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# Could a LEED for Roads Spur Greener Infrastructure?

by [Beth Buczynski](#) | July 6, 2014 | 5:00 am

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In a [recent interview](#) for American Public Media's Marketplace, President Obama once again acknowledged [America's crumbling infrastructure](#), and the fact that no one in Congress seems too terribly concerned about it:

"...we've got \$2 trillion of deferred maintenance: roads, bridges, an air-traffic control system that's creaky, an electrical grid that wastes too much energy and is highly inefficient, and we could be putting hundreds of thousands of folks back to work right now and not only put a big boost to the economy in the short term, but also lay the foundation for economic competitiveness in the long term. That creates a lot of middle-class jobs. The challenge we have is not that we don't know what to do. The problem is that we've got a Congress right now that's been saying no to proposals that would make a difference."

In case you missed it, [the 2013 Report Card for America's Infrastructure](#) gave the performance and condition of the nation's infrastructure an overall grade of D+, up from a D in 2009 (hooray?).

The fact that bridges and dams are literally falling apart in this country seems an apt example of... everything, but that's a discussion for another time. Regardless of bank account or political persuasion, every American relies on this infrastructure for survival. And from the highest levels of government on



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down, we're scrambling to figure out which projects to tackle first, and how to ensure the updates are enough to bring us into the next century, and beyond.

The increasingly unpredictable consequences of global warming demonstrate our need for infrastructure that's not only sound, but also smart and eco-friendly. Applying green building concepts to infrastructure is still a very new idea, one that there has been no comprehensive, standardized way to quantify — until now.

Introduced in 2012, the [Envision rating system](#), created by the Zofnass Program and Institute for Sustainable Infrastructure, strives to be for infrastructure what the LEED certification system is for buildings.

"Roads are the connective tissue of commerce and make economic growth possible," Bill Bertera, president and CEO of the [Institute for Sustainable Infrastructure](#), told GreenBiz.com. "Since connectivity drives GDP, how we prep our infrastructure for the future is an important consideration, especially for the business community."

"The USGBC focuses on the vertical infrastructure and we focus on horizontal infrastructure," Bertera continued. "Between the two organizations, we can offer a community a complete palette for making itself more sustainable."

The Envision system is built on the idea that infrastructure products are most successful — and sustainable — when they employ a holistic approach that takes the environment into account during planning instead of applying mitigation "bandages" after the fact. At its most basic, Envision is a checklist for engineers and city planners. Structured as a series of yes/no questions, the system assesses projects across five categories — quality of life, leadership, resource allocation, natural world and climate and risk — for a total of 60 sustainability criteria, called credits. "As with LEED certification, Envision helps projects achieve different levels of designation from a third-party evaluator," [reports GreenBiz](#).

Although a lack of funding might make it difficult for current projects to achieve certification, the tools are freely available as a foundation for anyone interested in making a project more sustainable.

So far, 300 infrastructure projects are using Envision, and about 30 are expected to go through the verification process.

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