

CITYAGE

EXECUTIVE ROUNDTABLE ON INFRASTRUCTURE

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In partnership with Siemens
and Accelerator for America

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ACTION





BACKGROUND:

During Infrastructure Week 2023, CityAge, Siemens and Accelerator for America gathered more than 20 local and national leaders in Washington, DC to discuss how to build better American cities through public and private sector partnerships.

ABOUT THE TOPIC:

American infrastructure is currently undergoing a transformation fueled by two significant trends: decarbonization and digitization. These trends have gained momentum through investments from the federal government, alongside substantial contributions from the private sector.

The electrified, digital infrastructure of the future is high-technology and complex, and it means public-private partnerships are more essential to building America's future than ever.

Engaging in dialogue with city leaders nationwide is crucial given that the majority of infrastructure projects will be carried out in urban and rural areas. It is imperative to acknowledge that a one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable, and instead, customized strategies must be developed for each region.

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PERSPECTIVES AND INSIGHTS



ACCELERATING THE ENERGY TRANSITION

The discussion on clean energy transition emphasized the need for integrating innovative charging technologies into existing systems, while managing grid strain and recognizing hidden utility upgrade costs. Participants advocated for a coordinated approach across agencies and cities at the regional level, as well as the need to address legacy systems, all while focusing on economic competitiveness.

Advanced Technologies: Bidirectional and Vehicle-to-Grid (V2G) technologies open up new frontiers with exciting potential. Despite the challenges, our robust R&D centers and promising prototypes, like the autonomous megawatt charger, bring the future closer than it appears.

Integrated Infrastructure Planning: The integration of energy plans, economic development plans, and climate plans is critical. A unified vision in the form of a regional infrastructure master plan is essential to align housing, transportation, community goals, and agency objectives effectively.

The Challenges of Legacy Systems: Legacy systems pose a challenge to infrastructure modernization. Given the strained existing grid capacity, prioritization becomes vital, with a focus on supporting electric grid enhancements and expanding electric vehicle charging facilities.

The Financial Implications of Utility Upgrades: Accounting for the hidden costs of utility upgrades is crucial to prevent budget disruptions and optimize the use of federal funding. Understanding the financial implications early on is essential for sustainable infrastructure planning.

Rethinking Design Principles: The transition in energy infrastructure is witnessing a historic shift from centralized grid systems to decentralized models with bidirectional EV charging and smart grids. Merely expediting application processes is not enough; we must fundamentally rethink the design principles of our systems.

Economic Competitiveness: The energy transition is not only about addressing climate change but also enhancing economic competitiveness. States with strong manufacturing capabilities are embracing renewable energy but must also confront existing legacy systems and structures.

2. THE NEW RULES OF URBAN DESIGN

The pandemic had a seismic shift in urban design – both downtown and in the suburbs. Participants emphasized the need to adapt city planning to ensure public spaces and community building take center stage.

Reshaping Urban Landscapes: The pandemic has irrevocably transformed our urban landscapes, urging us to envision a better and more adaptable future.

Redefining Urban Cores: With a significant drop in daily visitors to major office buildings, it's evident that a structural change has occurred, unlikely to reverse. This calls for strategies to make our urban cores more suburban-friendly.

Emphasize Public Spaces: The pandemic has emphasized the desire for public spaces where people can gather outdoors, even if they no longer commute downtown for work. Adaptations such as widening sidewalks, enhancing parks, and creating street-level friendly environments are essential in order to reshape downtowns to meet the evolving needs of residents.

Community-Focused Approaches: Transforming downtowns into vibrant hubs for recreation and community building, beyond mere workplaces, can revitalize the urban atmosphere on a grand scale. Despite changes in work habits, there remains an ongoing need to redefine and rejuvenate these spaces.

“The pandemic has forever altered our urban landscapes. While we can’t turn back the clock, we do have the power to shape a better, more adaptive future.”



3. HOW INFRASTRUCTURE CAN EMPOWER OUR WORKERS

How can we equip future generations and underrepresented groups with skills for new roles, and expand apprenticeship programs?

Family Transition Apprenticeships: We're beyond coal in our region and facing the reality of a changing energy industry. We need to recognize the need for family transition alongside job transition.

Meeting the Demand: Historically, the demand for apprenticeships has outpaced supply due to limited job availability. It is time to focus on the opportunity in registered apprenticeship programs. With labor standards in place as a result of federal investment, this expansion is crucial to meet the growing demand.

Aligning levels of government: We can better align state education departments with federal infrastructure funds that can be used for workforce programs, especially given some program applications even require a workforce development component.

Early Identification and Funding: We must consider taking proactive steps to identify motivated students as early as middle school who show interest in specific fields. In order to support their development, we need to provide opportunities for students to pursue their interests.

Promoting Inclusivity: The challenge lies in helping individuals envision themselves in new roles. We must encourage women to consider careers in manufacturing and promote representation for people of color in historically underrepresented industries. Reshaping perceptions and fostering an inclusive environment are key to opening minds to new possibilities and breaking down barriers.



“Demand for apprenticeships historically outpaces supply due to limited job availability... with labor standards and significant amounts of funding now in place from federal investment, it’s time to seize the moment.”

4. BUILDING EQUITY THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE

Elevating historically underrepresented businesses to prime contractors and partners can address wealth disparities. Overcoming systemic barriers, like stringent insurance requirements and lack of certification reciprocity, and implementing innovative strategies, like unbundling large projects, can promote diversity and expand opportunities for minority and women-owned businesses.

Empowering Businesses for Growth and Diversity: Empowering historically underutilized businesses as prime contractors or joint venture partners can drive generational wealth growth and enhance workforce diversity.

Legislative Changes: State-level legislative changes are essential to broaden opportunities for minority and women-owned businesses. Addressing barriers such as restrictive delivery tools and rigid insurance requirements is crucial in creating a more inclusive business environment.

Streamlining Administrative Processes: Streamlined processes alleviate burdens and improve opportunities for contractors, fostering a more favorable business environment.

Lowering Systemic Barriers: Promoting regional reciprocity in certification can help reduce systemic barriers. When a business is certified as minority-owned, women-owned, or disadvantaged in one agency's region, other agencies should recognize and accept that certification.

Engaging Small Businesses: We need to focus on incorporating small businesses into major projects and unbundling parts of larger tasks that can be allocated to small businesses.

“Systemic barriers can be lowered by promoting regional reciprocity in certification.”

5. REINVIGORATING THE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

P3s are strategic collaborations aimed at efficiently dividing risk between public and private sectors. With the right structure, they can be expanded into innovative procurement strategies to optimize benefits and improve project execution, all while bringing all parties to the table.

The Intricacies of P3s: Contrary to misconceptions, a well-executed Public-Private Partnership (P3) involves a sophisticated allocation of risk between the private and public sectors.

Fostering Success: Establishing a peer learning environment to bridge the gap between theoretical discussions and practical implementation of P3 initiatives are crucial to the success of execution.

Shifting Perspectives on Collaboration: We need to more frequently embrace broader concepts of collaboration between private and public sectors, including risk transfers and their impact on day-to-day operations.

New Models: Expanding collaboration beyond traditional models, optimizing private sector operations, and forging partnerships with smaller enterprises is critical.

Balancing Benefits: Be mindful that we can address the challenge of delivering public benefits in P3 projects without direct private sector interest.

The Fourth 'P': Procurement is essential to the discussion. Broadening the P3 framework to encompass innovative collaboration, idea sourcing, streamlined processes, and partnerships with non-traditional businesses.

“The concept of a P3 often extends to the innovative ways the public and private sectors can collaborate. This might be speeding up processes, partnering with smaller companies who wouldn’t typically win a traditional RFP, or creating incentive structures to optimize private sector operations.”

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ON ALL MAJOR PLATFORMS



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