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Trump's Infrastructure Plan Is A Pig With Lipstick
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(Photo by Mike Theiler-Pool/Getty Images)

President Trump's big infrastructure plan is out, and it is a pig with lipstick — he is putting the pork back into the federal funding process after decades of moving toward needs-based federal spending. Here are the main points:

- Ten lucky states will receive $10 billion in grants each for up to 20% of the cost of one or more major projects. A federal agency will dole out this pork on the basis of vague criteria that any political operatives worth their salt will be able to manipulate to favor Trump states.

- It is weighted to rural improvements, favoring Trump country, areas which the march of history has made less relevant, and not urban areas which are the future of the country and of civilization but which happen to also be blue districts.

- There is a plan to level the playing field for private investment by expanding private activity bonds in direct opposition to the just-passed tax overhaul and some money sprinkled at innovation, which could encourage states to explore PPPs but will not yield new work for years to come.

- There is a wish list from various lobbying groups masquerading as a set of "principles" that, for example, allows states "flexibility to commercialize interstate rest areas," and authorizes "utility relocation to take place prior to NEPA completion."

Here is what is missing:

- Enough money to complete all the deferred maintenance for all existing roads, water and power transmission systems, which runs to many trillions.

- A future-looking plan to provide what the country needs to be a 21st-century nation, including smart cities, faster transition to mass transit and renewable energy, and climate change resiliency.

- A focus on our major cities, including New York City, that are the engines of growth in the new economy, which is all about intellectual power, not muscle power.

The Trump infrastructure plan acknowledges that how we do infrastructure needs to ultimately change in its tip of the hat to private investment — that's the lipstick — but it ultimately fails. It is a step backward, both in its focus on rural development and in what is probably its main purpose: to allow the president to reward the red states with big hunks of pork ahead of the 2020 election.