

**Presentation by Barry B. LePatner to Mobility 21
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I could not help thinking about the coincidence of holding a conference on the future of transportation so soon after the passing of Neil Armstrong. It was Armstrong, after all, who punctuated a decade of excitement and adventure with his walk on the moon in 1969. His journey was triggered fifty years ago this month by President John F. Kennedy's famous, "We choose to go to the moon" speech.

Speaking in 1962, President Kennedy, with the full support of *both* political parties, committed our nation to putting a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s. It was a move that epitomized the courage and long-term vision that this nation's leaders and everyday citizens knew as the American way.

In that speech, President Kennedy said, "This country ... was not built by those who waited and rested and wished to look behind them. This country was conquered by those who moved forward...."

I am struck, fifty years later, by how far removed we are from President Kennedy's vision of the nation.

The America that launched Armstrong was an America that had embarked on a great and inspiring journey — one that spawned breakthroughs in science, medicine, computing and physics — outgrowths in an investment that made our country, and the world, a better place.

The trajectory from Armstrong's first steps on the moon to today, is startling: we can't even achieve the basics of maintaining our critical infrastructure. We have 4,000 dams that could fail and destroy millions who live nearby; we have crumbling airports. Of the top ten deep water ports in the world, not one is located in the U.S. Road disrepair and congestion has crippled parts of our economy. And that's why we're here today.

In the words of one commentator, "We are driving now without a bumper, without a spare tire, and with the gas gauge nearly empty."

The strength of our nation is built, in large part, on our infrastructure. Those of you attending this conference fully understand how much of our social, political and economic wellbeing is dependent on our ability to move goods and people seamlessly across our cities and states; how important it is that we can distribute what we manufacture to our coastal and inland ports and airports and from there to markets all across the globe.

The generations who came before us made certain that this country was not constrained by a failure to think big. We built the Erie Canal, and as we expanded west, the Transcontinental Railroad. Undaunted by these challenges, we built the TVA, the Hoover Dam and the nation's interstate highway system. Our nation built boldly, then built and invested even more.

But we have failed to maintain what we built. In fact, a listing of our infrastructure deficiencies is nothing short of depressing. Without immediate repair, the nearly 8,000 bridges could collapse at any time. Just as the I-35W Bridge failed in Minneapolis in 2007. Just as the Mianus River Bridge failed in Connecticut in 1983. Just as the Sherman Minton Bridge across the Ohio River last year nearly collapsed before it was saved at the very last minute avoiding certain tragedy. These, unfortunately, are not isolated incidents. During the last two decades, nearly 600 bridges have failed.

And we have fallen far behind other developed nations. China invests nine percent of its GDP on infrastructure development. In Western Europe its five percent. While the U.S. spends a paltry two percent on infrastructure.

Meanwhile, our roads have become a major cause of wasted economics for our nation. According to the Urban Mobility Report of 2010, massive congestion costs truckers \$33 billion a year, expenses that result in more expensive goods for consumers. According to the American Society of Civil Engineer's 2011 "Failure To Act" study on surface transportation, by 2020, merely retaining the current levels of funding will add \$430 billion in increased transportation costs for businesses. The ensuing impact on the efficiency of transportation systems will cause American export values to fall by \$28 billion, according to the report.

Today we need more from our politicians who merely pay lip service to our increasingly dire infrastructure needs. Our politicians have, in the words of Thomas Friedman of the NYTimes, become inhibitors, not enablers. They are entrenched in a system that makes them beholden to lobbyist funding so necessary for their short term goals of re-election. Going forward we are going to need more than commissioned reports on our failing airports, power grid, ports, roads, dams and bridges -- we are going to need the political will backed by powerful political leadership with vision to make the changes that will strengthen today's short comings.

In conjunction with the fifth anniversary of the tragic collapse of the I-35W Bridge in Minneapolis on August 1, 2007-- I inaugurated a new website, www.SaveOurBridges.com. This new website identifies nearly 8,000 bridges that, just as the I-35W, are both structurally deficient -- bridges which, for lack of maintenance have been rated "poor" and can no longer carry the amount of traffic they were once designed to hold -- and fracture critical -- meaning those that lack redundancy, a term that connotes that if one critical member fails, the bridge goes straight down, just as the I-35W did, killing 13 and injuring 145 people.

With the new website any citizen or politician or transportation agency can quickly identify if there are bridges in their area that are dangerous to the traveling public; whether their children are crossing these bridges on their way to schools each day or if their families are using them to go to churches and synagogues, mosques or shopping centers. More importantly, the map is intended to start a national dialogue to enable citizens to make informed decisions about their public safety and the politicians charged with their protection.

In Southern California, residents and truckers by the millions cross 16 bridges that are both structurally deficient and fracture critical. Right in Anaheim, the bridge at Tustin Ave & Route

91, built in 1967, carries on average 221,000 vehicles per day. Without immediate attention, this bridge could fail just as the I-35W Bridge did in Minneapolis five years ago.

We can no longer sit idly by and wait for future disasters. The likelihood of the federal government allocating sufficient funding to fix our roads and bridges in the near future is minimal, at best. At the same time, States such as California, New York and Illinois face gaps in meeting unfunded liabilities for retiring citizens that approach \$3 trillion. Former Governor of Pennsylvania, Ed Rendell has said that deferring action on fixing our infrastructure represents a clear hazard to our nation: “The longer we wait the more expensive it will be... This is as urgent an imperative as health care.”

It is now time for our politicians to find the funds to address these shortcomings. It is time for Federal, state and local political leadership to step up. This is where our former quest to “land a man on the moon” must convert in the 21st Century to a new challenge to “make our infrastructure the strongest of any nation on the planet.”

Towards that end, here is a list of seven recommendations to lead us toward ensuring the rebirth of our nation’s infrastructure by the year 2020.

1. We must review existing regulatory schemes to speed up the building process. We will need to use advanced technology to design, build and maintain our facilities. And we will need many times more engineers and scientists to bring their full attention to the task of addressing these needs.

2. We are going to need a new cabinet position, a Secretary of Infrastructure, appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate, to serve as the national overseer for this work.

We need a modern day equivalent of New York City’s master planner of the 20th Century, Robert Moses. We need a true general to muster our national leadership. That is why President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed General Lucius Clay when he proposed the creation of the Interstate Highway System.

3. We are going to have to plan for large scale projects such as future ports, highways and airports on a regional, rather than a county or state, basis. The impact of these projects affect not just the immediate locations in which they are built but impact commercial users and the traveling public from areas across multi-state areas.

4. We need to identify and fund advanced technology to monitor our roads and bridges and ensure they are all connected via a web of seamless information that can be analyzed and used to save hundreds of millions of dollars in maintenance each year. These tools are readily available and we need to give our transportation agencies the authority to put them in place and the funding to make those savings possible.

5. Changing the way we fund our infrastructure and build new roads and bridges is a complex process. We must demand that the construction industry bring greater efficiency to this process

so that our nation will no longer be faced with tens of billions a year in unwarranted cost overruns. Contractors must be required to sign contracts where they accept the risk of completing each project on time and on budget. If they finish ahead of schedule lets pay them a performance bonus.

6. We must explore creative ways to attract funding from the private sector through public\private partnerships. To date, many public-private partnerships in the U.S. have been quickly quashed by a combination of lobby interests and government concern that the deals will unfairly favor the private sector.

For example, in 2008, the Pennsylvania legislature derailed efforts by a consortium of private investors to pay the state \$12.8 billion for a 75-year lease to manage the Pennsylvania Turnpike. A report by the Pew Center on that failed transaction found that causes ranged from a lack of coordination between the executive and legislative branches of state government, overly optimistic financial assumptions, and the lack of a “clearly articulated plan for how the proceeds would have been invested and spent.”. We need to develop P3 formulas that ensure a fair payment for turning over an important infrastructure asset to a private entity, protect the public interest in a long term lease, yet permit risk takers to make a fair profit.

7. We need a “grass roots” demand from outraged citizens imploring our nation’s leaders to vote for meaningful funding before future tragedies occur. My hope is that concerned citizens can use the information provided on SaveOurBridges.com to back up their calls for action when they approach their local officials. With the help of the website, the public can contact their local, state and federal officials in this election year and demand the needed financing for remediating local infrastructure.

Our citizens are looking for honest solutions to the problems I have outlined this morning. They are no longer content to listen to a battle of sound bites that comes forth from Washington each day. They no longer wish to see a Congress pulled in every direction that money can buy.

Our nation must accept the fact that we can no longer spend irresponsibly. But that only means that if we don’t make the right choices – and spending on our nation’s infrastructure is one of those right choices – we will be sabotaging our future and that of generations to come. Upgrading our roads and bridges and ports must be the pillars of our future success. It will be the key to rebuilding our economy and the key to once again ensuring that the United States remains the global leader for the balance of the 21st Century and beyond.

Thank you.