COMMENTARY

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What Rebuild Illinois achieved

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> Infrastructure investment reaches far beyond the construction zone — strengthening jobs, communities and the statewide economy.

When most people think about infrastructure investment, they picture the construction site: orange barrels, heavy equipment and workers rebuilding a road or bridge.

But those things tell only part of the story. To understand the true value of infrastructure investment, we need to look beyond the construction zone.

A new analysis of the state capital program Rebuild Illinois shows what we find when we do. The nonpartisan Illinois Economic Policy Institute examined $30.8 billion in transportation investments made between 2020 and 2025. The study, commissioned by the American Council of Engineering Companies of Illinois, found each dollar invested generated approximately $1.79 in economic activity statewide — a nearly 200% return and approximately $2 for every dollar invested in the Chicago region.

Those benefits reach far beyond engineering and construction.

Rebuild Illinois created or preserved approximately 39,200 jobs annually. About 21,600 were directly connected to construction, and nearly 17,600 additional jobs were supported outside the construction industry through supply chain purchases and spending by workers these projects support.

Local governments benefit as well. Rebuild Illinois increased motor fuel tax distributions to counties, municipalities and townships and authorized $1.5 billion in bond funding for local infrastructure to help communities move forward with projects that might otherwise be delayed or unfunded.

The broader economic activity generated by the program produced an estimated $169 million in additional local tax revenue each year — including approximately $102 million annually in the Chicago region.

For suburban municipalities facing rising costs and limited resources, those benefits matter. Strengthening the local tax base allows communities to address deteriorating roads and bridges before they become more disruptive — and more expensive — to repair.

Rebuild Illinois has helped repair more than 21,000 miles of roadway, rehabilitate or replace more than 800 bridges and complete nearly 1,200 safety improvements.

Yet substantial needs remain. Rebuild Illinois was a down payment on decades of deferred maintenance, not the final payment. Delaying infrastructure investment does not save money; it shifts higher costs and greater safety and reliability problems to the future.

The study results show why Illinois should treat infrastructure as an economic asset rather than an expense. The return is measured not only in smoother roads and stronger bridges, but also in jobs across the economy, stronger local businesses, additional municipal revenue and more competitive communities.