We can't wait any longer for repairs: DC Metro GM

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Years of neglect have led to big problems for Washington, D.C.'s Metro system, and repairs need to be made now, the system's general manager told CNBC on Tuesday.

The beleaguered Metro is the second-busiest system in the country, with 700,000 riders a day. In January of 2015, a woman was killed when black smoke filled a tunnel after an electrical malfunction. The system also suffered a 24-hour shutdown in March and just last week, a fireball erupted on the tracks just after a train pulled away.

"It has taken decades, to be frank, of deferred maintenance and investments just not being made and we cannot wait any longer. We have to deal with these issues," said Paul Wiedefeld, CEO and general manager of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (Metro), in an interview with "Power Lunch."

A yearlong safety and maintenance upgrade will begin next month to get the system back to "good repair," he said.

But it's going to take more than just the coming repairs to keep the system running smoothly.

"This is a multi, multibillion-dollar investment that has not been maintained over time and it will take multi, multibillions of dollars to maintain it into the future," he said. "That's just the reality of these large infrastructure systems that we have around the country."

DC's Metro is just the latest example of infrastructure woes plaguing the country. Things like crumbling roadways and bridges and old airports have led the American Society of Civil Engineers to give the nation's infrastructure a grade of D+.

"We need to spend about $3.6 trillion between now and 2025 if we are going to bring our infrastructure to a condition of B, which is a good grade," said Greg DiLoreto, fellow and past president of the organization.

"The fact is we're not prepared to do that. We don't have enough revenue to make that kind of an expenditure."

In fact, over the next decade, infrastructure repairs are expected to be underfunded by $1.4 trillion, he told "Power Lunch."

For Chris Edwards, director of tax policies at the Cato Institute, the answer is privatization.

"Politicians like to open new lines and new systems without spending on maintenance," he told the show.

"The advantage of privatization is that private owners take care of their property and will spend on maintenance."

How to play it

Those looking to invest in infrastructure should look at municipal bonds because construction and repairs are financed through state and local government, according to Bob Dimella, co-head of municipal managers at MacKay Shields. He also manages the MainStay Tax-Free Bond Fund.

"It's a great way to build a diversified portfolio, very attractive returns for clients," he said in an interview with "Power Lunch."

He likes the Dallas-Forth Worth highway bonds and the new LaGuardia Airport bond. He would avoid the Alaska, Oklahoma and Louisiana marketplaces because of weakness in the energy sector.

For Josh Duitz, portfolio manager at Alpine Funds, suppliers like cement companies are the way to go. In December, Congress authorized $305 billion for repairs, he noted.

"We're seeing construction spending on highways increase even in the first quarter," he told the show.

He specifically likes Martin Marietta and Vulcan Materials. He also believes in public-private partnerships and therefore likes to own companies that own the infrastructure globally like Vinci and Ferrovial.

Disclosure: Alpine Funds owns Martin Marietta, Vulcan Materians, Vinci and Ferrovial.