

**A New Deal in Store for California's Infrastructure**  
**March 19, 2009**

**Panelists: Valerie Shaw, Los Angeles Board of Public Works**  
**Harvey Smith, National New Deal Preservation Association**  
**John Tanner, SEIU 721**

**Moderator: Mariel Garza, Los Angeles Daily News**

The panel, moderated by Mariel Garza of the *Los Angeles Daily News*, set out to address the current condition of California's infrastructure and how monies through Obama's administration can build upon the state's physical infrastructure.

Mr. Harvey Smith, of the National New Deal Association, provided background on the New Deal. Mr. Smith stated that during the 1930's great depression, under the direction of the President Roosevelt's administration, an infrastructure agenda was pushed forward which resulted in a massive capital infusion to develop infrastructure projects throughout the country. This was commonly referred to as the "New Deal" a federal government initiative created to provide economic relief and stimulate new revenue sources. Among some of the projects undertaken within the "New Deal" were construction of schools, parks, airports, housing programs, streets, highways, city halls, and sewer systems.

Ms. Valerie Shaw, Los Angeles Board of Public Works Commissioner, provided an overview of the board's function and priorities. Currently the department has 500 projects underway throughout the city of Los Angeles valued at over 4 billion dollars. Until recently the city has not had mass support for infrastructure development and maintenance. In addition, Ms. Shaw noted there is a lack of political will on the part of politicians and relevant stakeholders and consequently the problems associated with aging infrastructure is nationwide and not only restricted to Los Angeles. In 2005 the city made it a priority to focus on public transportation as part of Mayor Villaraigosa's infrastructure agenda which called for increasing the availability of public transportation, making major roadways efficient, and improving air quality. The city currently is waiting for the stimulus package and funding allocation to help with infrastructure development. Ms. Shaw stated the next steps are is to update the city's infrastructure assessment, move forward with city municipal bonds for future infrastructure projects, fix sidewalks, and provide tree specific trimming.

Mr. John Tanner, from SEIU Local 721, concurred with Ms. Shaw about the lack of political will and elaborated that in the last decade there has been reluctance on the part of government to spend federal funds on developing and maintaining physical infrastructure. California is ranked last in per capita infrastructure expenditure. Mr. Tanner stressed that this inaction contributed to an unsustainable United States economic model of unrestricted capitalism. Over the past 30 years the economy developed into a consumer economy with high productivity and low wages which has made it difficult for families to live within their budgets. Mr. Tanner cautioned that economic stimulus and investment in infrastructure will at best provide short-term improvements while long-term improvement in the economy depends on fundamental changes that will allow working families to share in future prosperities.

Ms. Garza asked the following question “given the stimulus package and all the bonds measures passed in California for funds for infrastructure projects why are jobs still lacking?” Mr. Tanner acknowledged that the stimulus law has just been passed and the money is on its way, but there is a lack of leadership to turn these packages into job creating ventures. Mr. Smith reiterated that California still lives under the cloud of prop 13 and the two-thirds majority which creates a lot of gridlock in terms of policy implementation.