

THE BOND BUYER

Thursday, January 21, 2016 | as of
3:04 PM ET

Budget & Finance

Aging, Underfunded Infrastructure Top Challenge for Mayors

by [Lynn Hume](#)

JAN 20, 2016 1:25pm ET

WASHINGTON – Aging and underfunded infrastructure is the greatest challenge for mayors, according to a survey sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and The Boston University Initiative and supported by Citi.

The mayors also focused on the fiscal health of their cities, but differed in their preferred methods to stabilize or improve it.

The survey, released during USCM's 84th Winter Meeting here, represented a collective call for the presidential candidates and Congress to focus on these issues.

"The data shared here is invaluable and helps us to advance our policy goals to uplift working families who live in our cities and metropolitan areas," said USCM President and Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake.

More than half the mayors said that in 2015 the greatest challenge facing their cities was how to deal with aging and underfunded infrastructure. While mayors most often must partner with state and federal governments to address their infrastructure priorities, they said they are "not confident" that this will not be adequate to help them solve these problems.

Asked what big ticket projects they would finance with a sudden unrestricted capital grant, 22% of the mayors said mass transit, 20% said roads, and 18% said water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure.

Modestly priced priority projects that would be financed with an unrestricted capital grant were bike and pedestrian infrastructure (20% of mayors), parks (19%), roads (15%), and municipal buildings (14%).

As for finances, the 2015 survey showed mayors believe fiscal management skills are a key driver of constituent approval and that this is one area where they possess real control.

But Republicans and Democrats differed in their reactions to potential fiscal tools. About 74% of Republican mayors opposed raising property taxes, compared to only 43% of Democrats. However, 42% of Democrats were more likely to oppose privatization, compared to only 9% Republicans.

To improve their city's fiscal health, 52% of the mayors said they would be least likely to raise property taxes, and 35% said they would be least likely to privatize city services or eliminate city programs.

The mayors were less opposed to other remedies such as reducing city staff (27%), raising other taxes and fees (22%), and renegotiating union contracts (24%).

The mayors were frustrated with the lack of financial support at both the federal and state levels and felt increasingly constrained by state regulations and state legislators.

Other issues covered by the survey included housing, police, poverty and inequality, and biking.



© 2016 [SourceMedia](#). All rights reserved.

[Mobile Version](#)