



\$2 billion Baltimore bridge rebuild is test case for new national debate over infrastructure spending

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- Planning is well underway to replace Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, which collapsed in March.
- Officials are hoping to use the process as an opportunity to reimagine the rest of the infrastructure in the region.
- The planning is, in many ways, a fast-motion version of conversations underway in every state, with a total 54,000 projects and \$550 billion in spending related to the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.



2024 'America's Top States for Business' new battleground: Infrastructure

Three months after Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed – killing six people, shutting a major port and disrupting vehicle traffic along the Eastern Seaboard — local, state and federal officials began a massive effort to make the best out of an unimaginable situation.

“We’re working with construction companies and designers, and working with the people of our state, to think about what is it that we hope for this almost two-mile long bridge,” Maryland Governor Wes Moore told CNBC.

The process passed a major milestone last week when crews managed to reopen the main navigation channel to the Port of Baltimore, the nation’s largest port for vehicles. That process alone was initially forecasted to take up to a year.

“It didn’t take 11 months. We got it done in 11 weeks, because we work together,” Moore said.

But now, in many ways, comes the hard part. Officials hope to use the disaster as a chance to reconsider all the infrastructure in the region.

“This is going to be an important opportunity for our state to look at all of our infrastructure, our roads, our bridges, our tunnels. You know, our critical infrastructure is imperative for our economic growth and development,” Moore said.

Reimagining how to rebuild a bridge



In an aerial view, the remains of the Francis Scott Key Bridge are seen as salvage crews continue to work to clean up the wreckage after the bridge collapsed in the Patapsco River on June 11, 2024 in Baltimore, Maryland. Kevin Dietsch | Getty Images

Some of that planning is already underway. Last month, the Maryland Transportation Authority issued its first request for proposals to rebuild the bridge. The plan is to use what officials call a “Progressive Design-Build Approach,” in which the design and construction firms are hired at the

same time and work together throughout the process. This efficiency could allow a new bridge to be built in just four years — breakneck speed for a project expected to cost upward of \$2 billion. The Maryland Transportation Authority is expected to choose the firms this summer.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg told CNBC the new bridge will be far better than the old one that opened in 1977.

“We know things that we didn’t know in the 1970s, about how to put up a bridge,” Buttigieg said. “Nobody wanted to be here through this tragic catastrophe that happened. But it does bring an opportunity, and I would say, responsibility, to get things right for the future.”



Transportation Secretary Buttigieg on Port of Baltimore reopening: Good news for supply chains

Transportation planners have also begun a series of community meetings to gain public input. At a virtual meeting on June 11, questions included whether the new bridge — like the old one — will be a toll bridge (that is the plan) and whether the new bridge will be wider than the old, four-lane structure (no).

As the process continues, officials have promised an “engagement tour” to get public input.

The city of Baltimore, meanwhile, hopes to speed up funding for the already-planned reconstruction of the Hanover Street Bridge over the Patapsco River, which has emerged as a key alternate route for travelers who formerly used the Key Bridge.

A microcosm of the national infrastructure push

The situation in Baltimore is a vastly sped-up version of processes underway in states and cities across the country, said Buttigieg, who is overseeing some 54,000 projects nationwide funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law passed in 2021.

“We have funding that goes to projects that come from every state, city, airport authority or transit agency, you can think of,” he said.

While Buttigieg acknowledged that some of the demand is a result of the huge amount of money being made available — \$550 billion in transportation and infrastructure funding over five years — it is also a reflection of the need.

“To me, it indicates just how much work there is to do in this country,” he said. “We were reminded as a country the hard way how important our infrastructure is, because of the pressures we experienced at the beginning of this decade with Covid. We saw what happens if our supply chains come under strain.”

New economic development battleground

Companies seeking to capitalize on the drive — and incentives — to rebuild damaged domestic supply chains are looking for states and localities that have proper infrastructure in place, said site selection consultant John Boyd, Jr., of The Boyd Company. This may help explain why infrastructure has become such a hot topic in the world of United States economic development.

“Site readiness is a key component when we think about what distinguishes one market versus another, and it very often is such a critical factor, it could tip the scales for a project towards an overall less business-friendly state, if they have a certified site that’s ready to go,” he said.

A CNBC analysis of all 50 states’ economic development marketing materials shows that infrastructure is the most mentioned attribute by states marketing to attract companies. As a result, Infrastructure is the top-weighted category in CNBC’s annual state competitiveness rankings, America’s Top States for Business.

Experts say the emphasis on infrastructure will likely stick around for a while.

“It’s not easy to build out electrical or water or gas or wastewater infrastructure. Those things take time and money,” said Seth Martindale, chairman of the Site Selectors Guild, which supplied some of the data for the CNBC study. “I think it’s going to be five-plus, 10-plus years before we really get it to a point where we feel good about it.”

Buttigieg noted that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is already halfway through its five-year lifespan, with plenty of needs remaining. “I think it’s not too soon to start thinking and talking about what the next five-year package ought to look like,” Buttigieg said, referencing the future of U.S. infrastructure.