

Southeastern Pennsylvania First Suburbs Project

Infrastructure Action Group Report

Goal Statement

Secure investments in Southeastern Pennsylvania's water infrastructure in a manner that is efficient, sustainable, equitable and coordinated throughout the region.

Southeastern Pennsylvania faces a looming water infrastructure crisis. To repair and upgrade aging drinking water, wastewater and stormwater systems, and to deal with mounting regulatory challenges, our region will need to invest billions of dollars in water infrastructure in the coming years. Any future water infrastructure investments should be guided by the following principles:

Efficiency. Southeastern Pennsylvania's water and wastewater infrastructure has expanded rapidly into previously undeveloped areas at a rate that far exceeds population growth, despite the excess capacity that exists in the overall system. Meanwhile, we have failed to invest adequately in maintaining our existing infrastructure. Future infrastructure investments should be guided by a "fix-it-first" policy that prioritizes using and improving existing infrastructure before investing in new infrastructure.

Fiscal Sustainability. To provide for ongoing maintenance and upgrades, and to avert future funding crises like the one we are now facing, infrastructure managers should budget for the eventual replacement of worn out assets and adopt full-cost pricing policies that build future maintenance costs into current rate structures.

Environmental Sustainability. Current policies and institutional arrangements in Pennsylvania discourage integrated water resource management by treating drinking water, wastewater and stormwater as separate domains. Current policies also make it difficult to coordinate water infrastructure decisions with local land use regulations that guide the location and character of development and strongly affect water resources. Policies and incentives should be aligned to encourage a comprehensive approach to water management that protects water quality, conserves groundwater, prevents ecologically harmful withdrawals from rivers and streams, and coordinates infrastructure investments with sound land use management.

Equity. Water does not recognize municipal boundaries, but our policies still require each municipality or authority to address water infrastructure in a piecemeal fashion. This approach places undue burden on older communities that must accommodate water flow from outlying areas, have systems that are in dire need of repair and improvement, and face new federal mandates that will necessitate expensive new investments. These first suburbs also face a declining tax base and are unable to afford the infrastructure investments required of them. Costs must be distributed to recognize the regional nature of these systems so individual municipalities do not bear this burden alone.

Coordinated Throughout the Region. The problems noted above are exacerbated by a highly fragmented system for managing water infrastructure in southeastern Pennsylvania. With responsibility divided among a complex array of municipalities, municipal authorities, public utilities and state agencies, redundancies and inefficiencies abound and disjointed decision-making is the rule. New infrastructure investments should be accompanied by new institutional arrangements that allow for improved coordination and more efficient service delivery throughout the region.