



Economic Stimulus Package—What’s in it for US?

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Recent media outlets have covered the lively and somewhat contentious debate over President Obama’s Economic Stimulus Package. From my perspective, suspended from a bridge during an inspection, this debate is a foregone conclusion.

The current state of the US economy, coupled with the present condition of the US infrastructure, has combined for the “Perfect Storm”. Most pundits acknowledge the need for increased spending to both invigorate the US economy and invest in improving the US infrastructure. This situation presents a classic “Two for One” opportunity, which will hopefully benefit US.

January 28, 2009 is a significant date in which to focus this discussion. Events will have occurred since this writing (Senate Bill), but I am constrained to comment on this “snapshot in time.”

On January 28th, the American Society of Civil Engineers released the key findings of its *2009 Report Card for America’s Infrastructure*. Originally scheduled to be unveiled in March, the timing of the announcement was accelerated to influence the Economic Stimulus Package moving through Congress during the start of the New Year.

The assessment, compiled by professional engineers across the US, assigned a letter grade to each of 15 infrastructure categories (see below), calculated an overall grade (D) and recommended a funding amount (\$2.2 trillion over 5 years). The results, published by ASCE, are as follows:



“\$15.8 billion is needed annually to maintain [transit] conditions and \$21.6 billion is needed to improve to good conditions. In 2008, federal capital outlays for transit were only \$9.8 billion.”

Also on January 28th, the US House of Representatives passed H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, by a party-line vote of 244-188. The total cost of the House-passed stimulus package was \$819 billion.

The proposed economic stimulus package includes over \$80 billion (see below) to repair and replace existing infrastructure. These needed investments include over \$43 billion for projects that directly impact highways, bridges and transit.

Infrastructure Investments in the House Bill

- \$30 billion for highways construction
- \$12 billion for transit
- \$1.1 billion for Amtrak
- \$10 billion for science facilities, research, and instrumentation
- \$11 billion for research and development, pilot projects, and federal matching
- \$3 billion for Airport Improvement Program
- \$6 billion for Clean Water State Revolving Fund
- \$2 billion for Drinking Water State Revolving Fund
- \$4.5 billion for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- \$500 million for Bureau of Reclamation
- \$900 million for Superfund and Brownfields

Taken in context with the 2009 Infrastructure Report Card findings, the House-proposed investments in infrastructure are only a supplement, not a replacement, for periodic appropriations and scheduled reauthorizations to adequately address the poor condition of US infrastructure. So, for now, that is, “what’s in it for US.” More (jobs/tax cuts/\$) to follow...hopefully!▪

2009 Infrastructure Report Card Grades

- Aviation = D
- Bridges = C
- Dams = D
- Drinking Water = D-
- Energy = D+
- Hazardous Waste = D
- Levees = D-
- Inland Waterways = D-
- Public Parks & Recreation = C-
- Rail = C-
- Roads = D-
- Schools = D
- Solid Waste = C+
- Transit = D
- Wastewater = D-

Highlighting the transportation infrastructure categories Roads, Bridges and Transit, the following excerpted economic findings were included in the report:

“The current spending level of \$70.3 billion per year for highway capital improvements is well below the estimated \$186 billion needed annually to substantially improve the nation’s highways.”

“A \$17 billion annual investment is needed to substantially improve current bridge conditions. Currently, only \$10.5 billion is spent annually on the construction and maintenance of bridges.”

