

City of West
Branch
Office of the
City
Administrator

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Matt Muckler, City Administrator
Date: June 5, 2016
Weekly Council Update

Infrastructure Investments: The City of West Branch is in the process of making some major repairs and upgrades to the City's infrastructure. From the College Street Bridge Project to the 4th Street Reconstruction Project to Main Street Intersection and Sidewalk Improvements to the Main Street Sidewalk – Phase 3 Project, the City has several projects either in planning or under construction this summer. Attached to this week's *Update* is an article on the importance of investments in infrastructure from the *New Yorker* entitled "System Overload."

Next West Branch Promotions Strategy Session – June 28th: The next Promotions Strategy Session has been scheduled from 7:00-9:00 p.m. on Tuesday June 28th. For more information or to contribute information to the strategy session that tells part of the story of what makes West Branch so great, please email westbranchisgreat@gmail.com.

4th Street Project Starts Monday June 6th: Construction on the 4th Street Reconstruction project will begin on Monday, June 6th after 7:00 a.m. Construction will begin on Phase 1 which is located at the north end of the project and consists of 4th Street north of Reagan Boulevard and the northern half of the entrance to the West Branch Village. 4th Street will be closed to through traffic during construction of the project. Follow instructions on the traffic control signs and do not attempt to drive around the barricades. The southern entrance to the West Branch Village will be accessible from the south on 4th Street. Mail will continue to be delivered to mailboxes on Reagan Boulevard. The first week of Phase 1 construction will include storm sewer, pavement removal, and some grading. Updates are also available on the City Website.

Pedersen Park Update: Fehr-Graham has provided the Monthly Project Status Report for May on the park space in Pedersen Valley. That report is attached to this week's *Update*. The report also contains a forecast of work to be completed in June.

The information provided is one-way communication and should not be discussed among you as this could be a violation of the open meeting law.

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THE FINANCIAL PAGE | APRIL 18, 2016 ISSUE

SYSTEM OVERLOAD

BY JAMES SUROWIECKI

“An example for the Nation” is how President Lyndon Johnson imagined Washington’s Metro, in a letter that he wrote fifty years ago to an official involved in planning it. And so it was. When the Metro opened, ten years later, in 1976, it was acclaimed as a farsighted fusion of design and utility, a system generations ahead of those in other cities. Today, the Metro is in such a state that fixing it may require shutting whole lines for months at a time. It’s yet again an example for the nation, but now it’s an example of how underinvestment and political dysfunction have left America with infrastructure that’s failing and often downright dangerous.

ILLUSTRATION BY
NISHANT CHOKSI

From the crumbling bridges of California to the overflowing sewage drains of Houston and the rusting railroad tracks in the Northeast Corridor, decaying infrastructure is all around us, and the consequences are so familiar that we barely notice them—like urban traffic congestion, slow-moving trains, and flights that are often disrupted, thanks to an outdated air-traffic-control system. The costs are significant, once you reckon wasted time, lost productivity, poor public-health outcomes, and increased carbon emissions. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a Harvard Business School professor and the author of “Move,” a recent book on the subject, told me, “Infrastructure is such a dull word. But it’s really an issue that touches almost everything.”

Infrastructure was once at the heart of American public policy. Works such as the Los Angeles Aqueduct, Hoover Dam, and the Interstate Highway System transformed the economy. Today, we spend significantly less, as a share of G.D.P., on infrastructure than we did fifty years ago—less, even, than fifteen years ago. As the economist Larry Summers has pointed out, once you adjust for depreciation, the

U.S. makes no net investment in public infrastructure. Yet polls show that infrastructure spending is popular with a majority of voters across the income spectrum. Historically, it enjoyed bipartisan support from politicians, too. If it's so popular, why doesn't it happen?

One clear reason is politics. While both parties remain rhetorically committed to infrastructure spending, in practice Republicans have been less willing to support it, especially when it goes toward things like public transit. This is partly because of the nature of the Republican base: public transit is hardly a priority for suburban and rural voters in the South and in much of the West. But ideology has played a key role as well. "The rise of modern conservatism, with its sense that government is the problem and its aversion to government spending, has created a Republican Party that's much more skeptical of big infrastructure projects than it was," Steven Erie, a professor of political science and an expert on development at U.C. San Diego, told me. There's also a deeper, bureaucratic issue. Over the years, the process of getting infrastructure projects approved has become riddled with what political scientists call "veto points." There are more environmental regulations and more requirements for community input. There are often multiple governing bodies for new projects, each of which has to give its approval. Many of these veto points were put in place for good reason. But they make it harder to undertake big projects. In 2010, Chris Christie was able to cancel a new tunnel under the Hudson River more or less single-handed, even though more than a billion dollars had already been spent on it.

Even more egregious than the lack of new investment is our failure to maintain existing infrastructure. You have to spend more on maintenance as infrastructure ages, but we've been spending slightly less than we once did. The results are easy to see. In 2013, the Federal Transit Administration estimated that there's an eighty-six-billion-dollar backlog in deferred maintenance on the nation's rail and bus lines. The American Society of Civil Engineers, which gives America's over-all infrastructure a grade of D-plus, has said that we would need to spend \$3.6 trillion by 2020 to bring it up to snuff.

Again, there are political reasons that maintenance gets scanted. It's handled mainly by state and local communities, which, because many of them can't run fiscal deficits, operate under budgetary pressures. Term limits mean that a politician who cuts maintenance spending

may not be around when things go wrong. There's also what Erie calls the "edifice complex": what politician doesn't like opening something new and having a nice press op at the ribbon-cutting? But no one ever writes articles saying, "Region's highways are still about as good as they were last year."

It takes a crisis like the Metro's to shock us out of our complacency. As Kanter puts it, "It's only when things get bad that infrastructure issues get real public attention." This is the heart of our problem: infrastructure policy has become a matter of lurching from crisis to crisis, solving problems after the fact rather than preventing them from happening. As Erie says, "We've turned into short-term-fix addicts." The U.S. needs to approach infrastructure the way it does national defense: come up with a long-term strategy, make sure it gets the money it needs, and hold the government accountable for making that strategy work. Infrastructure is the ultimate public good. It would be nice if ours was actually good for the public. ♦



James Surowiecki is the author of "The Wisdom of Crowds" and writes about economics, business, and finance for the magazine.

MONTHLY PROJECT STATUS REPORT
Work Completed in May 2016
Pedersen Valley Park
Project No. 16-072

SCOPE		SCHEDULE UPDATE	
Task/Item	% Complete	Target	Actual
1.0 Topographic Survey	95%	6/6/16	
2.0 Construction Plans	5%	2/1/17	
2.1 Preliminary Plans	15%	11/15/16	
2.2 Check Plans	0%	12/15/16	
2.3 Final Plans	0%	2/1/17	
3.0 Site Assessments & Permits	20%	2/1/17	
4.0 Project Coordination	10%	2/1/17	
5.0 Construction Services	0%	11/1/17	
5.1 Bid Letting	0%	3/28/17	
5.2 Construction	0%	11/1/17	

SUMMARY OF WORK DONE LAST MONTH

- Coordination with subconsultants
- Completed wetland delineation
- Contact pipeline, discuss constraints and options
- Developed multiple design options
- Scheduled first work session with client to discuss project concepts, general design, and challenges identified to date for June 2, 2016

FORECAST OF WORK TO BE COMPLETED NEXT MONTH

- Complete soil boring report
- Complete field work (survey wetland boundary - delayed to due weather)
- Continue preliminary design
- Schedule first work session with client to discuss project concepts, general design, and challenges identified to date

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED/RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

- Weather did not allow to survey wetland boundary when planned, will complete soon and will not cause delay with other work at this time.

ACTION NEEDED BY CITY

- None at this time

OVERALL PROJECT STATUS

The project is tracking on schedule and progress is satisfactory.