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Transportation Spending Is the Right Stimulus

China and Brazil are surpassing us with state-of-the-art ports and roads.

By ED RENDELL And SCOTT SMITH

During this time of economic uncertainty and record federal deficits, many question why America should invest aggressively in infrastructure. The answer is simple: Whether it involves highways, railways, ports, aviation or any other sector, infrastructure is an economic driver that is essential for the long-term creation of quality American jobs.

Unfortunately, our position as the world leader in infrastructure has begun to erode after years of misdirected federal priorities. When it comes to transportation, Washington has been on autopilot for the last half-century. Instead of tackling the hard choices facing our nation and embracing innovations, federal transportation policy still largely adheres to an agenda set by President Eisenhower.

As a result, American citizens and businesses are wasting time, money and fuel. According to the Texas Transportation Institute, in 2009 Americans wasted 4.8 billion hours sitting in traffic at a cost of \$115 billion and 3.9 billion wasted gallons of gas. Meanwhile, nations around the world are investing in cutting-edge infrastructure to make their transportation networks more efficient, more sustainable and more competitive than ours. These investments have put them on a cycle of economic growth that will improve their standard of living and improve their citizens' quality of life.

Building America's Future Educational Fund, a national and bipartisan coalition of state and local elected officials, of which we are members, recently issued a report on the subject, "Falling Apart and Falling Behind." It offers a sobering assessment of transportation-infrastructure investments in the U.S. as compared to the visionary investments being made by our global economic competitors.

As recently as 2005, the World Economic Forum ranked the U.S. No. 1 in infrastructure economic competitiveness. Today, the U.S. is ranked 15th. This is not a surprise considering that the U.S. spends only 1.7% of its gross domestic product on transportation infrastructure while Canada spends 4% and China spends 9%. Even as the global recession has forced cutbacks in government spending, other countries continue to invest significantly more than the U.S. to expand and update their transportation networks.

China has invested \$3.3 trillion since 2000, for example, and recently announced another \$105.2 billion for 23 new infrastructure projects. Brazil has invested \$240 billion since 2008, with another \$340 billion committed for the next three years. The result? China is now home to six of the world's 10 busiest ports—while the U.S. isn't home to one. Brazil's Açu Superport is larger than the island of Manhattan, with state-of-the-art highway, pipeline and conveyor-belt capacity to ease the transfer of raw materials onto ships heading to China.

To get our nation's economy back on track, we must develop a national infrastructure strategy for the next decade. This policy should be based on economics, not politics. Washington must finally pass a reauthorized multiyear transportation bill; target federal dollars toward economically strategic freight gateways and corridors; and refocus highway investment on projects of national economic significance, such as New York's Tappan Zee Bridge across the Hudson, where capacity restraints impose real congestion and safety costs in an economically critical region.

It is also time we create new infrastructure financing options, including a National Infrastructure Bank. Many of these new programs, using Build America Bonds, for instance, can be paid for with a minimal impact on the federal deficit.

The government's continued neglect of infrastructure will consign our nation and our children to economic decline. Rebuilding America's future cannot be a Democratic or Republican political cause. It must be a national undertaking. And if it is, there will be no stopping us. Let's get to work.

Mr. Rendell, a Democrat, was governor of Pennsylvania from 2003 to 2011. Mr. Smith, a Republican, is the mayor of Mesa, Ariz., and vice chairman of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Both are members of Building America's Future Educational Fund. A copy of the report can be found at: www.BAFuture.org