



Biden's \$2 trillion infrastructure plan gets a mixed reaction from industry groups

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Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has managed to thread the needle with his latest massive infrastructure wish list, pleasing industry stakeholders and environmentalists alike.

Many industry groups balked at recent congressional Democratic proposals designated as "green," and Congress responded.

The Green New Deal framework, which President Trump and Biden squabbled over in the first presidential debate, proved so unpopular that a nonbinding resolution expressing general support for it failed to garner even a single vote in the Senate in 2019.

On a nearly straight party-line vote in July, the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives passed the Invest in America Act, also known as the green infrastructure bill. That bill was considered dead in the water in the Republican-controlled Senate. The two houses compromised by merely passing a continuing resolution for transportation funding into next year.

Even though the act would have meant almost half a trillion dollars in additional funding for transportation infrastructure over five years, several industry groups came out against it.

At the time, the Association of American Railroads opposed the bill in no uncertain terms. AAR President Ian Jefferies told the *Washington Examiner* it was "partisan legislation [that] falls far short of what this moment demands."

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials Executive Director Jim Tymon seconded that, complaining to *Transportation Today*, "It is disappointing that this legislation was not developed in a bipartisan manner."

With Biden's trillion-dollar-plus grab bag, which includes such proposals as "jump-start the repair of our highways, roads, and bridges" and "invest in energy infrastructure for a 100% clean energy economy" and even "bring broadband to every American household," the industry tune is changing.

"We are grateful former Vice President Joe Biden wants to increase federal investments in airports, especially after the pandemic exacerbated that already gaping shortfall," Annie Russo, senior vice president for government affairs for the Airports Council International of North America, told the *Washington Examiner*.

"Airports need long-term investments to keep pace with the rest of the world, as well as more immediate relief to fund operations, service debt, and pay for enhanced sanitation and health measure," she added.

The rail lobby was also on board for its part of it. AAR spokesman Ted Greener pitched rail as "the most environmentally efficient way to move goods over land."

Greener said of Biden, whose nickname in the Senate was "Amtrak Joe" because he would use the trains to commute to and from Delaware, "We appreciate his continued interest in rail — both passenger and freight — and know that he understands the importance of freight carriers in moving goods and providing the infrastructure for most passenger rail."

Also, rather than come out against Biden's proposal this time, which would provide a shifting number that is likely to land in the \$1 trillion range in funding for travel infrastructure over the next 10 years, AASHTO spokesman Tony Dorsey said that his organization's policy team was "still looking over the Biden plan, and they are not prepared to comment at this time."

Meanwhile, support and endorsements from environmental groups continue to trickle in. This is primarily due to their members' aversion to President Trump's policies and their support for Biden's green agenda, which he has cleverly threaded into his pitch for infrastructure reform.

Adie Tomer is a fellow at the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program. He told the *Washington Examiner* that the Biden campaign's "focus on environmental resilience and workforce opportunities could help incentivize action on Capitol Hill."

"The Biden campaign's infrastructure proposals address one of the clearest gaps in recent federal debates: clarifying the purpose of our multibillion-dollar infrastructure programs," he said.

Tomer called this a "clear contrast with President Trump's campaigns. In 2016, the candidate focused on spending alone. Now, this year, the president barely mentions infrastructure at all."

But not everyone thinks Biden's approach is so smart. Randal O'Toole is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and author of several books on public transportation and urban growth. When the *Washington Examiner* sent him the Biden campaign's wish list, he was wroth.

"This infrastructure plan is a repackaging of a lot of bad ideas that have failed in the past," O'Toole said.

For instance, O'Toole noted that the plan "calls for making roads safer through 'Complete Streets.' But Complete Streets don't make the roads safer. They increase the conflicts between autos and bicycles and pedestrians," which can lead to more collisions and fatalities.

"Complete Streets isn't aimed at safety. It's aimed at punishing people for driving," O'Toole said, and he aimed that criticism squarely at many of the other transportation proposals coming out of the Biden campaign.

O'Toole also pointed out that Biden's proposed electrification of transportation could be a huge logistical nightmare for the country.

"In general, the problem with electrifying transportation, whether cars or trains, is that transportation uses about as much energy as the electrical power system," O'Toole explained.

"That means, to meet Biden's green goals, we not only have to replace all of the fossil fuel electric power plants, but we also have to double the amount of electrical generation capacity, all of it renewable, to support transportation. California is already suffering rolling blackouts due to its dependence on so-called renewable energy. Imagine if electrical demand doubled!" he added.