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Investing in infrastructure key to unleashing commercial development - by Jeffrey Diehl

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Jeffrey Diehl

From May 10-14, Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank joined with advocates to celebrate United for Infrastructure Week. From our roads and bridges, to safe drinking water, to sewer systems and wastewater treatment plants, infrastructure is the backbone of our way of life and our economy. Yet as has been pointed out often, Rhode Island and our nation are seriously under-investing in the construction and maintenance of these critical assets.

We experience this firsthand every time we hit a pothole or sit in rush-hour traffic, and this lack of infrastructure investment is holding back many commercial real estate projects, which rely on quality basic infrastructure to be successful.

To tackle this challenge, create good paying jobs, attract businesses, and build a more resilient Rhode Island, we must lead with infrastructure. That is exactly what Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank was created to do by providing low-cost financing options and technical expertise to our state's municipalities.

One example of the Infrastructure Bank's work financing infrastructure that is in turn driving commercial investment is our work with the cities of Pawtucket and Central Falls on a new commuter rail station set to open in 2022. Through \$850,000 in Transit Oriented Development financing, both cities are upgrading roads, sidewalks, and stormwater infrastructure in the district surrounding the new station. That district is now attracting significant investment in several mixed-use projects like the Peyser Real Estate Group's \$43.5 million Dexter St. Commons project that will include 150 residential units and 20,300 s/f of retail space.

Another example of our work that complements the success of commercial real estate, is our Municipal Resilience Program. Since its inception, the program has worked with more than a dozen municipalities across the state to help them identify, prioritize and fund key resiliency projects to reduce the impact of severe weather events. Projects include upgrading stormwater and sewer systems in North Kingstown to better protect Wickford Village's thriving commercial center from the

impacts of sea level rise.

Over the past 30 years, we have invested a total of \$2.4 billion in infrastructure projects in every city and town in Rhode Island. Projects that have created more than 62,000 jobs for tradespeople, engineers, architects, and other construction-related employees. These projects upgrade our infrastructure, increase resilience, create jobs, and have a multiplier effect throughout our economy with every \$1 invested in infrastructure generating \$3.70 in economic growth.

Working together with our municipal partners we are making real progress upgrading Rhode Island's infrastructure, but significant additional federal investment is needed. Fortunately, President Biden and Congress are now working through several bold proposals to significantly increase investment in critical infrastructure.

The approximately \$2 trillion in infrastructure investment proposed in President Biden's American Jobs Plan would allow us to dramatically scale up our work to assist municipalities in replacing and upgrading deteriorating infrastructure of all kinds while making it more resilient.

The success of commercial real estate and basic infrastructure are intimately tied together. That is why now is the time to lead with and invest in infrastructure.

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