truck to deliver and/or receive a shipment and leave the port. Often, truck drivers are paid by the move. When wait times are reduced, drivers can make more moves and, in return, make more money. In addition to streamlining this process, the appointment system also supports the terminal in managing its labor, infrastructure, and equipment, and provides better predictability for cargo owners regarding when freight will arrive. Collaboration is the linchpin to achieving improved port productivity and should be supported at all levels.



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