



Clean Water Infrastructure and COVID Relief Virtual Townhall

March 19, 2021

David Totman, Vice President of Asset Management at Innovyze, attended the U.S. House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Virtual Townhall on Clean Water Infrastructure and COVID Relief on March 19, 2021. Totman had a question answered in the Townhall and provided the core content for this report, drafted with Asset Leadership Network Director, Communications Mike Bordenaro.

Townhall Panelists:

Congressman Peter DeFazio (OR) U.S. House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Chairman

Mark Magaña, Founding President & CEO, Green Latinos (moderator)

Nsedu Witherspoon, Executive Director, Children's Environmental Health Network

Becky Hammer, Senior Attorney & Deputy Director of Federal Water Policy, Natural Resources Defense Council

U.S. House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Chairman **Congressman Peter DeFazio** (D-OR) expressed a core understanding significant problems by saying he wants to move water infrastructure out of the 19th and 20th Century and into the 21st Century.

Chairman DeFazio expressed understanding of how infrastructure projects in the 1960's and 1970's intentionally divided communities of color, specifically noting the issue of building transportation corridors in communities of color and low-income housing. He noted that the EPA Administrator is also looking at correcting this inequity and that they will be targeting \$2 billion in grants to under privileged communities as part of \$50 billion added to State Revolving Funds for infrastructure projects.

Chairman DeFazio also noted that the "Moving Forward in the House" infrastructure legislative language is similar to President Biden's "Build Back Better" infrastructure legislation, indicating that there could be smooth integration into a Bill.

Chairman DeFazio was asked about the value of establishing an Infrastructure Bank. He responded by saying it is a good idea, but Banks need a return on investment and many infrastructure projects are not profitable. DeFazio said talking to your congressional representatives is the best way to ensure Federal funds are made available to meet critical infrastructure needs that do not provide immediate, measurable returns.

Mark Magaña, Founding President & CEO, Green Latinos moderated the Townhall. With extensive experience serving the U.S. Federal Government as senior staff for both the White House and Congressional leadership, Mr. Magaña understands the power of potential infrastructure legislation to help establish equity for disadvantaged communities and supported "Clean Water for All."

Nsedu Witherspoon, MPH, Executive Director, Children's Environmental Health Network, pointed out the direct correlation between aging infrastructure and Public Health. This is primarily an issue about the extensive number of lead service lines that still remain from the 19th and 20th Centuries. She noted the ability for an asset management mindset to help prioritize at-risk infrastructure. And she reinforced the importance of include social issues when addressing water infrastructure.

Ms. Witherspoon serves as the Executive Director for the Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN). She is also a leader in the field of children's environmental health, serving as a member of the NIH Council of Councils, on the Science Advisory Board for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the External Science Board for the Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) NIH Research work among other activities,

Becky Hammer, Senior Attorney & Deputy Director of Federal Water Policy, Natural Resources Defense Council stated that Congress injects \$3 billion per year into water infrastructure, yet the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that \$37 billion per year is needed. She noted that infrastructure loans do not work for utilities serving disadvantaged, low-income communities, yet grants similar to the Clean Water Act grants issued in the 1970's can make a difference. The policy of providing loans took over in the 1980's and 1990's, but stated that utilities cannot afford these loans anymore. She also pointed out that lead service lines need to be replaced on a large scale. She said with conviction that grants must be implemented to address Water Affordability. Ms. Hammer also stated that the National Resource Defense Council promotes the policy of providing funds to target Green Infrastructure.

General Q&A

During the general question and answer session, Ms. Witherspoon answered a question on water systems with lead pipes by saying people should engage the Lead Service Line Cooperative. Contaminants are a water supply issue also, as she noted that drought conditions are causing concentrated contaminants (such as arsenic) in groundwater.

Ms. Witherspoon said that schools have begun to tackle the lead service line issue and are providing safe drinking water for children, however the problem during COVID is that children are staying at home and subject to lead contaminated drinking water in disadvantaged communities of color and low-income. So now there is increased concern about cognitive brain development in toddlers learning from home with lead service lines.

David Totman started a question to Ms. Witherspoon by thanking her for supporting the value of asset management to address seemingly intractable water infrastructure problems. Mr. Totman then stated, "We are a bit behind the world in asset management. Do you think the ISO 55000 global asset management standard can help, or are our problems in the US unique and that we need to get started with the basics?"

Mr Witherspoon said the answer is "A bit of both." She noted that she comes from "a global family" and understands the U.S. in a global context. She added, that many U.S. citizens think we have it all together. But around the world, infrastructure needs are more balanced with quality-of-life issues. She added, "We don't have to start from scratch. We can learn from accepted procedures. Prioritization is key."

Ms. Hammer made a statement that infrastructure improvements cannot jeopardize environmental safeguards in exchange for funding. She also noted that local governments are bearing too much burden for aging infrastructure. She also noted that the EPA's Water Innovation and Financing Infrastructure Act accelerates investment in our nation's water infrastructure by providing long-term, low-cost supplemental loans for regionally and nationally significant projects. But it mainly targets large projects, such as Chicago and St Louis trying to address lead service lines.

Ms. Hammer made a powerful statement toward the close of the Townhall. She noted that President Biden's acceptance speech mentioned four current crises: 1) Pandemic, 2) Economic Crisis, 3) Racial Injustice, and 4) Climate Change –and that water plays a role in all four.

ALN Action Items:

The Asset Leadership Network is grateful to Mr. Totman for participating in the Townhall and representing the value of ISO 55000 to help with water asset management infrastructure issues. Chairman DeFazio asked all participants of the Townhall (of which Mr. Totman will most certainly comply) to send him a communication on the Townhall meeting as a follow up.

Mr. Totman is the American Society of Civil Engineers' Engineers' Utility Engineering & Surveying Institute representative to US TAG TC251, which contributes to ISO 55000 and supports the Asset Leadership Network. Therefore, his follow up communication can represent a unified effort in support of proven asset management practices.

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