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Guidance Position Statement

Building a Better Future

Statement of Purpose

The American Public Works Association (APWA) seeks to encourage the public works communities, its professionals and practitioners, policy-makers and decisions-makers at all level of government and the public at-large, of its position on the need to re-focus the discussion of how to replace the crumbling infrastructure across the nation and the seemingly insurmountable amount of money needed to fund the replacement of this infrastructure with a more positive, inspiring vision of the future that can result from sound application of public works management principles.

Statement of Position

APWA believes the application of sound management principles will lead to a better future for all Americans. To that end, APWA will focus its efforts on programs and activities that lead to a Public Works vision for the future.

Background and Rationale

The great public works projects in history have been the results of leaders describing a better future that results from building those projects. We are not in an age where great projects alone will result in a better future. What is needed is that same vision of a better future to guide ongoing maintenance and operations.

Building any kind of support for maintenance has always been difficult because maintenance is practically invisible and good operations are expected regardless of the impediments that operators encounter.

For years, public works officials have been complaining about failing infrastructure and the need for more financial support for maintenance and operations. This has led to some minor improvements but those improvements have been randomly placed throughout North America. When expert panels conduct “report card” types of evaluations they find that the nation’s infrastructure has deteriorated in spite of all the “awareness building” that has been going on over the last 30 years.

Past efforts by APWA have focused on traditional lobbying efforts to elicit support for public works programs. Judging by the continued deterioration of public infrastructure, a new approach is needed.

Leaders cannot be pessimists. We cannot continue to describe how bad things are becoming. Continual focusing on deterioration and the sins of the past leads to a sense of hopelessness that does not motivate citizens to action.

What is needed is a positive, inspiring vision of the future than can result from sound application of public works management principles. This is no easy task. The easy task is forecasting the future and projecting today's limited resources into that future. That almost always results in a bleak picture of under-funded maintenance and operations.

The hard job is the task of creating a vision of what a properly run public works system can look like. Creating that vision was something Walt Disney tried when he developed the concept of the Experimental Prototype City of Tomorrow of EPCOT. What has resulted is less a vision of a better future and more of a tribute to the American free enterprise system and the allure of escapist entertainment on a massive scale. Still, the concept has merit and could be investigated for lessons learned.

Sponsor

Leadership and Management Committee