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Next US president faces \$1.6 trillion infrastructure bill

Published: 04 November 2008 09:39 | Author: [Ed Owen](#) | [More by this Author](#)
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The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) has called for US Congress to invest in infrastructure to boost the flagging US economy.

The move has been copied by Chancellor Alistair Darling, who will announce his own measures in the upcoming pre budget report. A special meeting of congress will meet on 17 November to discuss an economic package designed to boost the US economy.



The collapse of the I35w in August last year focused US attention on infrastructure

According to ASCE president David Mongan, "In 2005 we prepared an institution report and gave the overall grade for US infrastructure as D. We estimated that there was a cost to state and local government of some \$1.6tr to bring infrastructure up to an acceptable level. We will be issuing a new report in March 2009, but I do not see any significant improvement," he said.

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"Whoever wins the White House will have a number of pressing infrastructure issues to deal with," he said.

Mongan said that up to a dozen infrastructure bills are languishing in Congress, and could be pushed through to get investment moving. "A number of projects are just on the shelf, but could be up and moving in 2-3 months."

He said the US had been looking closely at public/private finance models used in the UK, such as PFI and PPP. "We don't think these are the only solutions, but we urge local and state government to use these tools where appropriate," he said.

While the ASCE is strictly impartial in its views, new research shows that the majority of civil engineers are backing Democrat presidential candidate Barack Obama. In a survey of more than 1,000 engineers and civil engineers, EPCglobal show that 36% are behind Obama, and just 32% behind McCain.

US civil engineers identified 'the economy/jobs' as the most important issue facing the US electorate (100% of respondents), with energy second at 98% and education third at 96%.

84% of civil engineers said 'Meeting our future need for more power' was the primary issue to be addressed, with 38% saying it was 'Opportunities presented by 'green collar job' creation'.

EPCglobal vice president Richard Spragg said: "Interestingly, both sets of energy policies are rated almost equally when considered on their own merits. However, the research suggests McCain's emphasis on issues such as energy supply security gives him a distinct lead with the majority of engineers, whilst civil engineers are more favorable to Obama's, such as how to curb per capita energy consumption."

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Publication: New Civil Engineer
Subject: US Survey
Circulation: 55,523
Date: November 4, 2008
Source: Coverage arranged by Wide PR