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Why It's Time for Rhode Island to Invest in Infrastructure

New Report highlights need for Rhode Island to fix our crumbling roads & create jobs

A new paper released yesterday by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) highlights the importance of investing in infrastructure. Doing so creates jobs today, and lays the foundation for future prosperity.

In "[It's Time for States to Invest in Infrastructure](#)," CBPP Senior Fellow Elizabeth McNichol urges states to make sound infrastructure investments. Now is the time for states to reverse years of decline and step up investment in state-of-the-art school facilities; up-to-date water treatment plants; better highways, railroads, and ports; and other public infrastructure -- which is vital to creating good jobs and promoting full economic recovery.

The Center on Budget report places Rhode Island third last among all states (ahead of only Michigan and New Hampshire) for total state and local capital spending as a share of state gross domestic product in 2013 (the most recent year for which 50-state data are available).

Here in Rhode Island, years of neglect have resulted in consistently low ranks on infrastructure such as roads and bridges – more than one in five bridges in our state is structurally deficient [according to the American Society of Civil Engineers](#), and 41 percent of our roads are in disrepair, compromising public safety and costing motorists nearly half a billion dollars a year in additional transportation and repair costs. This state of disrepair should come as no surprise – since 2000, Rhode Island has ranked in the bottom three for state and local capital outlays as a share of GDP in ten of the twelve years for which we have data.

Since 2013, more infrastructure investments have been made. In 2015, the General Assembly approved a five year, \$3.4 Billion Capital Budget, heavily weighted towards investments in transportation (43.2%) and Education (17.9%), spanning investments in K-12 schools, higher education facilities, as well as vocational schools, and the School Building Authority was created to oversee the process of overhauling the state's crumbling school buildings.

The Governor's 2017 budget proposal recommends significant further capital investment such as in Rhode Island's public colleges, for affordable housing, and for the "Rhode Works" overhaul of the state's transportation infrastructure. The recently passed Rhode Works legislation provides much-needed investment to fix Rhode Island roads and bridges and underscores the importance of raising sustainable revenue to ensure that our transportation infrastructure is well-maintained and safe for those who use them.

Rachel Flum, the Executive Director of the Economic Progress Institute, notes the importance of infrastructure investment for Rhode Island families:

“Investing in our public infrastructure – our roads, bridges, schools, ports, and more – creates immediate jobs, makes our communities safer and healthier, and lays the foundation for a brighter future for all Rhode Island families. This report confirms that the Governor and legislative leaders are on the right track committing to a significant overhaul of our roads and bridges, an investment that will increase private sector productivity, and contribute to public safety.”

Modernizing Rhode Island’s transportation systems and other infrastructure boosts productivity by supporting businesses and residents, improving the education and job readiness of future workers, and helping communities to thrive. Investing in our infrastructure will also provide immediate job opportunities for Rhode Islanders who are working less than they would like and making less than it takes to get by. Infrastructure investments typically bring higher wages and better quality of life for years in the future.

“**It’s Time for States to Invest in Infrastructure**,” is available on the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities website. Liz McNichol is available to discuss the report with media. Contact Christy Hicks at cdhicks@cbpp.org to schedule an interview.

About The Economic Progress Institute

The Economic Progress Institute - formerly The Poverty Institute - is a nonpartisan research and policy organization dedicated to improving the economic well-being of low- and modest-income Rhode Islanders. For more information visit www.economicprogressri.org.