

Community Comment  
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Sam Pennisi

The cost of doing business.

Nearly every day we see on the news or the radio or the newspaper a story about a road or a bridge that is failing. The Last Chance grade on 101 near Crescent City is apparently in crisis condition. If this slips, it falls into the ocean with no good alternative route readily available. During the last flood, we lost a road to a small number of houses outside of Eureka. A small number unless one was yours.

Across this country we are facing the real problem of an aging, and in many cases, neglected infrastructure. This means we have major roads and bridges that are in poor condition or are out and out dangerous. Most of our train depots and airports need upgrades to keep them safe and accommodate the current and future number of passengers. Our electrical grid and transmission lines are outdated in capacity for the growth in population and changes in urban growth. Rural areas suffer similar issues. Water and waste water pipes are often over fifty years old. Wear and tear, earthquakes, landslides, sinkholes, and tree roots are among the many things that cause these pipes to fail. Leaks mean the loss of precious drinking water or contamination from raw sewage.

Dams and power stations are also included in this list. These things don't last forever and they need constant upkeep just to keep them operating. And finally, although the list goes on, many of our storm water channels need improvements. In most cases, these channels used to be streams and rivers. When we make them into concrete channels, we lose valuable wetlands and riparian vegetation. These provide habitat for animals of all kinds including those that work for us by absorbing flood conditions or pollinating our crops.

There is work to be done and we haven't been doing it. When local, state, or the federal government loses revenue for whatever reason, the easiest thing to do is to put off capital improvements, replacements, or upgrade repairs. The result of these decisions is that it costs us more in the long run but isn't noticed in any given year. And all levels of government have experienced a loss in revenue over the last decade and more.

The single most important job of government is to provide for the public welfare. At least this is the single most practical thing they provide. If this job is deferred year after year, it only make things more dangerous, less likely to encourage private investment, and more expensive.

Say what you will about wanting less government or lower taxes. The fact is, it costs money and staff time to keep our country and our culture modern and safe. The next time you have an opportunity to communicate with any level of government representative, ask specifically what his or her stand or ideas about our infrastructure are.

And the latest wrinkle is the effect of climate change on all this. Where we invest in infrastructure will affect our children's quality of life and opportunities.

These are our generations legacy issues. We need to make the best possible choices we can for our grandchildren's sake.

This has been Sam pennisi for community comment