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A Better Path for Infrastructure

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While many officials may just want to throw money at our nation's infrastructure issues ("We already have the infrastructure bank we need," the Washington Post, Sept. 29), there is common sense in doing things smarter.

For instance, much of our infrastructure is not managed correctly and results in early failures. Prior to any new public-private or federal funding or bailouts, infrastructure asset management best practices should be employed with the goal of maintaining an asset at an acceptable level of service at the lowest life-cycle cost.

Asset management guides the asset investments in all stages, including planning, acquisition, operations, maintenance, renewal and decommissioning.

Take our water and wastewater systems — 60% of the \$700 billion-plus costs are the underground pipes. The wood pipes of the 1800s, the thick, grey, cast-iron pipes of the 1900s, the thin ductile iron pipes of the post-1950s, all need to be replaced because of age and corrosion.

These pipes are not going to fail all at once, so asset management helps direct the repair-replacement strategy, amount and timing of the investment.

Another huge replacement cost savings includes the use of non-corrosive materials like PVC, which studies suggest has a design life of 110 to 170 years or greater, at 30-70% of the metallic pipe costs.

Our nation can go a long way on the path of self-help in better managing our infrastructure and making wise replacement decisions. The federal government can focus on removing the state volume caps on private-activity bonds to generate \$50 billion for private funding of public water-wastewater projects.

Washington can and should also support WIFIA (the Water Infrastructure Financing Innovations Authority) to offer low-cost capital loans to water utilities, and SRFs (state revolving funds) at a time when the White House is proposing to cut 38% of SRF funding.

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