

## Here's what taxpayers need to watch for as Illinois' \$45 billion infrastructure plan takes shape

Cole Lauterbach

August 10, 2019

Illinois is in the process of implementing the largest infrastructure plan in the state's history.

The specifics of the plan were left largely obscured until Gov. J.B. Pritzker enacted it. Now that details have been released, infrastructure experts have pointed to areas where taxpayers should be aware of potential extra costs.

The breakdown of costs released in June by the governor's office showed three-quarters of the total funds, more than \$33 billion, would go to "horizontal" infrastructure, mostly roads, bridges, mass transit, and similar projects. The rest is devoted to "vertical" infrastructure, a broader range of projects such as improvements to existing schools, government structures, and new projects. Some of the vertical projects have been criticized as unnecessary. Critics have said the state's fiscal condition should be addressed before building pickleball courts.

"Politicians want big and glitzy projects that they can cut ribbons at," said Randal O'Toole, an infrastructure expert and Cato Institute senior fellow. "A lot of times, we just need to maintain the existing infrastructure."

O'Toole and others warned that because many of the projects the state has promised are massive undertakings, the long-term costs have likely been underestimated.

"Many of these projects likely don't have detailed cost estimates yet," said Aaron Renn, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. "Projects often tend to run over budget. They tend to take much longer than you would expect. Realistically, it may well be that not all of the projects can be done for the amount of money that people said they would. Even worse, when you start running low on funds, there's a tendency to want to cut corners."

The Civic Federation, a Chicago-based nonprofit, had a similar warning about cost overruns.

"...the underperformance of similar revenues supporting the Illinois Jobs Now! plan has for years forced the state to backfill the Capital Projects Fund with General Funds revenues in order to honor debt service requirements," the group said. "The state will need to carefully manage the pace of bond issuance and construction to avoid having the Rebuild Illinois plan repeat the mistakes of its predecessor."

The governor's office didn't respond to requests for comment on the analysis of the plan.