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Saving Ohio Communities, Strengthening Ohio's Infrastructure

Over the past three years, I've held more than 160 community roundtables – including at least one in each of Ohio's 88 counties. Most roundtables are attended by a broad, cross-section of the community: farmers and manufacturers; teachers and police officers; and Democrats and Republicans. At nearly every one of them, I've heard a common suggestion for improving economic development in Ohio: investing in infrastructure.

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A sound infrastructure is the foundation for a stable economy and fundamental to the public safety. Not only do Ohio businesses and residents rely on the network of Ohio roads, bridges, railways, and waterways, but the quality of our state's infrastructure factors heavily into Ohio's ability to attract and retain new businesses. That means keeping existing infrastructure in good repair and keeping up with infrastructure advances. We need updated sewer systems and statewide access to broadband. We need to ensure the safety of our roads and apply the latest science to prevent bridge corrosion. These investments more than pay for themselves in job creation and retention, business development, and the enhanced safety and security of Ohioans.

Just one example: recently, \$20 million in Recovery Act funds to improve infrastructure enabled the expansion of V&M Star in Youngstown – creating 400 construction jobs and 350 permanent jobs.



So how do we ensure that Ohio secures and maintains the infrastructure it needs to thrive in the 21st century?

One proposal I have long supported is the creation of a National Infrastructure Bank. The Obama Administration has embraced this proposal, which would enable states to continue the progress enabled

by the Recovery. Transportation stimulus funds will be invested in nearly every Ohio county, creating and retaining an estimated 21,257 jobs. The Infrastructure Bank Proposal the President unveiled earlier this month would build on the investments in Ohio and the rest of the nation. It would help states rebuild 150,000 miles of roads, construct and provide maintenance to 4,000 miles of rail, and improve 150 miles of airport runways.

Ohio workers, businesses, and residents would benefit meaningfully from this plan. We are already home to six of the "most innovative and effective" Recovery Act projects nationwide. We can and will make the most of infrastructure bank dollars to revitalize our

transportation infrastructure and jumpstart our economy.

Second, we have to ensure that our communities can afford to make renovations to outdated water systems to protect the public safety and prevent spikes in water and sewer rates for consumers and business. Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH) and I worked together on the Clean Water Affordability Act to help Ohio communities afford renovations needed to sewer systems. Access to safe and clean drinking water isn't just a health issue; it's an economic development imperative. In the roundtables I mentioned, Ohioans have told me how important water and sewer infrastructure is to economic competitiveness.



Ohio is also home to the second largest number of bridges in the nation. But too many of these bridges are in a state of disrepair – costing taxpayers \$8.3 billion per year, according to a study by the Federal Highway Administration. And as recent reports have indicated, debris from railroad bridges and overpasses have put Ohio pedestrians and drivers at risk. That's why I'm fighting for legislation to address bridge corrosion. The [Bridge Life Extension Act](#) I introduced last September is a common-sense step toward safe and sustainable infrastructure. The bill would encourage states to develop and implement corrosion mitigation and prevention plans. In turn, states would

receive funding to implement anti-corrosion technologies – many of which have been developed and are produced in Ohio.

New investments in infrastructure are needed now to keep Ohio on the road toward economic recovery. There are few better initiatives to put people back to work and increase our nation's long-term economic competitiveness than to make our bridges safer, improve our roadways, modernize water and sewer systems, and provide broadband Internet access to our small towns and rural communities. Naysayers will argue that we can't afford to invest in infrastructure. The truth is we can't afford not to.

Sincerely,

Sherrod Brown



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