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SUMMER 2022



Ryan Taylor
Pickering Associates

Ryan Taylor is President and Chief Executive Officer of Pickering Associates, a regional provider of architecture, engineering, and surveying solutions. Taylor provides the leadership and strategic vision to an experienced team of design professionals and project managers serving clients from four offices in West Virginia and Ohio. He has managed projects with a total value exceeding more than \$250 million. Taylor volunteers his time on several non-profit boards, including the Polymer Alliance Zone, Westbrook Health Services, The Buckskin Council – Boy Scouts of America, and the Wood County Development Authority.

Creating the Environment for Growth and Expansion

As most of us are probably aware, the U.S. Congress recently passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). As defined by the White House, this “Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will rebuild America’s roads, bridges, and rails; expand access to clean drinking water; ensure every American has access to high-speed internet; tackle the climate crisis; advance environmental justice; and invest in communities that have too often been left behind.”

The bill provides \$550 billion in new spending on our nation’s infrastructure over the next five years, including:

- \$110 billion for roads, bridges, and major projects.
- \$66 billion for passenger and freight rail.
- \$11 billion for transportation safety.
- \$39 billion for public transit.
- \$17 billion for ports and waterways.
- \$25 billion for airports.
- \$7.5 billion for clean school buses and ferries.
- \$7.5 billion for electric vehicle charging.
- \$1 billion to reconnect communities, including funds for projects that remove barriers to opportunity caused by legacy infrastructure.

Those are some very large numbers being tossed around, and not all that money is headed West Virginia’s way. Based on formula funding, West Virginia can expect to receive almost \$4.4 billion in funds over the next five years. That’s



a historic investment that will make life better for hundreds of thousands of West Virginia residents, create a generation of good-paying jobs, and encourage economic growth.

Sounds great, but what will be impacted and why is it so important to the economic growth of West Virginia? Some of the impact is obvious – improved roads, clean water, expanded broadband, etc. are all critical to the state. But there is a less visible part that can play a huge role in future development in West Virginia. Let me explain what I mean.

One of the biggest economic growth challenges the state has had is attracting businesses to relocate or expand their operations here. We have had some great wins recently with the Nucor and GreenPower Motor Company announcements, but the competition between neighboring states is strong, and we can’t sit on our laurels. We need to continue to create an enticing environment for companies to expand to West Virginia.

One of the biggest keys to attracting new business to locate here is what some refer to as shovel-ready sites. Site selectors need a wide variety of information to determine whether a location is suitable. General site information includes:

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- A description of all parcels that make up the site.
- A site map and schedule for site plan approvals and permits.
- A zoning description of the site plus current and future planned zoning of adjacent sites.
- Land use maps must be provided. Information about whether the site or adjacent sites fall within the boundaries of special Economic Development Zones.
- Aerial photos noting site boundaries.
- The current price offering for land.
- Current real estate taxes and special assessments on all parcels that make up the site.
- Identification of current and former land use of the site and adjacent sites.

Site selectors also need to dive further into the physical attributes of the ground to know whether the particular site is suitable for specific structures or uses. Certain tests and site assessments must be completed and documented, including geotechnical evaluations and Phase I (and II, if required)



Because of a site readiness study Pickering Associates completed, this site is now being transformed into a \$47 million investment by FedEx.



Rough grubbing and grading of a site in Parkersburg to make it more appealing to future site selectors.

Environmental Site Assessments. The availability of utilities is also an extremely important factor that site selectors consider. The types of services available at the site and the names of the providers should be documented.

When reviewing potential sites, many of the selectors will even search out information regarding mean income, tax structure, quality of education, and, more generally, the overall quality of life for the region they would be serving. These intangibles are also very important as attractors to talent and the future workforce of facilities. They want what is best for their employees and, ultimately, what will bolster the community.

Promoting an existing site to a potential new business is fairly straightforward since the majority of that information and infrastructure already exist. New, undeveloped sites are much more challenging. The costs to cover the preliminary work required on the front end has been difficult to cover without having a tenant lined up. The IIJA is helping change all of that.

The IIJA is providing funding specifically set aside to modernize our roads, bridges, transit, rail, ports, airports, broadband, and drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. With that said, there are additional grant funds within the Appalachian Regional Commission that state and local governments can take advantage of to help fund specific business infrastructure development.

Eligible uses are expected to support the Appalachian Regional Commission goals of Building Appalachian Businesses; Building Appalachia's Workforce Ecosystem; Building Appalachia's Infrastructure; Building Regional Culture and Tourism; and Building Community Leaders and Capacity. These funds can be used to complete planning, zoning, surveys, title work, environmental studies, soil analyses, and public infrastructure engineering prior to promoting the site for sale.

As you can see, the impact of the IIJA isn't just about improved roads and bridges, repairs and development of water and sewer systems, expansion of high-speed internet, and upgrading our power grids. It's about creating more livable communities, supporting disadvantaged and underserved areas, and positioning the state to win the 21st century through modern infrastructure. These impacts are fundamental to making the state's supply chain ecosystem more efficient and could be the key to raising competitiveness, especially as companies rethink global supply footprints in the pandemic's wake. ▼