

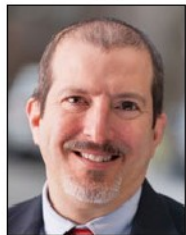
STILL POWERFUL

Even a reduced federal infrastructure spending plan will be welcome in New Jersey

BY MARTIN DAKS

Facing resistance to his original \$2.25 trillion infrastructure proposal, President Joe Biden appears to be closer to achieving a bipartisan compromise on a less-costly \$1.2 trillion deal. While lopping nearly 50% off the total funding, the wide-ranging proposal still directs federal money to clean transportation and clean energy initiatives, in addition to lead pipe replacement and other cleanup efforts that a June 24 White House news release says will create more union and other jobs. If it passes, New Jersey could benefit, according to some insiders.

"As a leader in geotechnical and water engineering on complex infrastructure projects—including tunnel design, bridge design, rail projects, airport terminals, off- and on-shore wind projects, solar arrays, and resiliency planning—GZA stands to benefit



Winslow

from the bipartisan infrastructure bill," said GZA GeoEnvironmental Inc. Principal-District Office Manager David Winslow. "Although the original \$2.25 trillion plan may be reduced to \$1.2 trillion, it can fund a number of long-needed infra-



Mario M. Cuomo Bridge.
- NEW YORK STATE THRUWAY AUTHORITY

structure upgrades in our region."

GZA has more than 700 employees and 31 offices nationwide, with 110 employees across four offices in New Jersey. The firm also has offices in Philadelphia and Manhattan that service New Jersey projects.

"GZA has extensive experience with bridge, tunnel, and roadway projects," Winslow said. "Prior to the cancellation of the Gateway Tunnel over 10 years ago, GZA was part of the winning design-build team; we are well positioned to be a part of this critical project if it is funded under this bill. The bill is also intended to provide investment in new, green infrastructure projects, such as commuter rail, and this is another area in which GZA has demonstrated expertise."

Winslow noted that CZA also played a big design-build role in the Mario M. Cuomo Bridge, which was fully opened in 2018. Calling it "the largest bridge-construction project in New York State," he said it "is one of GZA's most high-profile projects in the region. As the lead geotechnical engineer, GZA designed the pile system that supports the main span towers and piles for the remainder of the bridge. GZA's innovative foundation design advanced the state of the practice in geotechnical and foundation engineering relative to the behavior of long, large diameter piles in soft soils that engineers, and the field will benefit from it on other projects. GZA also provided environmental and asbestos services."

GZA's infrastructure portfolio also includes projects at LaGuardia Airport, like the Delta Air Lines Terminals C & D Reconfiguration; for the Long Island Railroad, including the LIRR Expansion/Main Line Third Track, and multi-disciplinary projects for the New Jersey Turnpike Authority and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. "We also provided geotechnical engineering services for the Bayonne Bridge 'Raise the Roadway' work," Winslow said.

Project delivery on large infrastructure projects has changed, he added. "In the past, most infrastructure projects followed traditional design-bid-build project delivery methods with the owning agency, such as New Jersey Turnpike Authority hiring a design team to prepare 100% design documents for bid by a contractor. More recently, we've seen an increase in design-build project delivery, with the owning agency producing a smaller design set that design-build teams propose on. Public-private partnerships have also increased, wherein a private entity may finance and construct an infrastructure project and then lease it back to an authority or be compensated from tolls and fees collected during its use."

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Other engineering firms are also excited about the prospect of a bipartisan infrastructure initiative. Even the slimmed-down version “will present tremendous opportunities for consulting-engineering



Cimino

firms, presenting projects in water and sewer, transportation, and energy improvement upgrades among other areas,” said John Cimino, Senior vice president and chief strategy officer at T&M Associates. The Middletown-based engineering and technical services consulting company has a national footprint with more than 300 employees. Recent T&M projects in New Jersey include the Grasselli Access Road Bridge, a \$13 million, 497-foot-long structure in Linden.

He sees a lot of local opportunity, “since New Jersey’s infrastructure tends to be older,” so besides bridge and other roadwork, “there could be a lot of work in the state on schools, healthcare and other facilities, including upgrading their energy efficiency” to reduce operating costs.

RIPPLE EFFECTS

Even firms that aren’t directly involved with infrastructure may benefit from Biden’s proposal. “Infrastructure



Murray

improvements mean people can get around faster, and the building process generally creates more jobs,” said Bryan Murray, director of business development at March Associates, a Wayne-based construction management company and general contractor. “When more people are working, they have more money to spend, so there’s a kind of trickle-down effect.”

He said that could spur even more interest in projects like Vinty Apartments, a mixed-use project in Elizabeth that March Associates worked on as construction manager. “Multifamily mixed-use projects have continued to attract people from various demographics,” said Murray. “And the pandemic has accelerated that as more people leave New York City for a more suburban lifestyle, with amenities and nearby shopping but without the single-family home maintenance requirements. If the infrastructure bill is passed, even more people will be interested in mixed-use projects here, and in other growth areas like Parsippany, Whippany and Flemington.”

Approval of the president’s plan would be good for unions, and a bonanza for New Jersey, according to Engineers Labor-Employer Cooperative 825 Director Mark Longo. “With New Jersey [infrastructure] being ranked as among the worst in the nation, any and all additional infrastructure spending is

good for the state, local economy and quality of life,” he said. “We have many needs and limited resources to meet those needs.”

Boasting more than 8,200 members, ELEC825 is a labor-management fund that represents operating engineers and contractors, and “the bread-and-butter operating engineer work is primarily in surface transportation and utility infrastructure — all of which is heavily featured in every proposal,” Longo added. “And for that we are excited. For Local 825 specifically, one of the largest infrastructure projects since Robert Moses’ time

has seen movement under President Biden — Gateway Tunnels and Portal North Bridges.”

Operating engineers are currently involved with infrastructure projects in Bergen County, where lead main pipes are being replaced with safer alternatives “to ensure clear drinking water” and ELEC825 members are also “beginning the work on the offshore port where the turbines will be built in Salem County,” he noted. “In Hudson County, we are bolstering the bulkheads around the historic Lackawanna Terminal; and new electric transmission lines have been installed in

Somerset County. Additionally, the Turnpike, Parkway and almost every major highway have operating engineers currently resurfacing or repairing bridges as we speak.”

The “brass ring” in the infrastructure debate would be securing funding for the Gateway Rail Tunnels, according to Longo. “This is a true matter of national importance,” he said. “The most recent published information shows this corridor serving more than 17% of the total U.S. population, 97 Fortune 500 company headquarters, and an area that contributes 20% of the national GDP.”

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