

# The Post and Courier

## Infrastructure: Falling apart, falling behind

BY ED RENDELL and JOE RILEY JR.  
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Americans see the consequences of inadequate infrastructure every day: when we get caught in traffic jams on our way to work, when we get stuck at the airport because our flights are delayed, when mass transit options are too few, when our electric grid fails and leaves us in the dark, and when our ports are too shallow to handle modern cargo ships. As individual cases, these deficiencies can be daily annoyances. Together, they form a national crisis.

Unfortunately, our position as the world leader in infrastructure has begun to erode after years of misdirected federal priorities and wasteful earmarks. Our nation is still relying on outdated policies and agendas that have largely been in place since the Eisenhower Administration. While we have been content to live with a transportation system that met 20th century needs, our global economic competitors are investing in cutting-edge technologies to make their systems more efficient and sustainable. And while Congress argues about which programs to cut, our competitors are pouring billions of dollars into their transportation networks and expanding their ports to accommodate the next generation of cargo ships.

The result? China now has six of the world's top 10 ports while the U.S. has none. Shanghai's port now moves more container traffic in a year than the top seven U.S. ports combined. In Brazil a new \$2.7 billion intermodal superport is being built in Acu to accommodate the increased trade with China. This new port is larger than the island of Manhattan with state-of-the-art highway, pipeline and conveyor belt capacity to ease transfer of raw materials onto ships. As these countries make strategic investments, the World Economic Forum now ranks the U.S. 22nd in the world in terms of the quality of our port infrastructure.

Charleston and other ports around the nation are economic drivers for their regions, but they are scrambling to secure the resources needed to deepen their facilities in order to accommodate the gigantic new ships that will become the new norm following the expansion of the Panama Canal in 2014. Our international competitors get it -- and are investing appropriately.

Building America's Future Educational Fund, a national and bipartisan coalition of state and local elected officials, of which we are members, recently released "Falling Apart and Falling Behind." The report lays out the economic challenges posed by our nation's ailing infrastructure, provides a comparative look at the smart investments being made by our international economic competitors, and suggests a series of recommendations for crafting new innovative transportation policies.

We believe that our nation must develop a long-term national infrastructure plan for the next decade. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated that direct, well-targeted government spending of \$185 billion a year on infrastructure would generate economic and social benefits that exceed the cost. To be clear, we are not proposing another quick round of federal spending -- we are advocating for an infrastructure policy based on economics, not politics.

First, Congress must pass a multi-year transportation bill, target federal dollars toward economically strategic gateways and corridors, and re-focus highway investments on projects of national or regional economic significance, such as the Port of Charleston. Second, it is time we embrace creative infrastructure financing options such as a National Infrastructure Bank, America Fast Forward, Build America Bonds and capital from the private sector. South Carolina is already ahead of the curve, having created its own state infrastructure bank 14 years ago.

Our nation is at a pivotal moment. We can either begin to make the smart strategic investments that offer tangible returns to our economic growth and competitiveness or we can continue to sit on the sidelines as the world passes us by. As a nation of doers we know what the right answer is. Let's get to work.

*Ed Rendell is the former governor of Pennsylvania and Joe Riley Jr. is the mayor of Charleston. Both are Democrats and members of Building America's Future Educational Fund. A copy of its report is available at [www.BAFuture.org/Report](http://www.BAFuture.org/Report).*