



New York state paves the way for big infrastructure

By Anthony Poole

More than a year into Donald Trump's presidency and not a single infrastructure project has been approved as a result of any efforts by him and his administration.

It is all talk, so far, even though it was a cornerstone of Trump's campaign and also that of his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton and mentioned again in this year's State of the Union address to Congress in January.

During the election campaign, both candidates painted pictures of the entire country being completely starved of infrastructure spending and, while it is true that much of the US' infrastructure is crumbling, renewal is taking place, just not on the scale of Trump's much-hyped \$1 trillion infrastructure spending plan.

Nevertheless, some significant projects started long before Trump took office. One such example can be found in New York's Hudson Valley, about 14 miles north of New York City.

The \$4.2 billion new Tappan Zee Bridge, just north of the crossing it is replacing, is nearing completion and is

opened to traffic last autumn and should be fully open on both spans sometime in the second half of this year.

The project was at least 10 years in the making, stuck fast in a quagmire of political ineptitude, before Governor Andrew Cuomo finally got things moving and contracts were signed and construction began in 2013.

Construction of the 3.1-mile, two-span, cable-stayed bridge, linking Westchester and Rockland counties at one of the widest points on the Hudson will have used nearly 100,000 mt of US-made steel and 270 cu m of concrete when complete, New NY Bridge Project, the formal name of the replacement bridge, said on its website.

The construction has employed around 6,300 people on or off-site, including subcontractors, according to Khurram Saeed, a New NY Bridge Project spokesman.





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Tappan Zee Constructors, a consortium of four companies, Flour Enterprises, American Bridge, Traylor Bros and Granite Construction Northeast, has combined local, national and international experience to design and build the bridge.

The new bridge will have a life expectancy of about 100 years, according to New NY Bridge. It will replace the old cantilever structure, opened in 1955 with a planned lifespan of 50 years and designed to carry considerably less than the 137,000 (2011 estimate) vehicles/day it now carries. Unlike the old bridge, the new structure will have dedicated bus lanes, giving commuters in Rockland County on the west side of the river access to an overcrowded Metro-North commuter railroad in Westchester, on the east side, potentially

cutting commute times to New York City considerably. The new bridge will also feature emergency hard shoulders and a 12-ft-wide shared bike and pedestrian lane, both absent on the old bridge.

To fund the new bridge, its owner, the New York Thruway Authority, in December 2013, closed on a \$1.6 billion, long-term, low-interest soft loan through the 1998 Transportation Infrastructure Financing and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program, administered by the US Department of Transportation, which explains the large US steel component. It was the largest loan in the history of the program at the time, according to the New NY Bridge Project on its website. A further \$2 billion in bank settlement funds have been committed to support Thruway capital improvements over the last



two years, including helping pay for the bridge. The remainder of the funding is from Thruway Authority bonds. Thruway tolls are frozen until at least 2020.

While 100,000 mt of US-made steel in a single project may not seem like much in the grand scheme, if a fraction of the nation's dilapidated bridges and railways are repaired or replaced during the lifetime of the Trump administration, that 100,000 mt figure would multiply quickly and significantly, especially if funded through programs like TIFIA.

New York state is also home to other large bridge project, including the replacement of the partly opened \$1.5 billion Goethals Bridge, replacing an older one between New Jersey and the New

York City borough of Staten Island, also involving TIFIA funding. This bridge is now fully open.

Use of existing legislation, such as TIFIA, has done more to get US infrastructure moving than any new law or initiative since Trump took office. A look at the TIFIA project map on the US DOT's website shows several projects funded using program loans, including no less than six in close proximity to Washington. These projects are concentrated primarily along the East, West and Gulf coasts.

It is in the power of the administration and Congress to continue to support and fund programs like TIFIA, or come up with something bigger. But actions speak louder than words. ■