

# Trump to Turn Attention to Infrastructure

President could find bipartisan support for his effort; questions remain over financing

By TED MANN  
AND MICHAEL C. BENDER

President Donald Trump will launch a new campaign this week aimed at fulfilling his pledge for \$1 trillion of infrastructure investment, hoping to capitalize on support for rebuilding the nation's transportation systems.

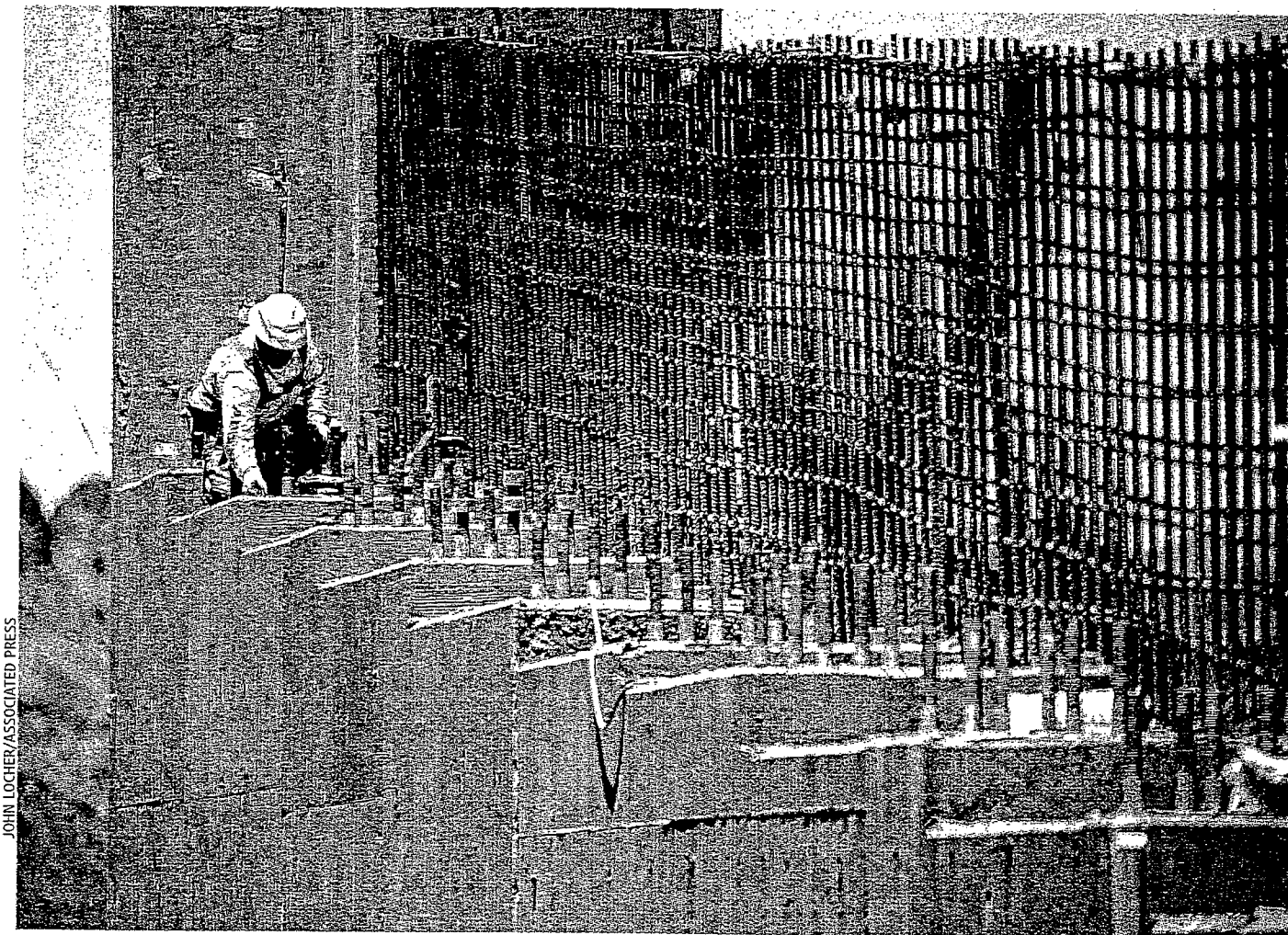
Mr. Trump will begin with a White House event Monday announcing a push to privatize air-traffic control across the U.S., in what backers say could be a catalyst for improving speed and fuel efficiency across the aviation industry.

From there, the president will campaign for reviving infrastructure along the Ohio River, then meet with mayors and governors in the White House, followed by a speech at the Transportation Department on Friday.

The White House still hasn't said how it plans to pay for the projects, and officials said a more detailed proposal will come at an unspecified later date. But Mr. Trump's top economic adviser said the administration aims to encourage states and cities to bear much of the burden.

"We want to talk to them and make sure we're partnering with them to make sure that they can use their tax dollars as efficiently," White House National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn told reporters Friday. "We can be a good partner with them in helping them to enhance their infrastructure projects."

Shifting the discussion to infrastructure could mean the best chance for Mr. Trump to find common ground with members of Congress who object to other elements of his agenda, given the broad agreement that the nation's roads, bridges, rails and water facilities are in disrepair. It would,



Work in May on U.S. Interstate 11 near Boulder City, Nev. The president campaigned on a pledge to rebuild the nation's infrastructure.

however, mean finding a way to live up to campaign pledges that many believe are irreconcilable—investing \$1 trillion in infrastructure, but doing so with funds raised almost entirely from the private sector.

The infrastructure push is encouraging, said Scott Rechler, a real-estate developer and former official at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey who consulted with Mr. Trump's transition team. "They should have started with this, since it's one area with a level of bipartisan support."

But Mr. Rechler, a Democrat whose real-estate company has financed infrastructure in public-private partnerships with local government, said the administration's plans should recognize that private financing won't be able to replace federal funding in fixing some

areas—from commuter railroads to crumbling dams—where investors can't turn a profit.

"It's not free," Mr. Rechler said. "At some point or another someone's going to have to pay for this."

In remarks to reporters last week, presidential advisers made clear they will be attempting to pair the president's pledge to renew critical infrastructure with a shift of responsibility for some of the costs from federally funded grant programs to state and municipal taxpayers.

Some city and state officials say privately that they are already strapped for funds and worry about having to shoulder additional costs.

The administration has called for spending \$200 billion on infrastructure over 10 years, saying that infusion of

federal money could help trigger roughly \$1 trillion worth of total funding thanks to a surge in private investment.

The administration hasn't said how it will pay for the federal government's share of that investment, and hasn't put forward legislation that would show how it plans to spur private investment.

Senior administration officials didn't say if Mr. Trump would put forward his own proposals for raising the funds for an infrastructure package or defer to Congress, saying that is "something we are currently debating inside the White House."

An infrastructure proposal fleshed out with details will be ready "when the president tells us it should be ready," a senior administration official said.

The administration has been most specific about its

desire to cut regulation and permitting that can delay the start of new infrastructure projects. Mr. Trump has seized on a flow chart provided by Mr. Cohn's deputy, DJ Gribbin, that shows how the permitting process for a new highway can involve up to 16 federal agencies.

Mr. Cohn said Friday that the administration would like to shrink the permitting schedule for such projects from as much as 10 years to "two or less."

"The cost of infrastructure goes up dramatically as time goes on in the approval process, capital is tied up, it has people waiting for permits, and the amount of paperwork and the amount of fees that you just encumbered while you're going through the approval process is enormous," Mr. Cohn said.

## Plan for Air-Traffic Control Gets Focus

In his infrastructure push, President Donald Trump will embrace a longstanding goal of some aviation experts and lawmakers: transferring control of the nation's air-traffic system to a new nonprofit corporation, which they say would mean a more nimble and cost-effective approach.

Control by the Federal Aviation Administration, these advocates say, is an antiquated model that falls short of the best practices used in other countries.

Overhauling air-traffic control would be complex, involving the privatization of a federal workforce of some 30,000. The administration proposes moving air-traffic operations off the federal budget, eliminating taxes that currently pay for the system while allowing the new operators to impose user fees.

The new system could mean more efficient landing patterns and routes for planes, supporters say, and could let air-traffic controllers move more planes through the busiest air corridors.

Some lawmakers and aviation officials are wary of privatization, including those from rural states who worry that a private system would neglect less-populated areas. Others are concerned that a new system would give too much influence to big airlines.

Privatization is opposed by many Democrats, and it's not clear if the White House's endorsement will sway enough Republican Senators to change that chamber's rejection of privatization less than a year ago.

The Trump administration's budget released earlier this year included a proposal for privatizing the air traffic control system with a three-year phase-in.

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