The Pipe Crisis Beneath NYC

By BONNER R. COHEN

The recent nasty water-main break on West Broadway was a grim reminder that the city’s infrastructure woes aren’t restricted to pockmarked streets, creaky bridges and crumbling sidewalks.

There’s a crisis beneath the streets: New York’s underground network of iron pipes has been decaying for decades. Leaky pipes and water-main breaks mean that untold thousands of gallons of water every year never reach New Yorkers’ homes, schools or businesses. This ghastly waste is reflected in soaring water bills.

The city must modernize its procurement policies. It now excludes polyvinyl-chloride pipe manufacturers from bidding on city contracts, virtually guaranteeing that corroded iron pipes will be replaced by newer, corrosion-prone pipes.

Unlike traditional iron pipes, PVC pipes don’t corrode, last longer and cost about 70 percent less. Rather than soaking ratepayers, New York should open its bidding process and let the best technology at the best price determine the outcome.

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