



General Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the backbone of communities. Infrastructure includes roads, water, communications, transportation, education, and public services related to such things as public health, safety, and recreation. In its broadest definition, it also includes investments made to restore natural resources from past degradation or to preserve resources of special quality, such as unique vistas or wildlife habitat. In a large part, the basic capital for infrastructure is provided by the public sector and funded through the system of public finance.

Public works and infrastructure are the major forces that shape the location of private development.

California exists as an interdependent economy of regions; each of these regions competes worldwide for talent, companies, and recognition. Companies locate in regions based on what they have to offer. This requires each region to develop characteristics that distinguish themselves as desirable places to live, work, and conduct business. Some regions may emphasize quality of life or clusters of emerging industries (Council on Tax Fiscal policy Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network, [ND]). See the [Silicon Valley White Paper for California Constitution Revision Commission](#). In all cases, regions face the challenge of providing sufficient quality of life to attract and retain a skilled workforce. This increases the importance of providing quality public services; affordable housing; a diverse range of cultural and outdoor experiences; a clean environment; and the availability of amenities, parks, and open space.

California exists as an interdependent economy of regions; each of these regions competes worldwide for talent, companies, and recognition.

Expansion of regional settlement patterns largely follows existing transportation corridors and often adds to existing infrastructure. Public works and infrastructure are the major forces shaping the location of private development (Bradshaw, 1986). Companies and people tend to settle in the same place because they gain mutual benefits. As industries cluster, they support specialized workforces, suppliers, and resilient information networks. New residents demand basic services such as schools, police, and fire protection. This is especially true with settlement patterns that require development of the most basic services, such as roads, water, and sanitation.

At the same time, existing settlement patterns may help determine the expense of providing new infrastructure. While existing cities may have infrastructure, expansion may be too costly. Reasons can include limits imposed by current tax revenue allocations, costs of bringing in new industries, or satisfying environmental or social issues. In some instances, it may cost less to build in more sparsely developed areas and create a completely new infrastructure. This leads to a pattern of suburbs and new cities, with a high revenue generating capacity and few social or environmental issues, that skip over older areas with higher tax loads and social problems (Fulton et al, [ND]). See [A Landscape Portrait of Southern California's Structure of Government and Growth](#).

The thrust to “leapfrog” in development, as well as to move further into less populated areas along transportation corridors, has been accentuated by the need for affordable housing in California. The increased need for housing is intense. Under normal conditions, California’s population will grow from its current size of just under 34 million to 40 million by 2010 and to 45 million by 2020. This means that California will add over five million additional households by 2020. More than half of California’s projected household growth will occur in the greater Los Angeles and San Diego areas. Elsewhere in California, growth will be more concentrated in inland counties than coastal counties. This will have a direct impact on some forest and rangeland areas but only an indirect impact on others (California Department of Housing and Community Development, 1999 and 2000a). See [Raising The Roof: California Housing Development Projections and Constraints, 1997-2020](#).

Mobility, by either transportation or the electronic pathway, is one of the cornerstones of California’s economy. This means that infrastructure related to mobility has special importance. Where people must commute long distances to work because of more affordable housing prices, transportation networks are key. Where telecommuting is used, emphasis is on electronic communication networks. Without sound transportation and electronic infrastructure, California’s economy will not work efficiently. This is true in both urban and rural areas.



Central Valley commute. Photo: Department of Water Resources

The importance of California’s telecommunications infrastructure: Businesses in California’s knowledge-based economy want a highly trained workforce and specialized infrastructure support, such as advanced telecommunications and information networks. Providing this kind of infrastructure is critical to California because rising income and standards of living come largely from increases in productivity. Regions like California with relatively high operating costs will have to compete based on productivity, speed, and innovation.

Infrastructure need

In a large part, the need for infrastructure is driven by population growth and settlement patterns. New residents demand basic public services, such as schools, police, and fire protection. This is especially true with settlement patterns into new areas that require the development of the most basic public services, such as roads, water, and sanitation. Development moves into wildlands often results in specific settlement patterns. This pattern shows that development is locating in areas of historically high fire risk or areas with sensitive ecological resources. Development in range or agricultural areas can bring settlement into floodplains or seismic areas. This may place additional pressures on public services, especially those related to natural disasters.

In large part, the demand for infrastructure is driven by population growth and settlement patterns.

An increasing dimension of the need for infrastructure to support California’s urban society relates to quality of life. This includes such things as the provision of open space and parks, improvement of air and water quality, disposal of wastes, restoration of natural resources from past degradation, and preservation

of resources of special quality such as unique vistas or wildlife habitat. These kinds of investments are especially important as regions of California compete against each other based in part on quality of life variables.

It is nearly impossible to estimate the total infrastructure needs as seen by all levels of government that operate in California. As a first approximation, the Assessment uses estimates by the California Department of Finance (DOF) for State agencies. The DOF *Capital Outlay and Infrastructure Report, 1999*, indicates that State departments have estimated infrastructure needs of \$82.2 billion, however, \$8.7 billion of existing bond authorization is available to fund future projects, therefore the need for new funding is \$73.5 billion. Most of this can be met from projected revenue sources, but at least \$6.4 billion is un-funded infrastructure (California Department of Finance, 1999).

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The California Business Roundtable (CBRT) updated these estimates and found that the ten-year need for California infrastructure is more than \$90 billion. Most of this addition is related to educational infrastructure. However, this number does not include \$15-25 billion in funding of new transportation infrastructure essential to maintain existing levels of mobility. CBRT points out that

the highway capacity has increased by seven percent over the last 20 years while population has increased by 50 percent (California Business Roundtable, 1998). See [Building a Legacy for the Next Generation](#).

Table 1. Ten-year capital outlay needs for selected programs as identified by various State agencies (fiscal years 1999/2000 to 2008/09)

Agency	Amount (millions of dollars)	Percentage of total
K-12 Education	\$8,857	20
Higher Education	\$15,423	31
Youth and Adult Corrections	\$9,486	21
Business, Transportation, and Housing	\$27,560	1
Trade and Commerce Agencies	\$1,100	3
Natural Resources/EPA*	\$8,981	20
Water Resources	\$2,803	6
Parks and Recreation	\$1,953	4
All other	\$4,225	10
Other government infrastructure	\$2,162	5
Total need	\$73,569	100

*Environmental Protection Agency
 Source: Department of Finance, 1999

Provision of infrastructure

Federal, State, and local agencies all spend for infrastructure. Federal involvement can occur in a variety of forms, including transfer payments, spending for services, and actual construction and

maintenance of facilities. Examples of federal involvement in infrastructure are funding for highways and education.

Within California, governance is split between State and local government. The State historically has been responsible for general support such as financing basic health and human services, public safety, education, economic development, environmental and consumer protection, and other statewide infrastructure. Local government (counties, cities, and special districts) provides direct services to citizens as guided by the State.

Counties provide basic human services and law enforcement duties. These include:

- Municipal services in unincorporated areas (sheriff, land use planning, fire protection and recreation services if not covered by a special district, etc.)
- State and federal social service and health programs (food stamps, foster care, etc.)
- County services to all residents (criminal prosecution, property tax collection, election administration, land use planning, etc.)

Although it varies, counties spend significant portions of their general-purpose revenues to pay for these programs.

Special districts traditionally have been formed by local voters to provide specific services such as water, sewer, or fire protection (Commission on Local Governance for the 21st Century, 2000). For 1997-98, the State Controller listed 4,780 special districts with 53 categories of districts. Districts are divided into two categories. Non-enterprise districts are primarily funded or supported by government funding. Enterprise districts are primarily self-supporting through levying of user charges and fees.

Additionally, special districts can be organized as joint power authorities (JPA), non-profit corporations (NPC), or other forms. Since 1989-90, there has been an increase in the number of special districts organized as JPAs or NPCs. There has been a decline in other special district organizations from 1989-90 to 1997-98 (California State Controller, 2000).

Changes in funding sources and program emphasis have altered the role of State governance. California is now much more focused on law enforcement, environmental regulation, and financing education, social, and health services (Silva and Lewis, 2000). The State provides funding for public safety and trial courts.

Proposition 13: Prior to 1978, the system of public finance was shared between the State and local governments (including cities, counties and special districts). Each level of government had major sources of revenue. The primary State sources were income tax, sales tax, and a variety of other sources. The major source of local government revenue was the property tax (Commission on Local Governance for the 21st Century 2000).

The adoption of Proposition 13 in 1978 mandated one property tax rate—one percent of the assessed value of property. This led to implementation of a new State-local finance system. In response, the State assumed control of the distribution of property tax revenues by enacting programs, such as the Education Relief Augmentation Fund. This increased support to local governments (Shires, 1999).

At the local level, the ability to raise revenue and the responsibility for providing services mostly are separated. There is more competition over funding and there is often less ability to raise revenues for locally desired services. Un-funded or partially funded State and federal mandates have taken a toll

(Lyon, 2000). Voters are more often indifferent and distrustful of State government (Silva and Barbou, 1999).

Counties rely less on the property tax collections and expenditures. Property tax expenditures as a percent of aggregate county revenue decreased from 33 percent in 1977-78 to 12 percent in 1995-96. In contrast, State funds increased from 24 percent to 42 percent (Chapman, 1998). The percentages for taxes and benefits assessments increased 16 percent in 1998-99, but are still far less than historical figures.

Many police and fire districts, which enjoy strong political support, have been able to offset revenue losses. However, special districts, especially those that do not provide public safety services have suffered the most. Examples include mosquito abatement districts, library programs, and recreation and park districts (Commission on Local Governance for the 21st Century, 2000).

Yet, despite these impacts, the structure of local governance in California seems to have remained relatively stable. Counties are inventive at finding solutions and avoiding issues that would cause further fragmentation of local government (Lewis, 1998).

Willingness and ability of Californians to fund infrastructure

Key factors in the development and maintenance of an efficient physical infrastructure are the willingness and ability to fund it. For California this can be seen in several ways.

One measure of this willingness is the relative tax burden of Californians compared to that of other states. California taxpayers paid \$3,475 per capita to State and local government in 1995-96. This was the eleventh highest in the nation. Per capita funding of government still increased, even after the passage of Proposition 13 and related measures. Californians now pay over 16 percent of personal income to support State and local government. This is nearly the same proportion as before Proposition 13 (Kroes, 1999).

One measure of the relative capacity to demand and pay for infrastructure is the relative tax burden in California.

Impact of Proposition 13: On a per capita basis, adjusted for inflation, overall public revenues are approximately 85 percent of their pre-Proposition 13 levels (Shires et al, 2000 and Legislative Analyst Office, 2000b). See [Has Proposition 13 Delivered? The Changing Tax Burden in California](#).

Although less revenue comes from property taxes, other sources generate more (Kroes, 1999). Fees and assessments are now a larger cost to taxpayers in California than property taxes, sales taxes, or income taxes. These fees and assessments are growing and represent a cost of \$25 billion per year (McCarthy, 2000).

The impacts of State programs to relieve loss of the property tax to local government have been uneven. Some counties including many rural forest and rangeland counties receive more revenue from relief measures than lost under the property tax shift; others receive much less. Beyond this generalization, no regional pattern emerges. In some cases, counties may experience net gain and contain cities that experience net loss. Generally, counties in the mountain regions of the Sierra Nevada receive more property taxes per capita than other counties (Legislative Analyst Office, 1998). They have the greatest property values per year-round resident in the State and they continue to receive the large shares of the property tax they received before Proposition 13.

Statewide, according to the Legislative Analyst Office (LAO), real per capita spending on infrastructure dropped rapidly in California in earlier decades. This decrease came from less funding for major programs such as transportation and higher education. Recently, per capita spending has grown moderately. Increased funding for transportation and resource projects was added in

2000. In 2000-01, the LAO reported that per capita expenditure for infrastructure in California would be about \$93. In real terms, this is approximately one-third the spending level of the mid-1960s (Legislative Analyst Office, 2000a). See [2000 Cal Facts, Program Trends Part 5](#) .

Still another measure of the demand for infrastructure is the willingness of taxpayers to carry bonded indebtedness. At the State level, as of December 2001, California had almost \$28 billion in outstanding or unissued general obligation bond debt. Of this amount, about 10 percent was related to natural resources (California State Treasurer, 2001a). See [General Fund Supported Debt](#). By credit industry standards, California's ratio of debt service as a percentage of general fund revenues is low, so the potential to fund expanded infrastructure is good (California State Treasurer, 2001b; California State Treasurer, 2001c; Poterba and Rueben, 1999).

Statewide, voters in recent years have been inclined to approve propositions that relate to the environment. In 1996, Proposition 204 (Safe, Clean, Reliable Water Supply Act) passed with wide support from water authority, business, agricultural, and environmental organizations. The proposition authorized a total funding amount of \$995 million and covered areas related to clean water and water recycling and for ongoing programs in the Bay-Delta watersheds and for the administrative expenses of CALFED studies and planning activities. In 2000, Propositions 12 (Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000) and Proposition 13 (Safe Drinking Water, Clean Water, Watershed Protection, and Flood Protection Act) passed. Proposition 12 authorized \$2.1 billion and Proposition 13 authorized \$1.97 billion for specified purposes. Finally, in March 2002, voters passed Proposition 40 (the California Clean Water, Clear Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002) authorizing \$2.6 billion for specified purposes.

At the local level, per capita debt has increased in recent years. Adjusted for population growth and inflation, total local bonded indebtedness increased steadily from \$400 per capita in 1984 to \$1,400 per capita in 1995 (Department of Housing and Community Development, 2000b). In the last decade, as counties have struggled with funding issues, they have sought new ways to finance capital expenditures. One common approach is the lease purchase plan. In 1990, 28 counties had lease purchase obligations of about \$3.2 billion. By 1999, 46 counties had lease purchase obligations of about \$12.9 billion. Bonded indebtedness of counties had grown from \$475.3 million in 1990 to about \$6.7 billion in 1999 (California State Controller, 2001).

Lease purchase plans: These plans, used at all levels of government, have several forms. At the least complex level, they can consist of a non-profit corporation being organized to issue "certificates of participation." Private corporations use funds from these proceeds to construct facilities on government land. Corporations then lease these facilities back to the governmental agencies using them. The terms of the lease retire the financing and the governmental agency acquires ownership at the end of the lease.

Local voters have resisted raising taxes. For example, despite a strong economy, there were more local tax measures on the November 2000 ballot than ever before. While voters seemed willing to extend some existing taxes, most of the new tax proposals were turned down. Of 94 direct tax increase measures found in a Cal-Tax survey of local November ballots, approximately 58 percent were rejected. Sales tax increases failed in seven counties (Doerr and Micheli, 2000). This resistance continued in the March 2002 primary when voters in the State's 58 counties considered 115 ballot measures. Of the 115 various kinds

of measures, 52 related to taxes. Voters rejected 37 measures, or 71.1 percent of those proposed (Institute for Social Research, 2000).

One measure of the willingness to pay for infrastructure is trends in annual expenditures for services at the local level.

A final measure of willingness to pay for infrastructure is the trend in annual expenditures for services at the local level. At the county level, per capita expenditures for public assistance have increased from \$273 in 1989-90 to \$305 in 1998-99. In real dollars, this is an increase of 11.5 percent. Public assistance includes expenditures for welfare, social services, general relief, and other assistance categories (California State Controller, 2001).

In contrast, public protection includes funds spent for judicial, police protection, detention and correction, fire protection, flood control, and related functions. Per capita expenditure for public protection functions has increased from \$194 in 1989-90 to \$259 in 1998-99. In real dollars, this is an increase of 33 percent (California State Controller, 2001).

Concluding observation

Statewide, the discussion over provision of infrastructure is fundamentally urban. By far, urban areas have great needs including investment in transportation, open space, parks, and improved air and water quality. Yet, at the same time, the infrastructure needs in California's forest and rangeland counties are significant. Rural areas are competing as part of California's regional economy and must be able to offer attributes that attract industries and retain workforces. The rural transportation structure links regional economies and industries. This infrastructure is aging and road connections between many rural communities are often limited and the distances long. Most of these rural economies traditionally have been dependent on agriculture, mining, forestry, and ranching. As these industries have declined, tourism has become more important to local economies. While tourism offers promise, it also brings special infrastructure needs.

In the next decade, rural economic policy is challenged by the fact that economic growth can be limited by inadequate infrastructure, operating funds, and technical assistance. Over the last decade, Californians especially have been willing to invest in education and programs for open space, parks, habitat, and improved air and water quality. However, at the local level, taxpayers have resisted raising taxes. Combined with the limited ability of local governments to raise funds under the current system of public finance, planning for and provision of local services in some forest and rangeland counties can be difficult.

In general, Californians appear willing to make investments in infrastructure, especially for education, transportation, and quality of life issues like clean air, clean water, and open space. The context of these investments is overwhelmingly urban. They must respond to the needs of a growing population and a highly mobile work force operating in a regionally based economy.

Both the governance and funding mix of infrastructure at the State and local level have changed. With shifts in the property tax revenue to the State, local governments have become more reliant on other revenue sources to sustain their programs.

Shifts in funding sources and program emphasis also have changed the role of State governance. California is now much more focused on law enforcement, environmental regulation, and financing

education, social, and health services. By virtue of recent ballot propositions and other programs, the State is also playing a significant role in environmental restoration and habitat acquisition.

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