

Kansas Infrastructure Summit Summary



About 650 people participated in-person and virtually at the Kansas Infrastructure Summit held in Wichita on July 13-14. The purpose of the Summit was to raise awareness about the funding opportunities provided through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), identify ways to collaborate and to generate and prioritize actions to maximize the impact of these dollars. More than \$3.8 billion will be invested in Kansas infrastructure over the next five years, and additional funds are available through competitive grants.

Kansas Governor Laura Kelly launched the first-ever infrastructure event like this in Kansas history. In her opening remarks, Gov. Kelly noted that “infrastructure is the backbone of a healthy economy” and gave a special thanks to local governments who are on the frontlines of making it work for our state. KDOT Secretary and Chair of the [Kansas Infrastructure Hub](#) Julie Lorenz offered a new take on the Kansas motto and shared the phrase “Ad Astra Simul” – to the stars, together. Sec. Lorenz highlighted examples of the vast infrastructure needs in communities large and small across Kansas and noted that many of these places are short-staffed making delivering these investments difficult, which is why collaboration among federal, state and local



governments and the private sector across regions will

be critical to deliver much needed improvements. Florence Chen, Associate Director of BIL Implementation for the U.S. Department of Transportation gave an overview of the components of BIL, highlights of the funding opportunities both through existing programs and new discretionary grant programs.

On Day 1, participants had the opportunity to choose from the following infrastructure sector panels: Water & Sewer, Transportation, Energy & Power, Broadband, Resilience and Cybersecurity. These panels each featured representatives from federal, state and local governments and the private sector. The purpose of the panels was to identify key opportunities for Kansas in each infrastructure sector, discuss barriers that may prevent communities from capitalizing on these opportunities and talk through actions that would be most helpful for mitigating barriers and optimizing opportunities.

Summit recordings available online

[You can view the Day 1 plenary sessions and the Transportation and Water panels here.](#) (Note: We were only able to make two of the infrastructure panels available virtually due to cost and staffing constraints. Transportation and Water were selected based on the interest level of registrants.)

There were some **issues that were cross-cutting among all the infrastructure sectors** based on the panel discussions. Those overarching themes included:

- **State funding is needed to help with local match requirements on BIL discretionary grants.** Many of these programs require a local match, often in the 20 percent range, which many communities currently lack the resources to provide. Participants noted that it would be a big loss for the state to miss out on having 80% of projects funded through federal funds because of an inability at the local level to provide the match. The suggestion was for the Governor and Kansas Legislature to consider setting aside some dollars to be utilized for state and local match requirements as other states have done.
- **Workforce development is needed to address staff shortages, capacity issues and needed skill sets.** There are concerns about being able to access federal dollars due to both staffing shortages and the lack of expertise required to administer federal funds or write grants to seek additional dollars. There are also concerns about a lack of contractors, engineers and other high-demand positions to make the infrastructure improvements once the funding is secured for them.
- **Need to identify infrastructure champions at the regional level.** Given the need for regional collaboration, participants indicated having clearly identified leaders or champions would be beneficial to optimize the opportunities BIL will provide over the next five years.



To learn more about the opportunities, barriers and actions identified in each infrastructure panel [click here](#).

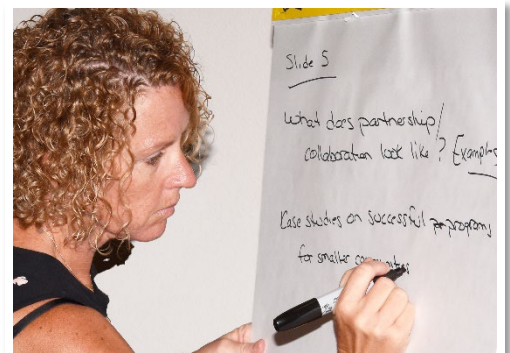
On Day 2, participants met in breakout groups based on population size, recognizing that infrastructure priorities and challenges can vary based on community size. Participants reviewed the opportunities, barriers and actions identified across all sectors and then were asked to prioritize what actions, particularly at the state or Infrastructure Hub level, would be most helpful. During the report back session, it became clear there were shared issues among communities of all sizes:

- **Shared opportunities for small, medium and large communities:**
 - **There is value in collaboration and coordination for projects both across jurisdictions and among all infrastructure sectors.** There is opportunity for true problem-solving through cross-cutting collaboration. For example, using one-dig policies where you would install fiber while performing construction work on a highway thus, improving the road and expanding access to high-speed internet.
 - **Scalable state funding for local match.** Recognizing it can be especially difficult for smaller communities to provide local match, participants recommended that any funding provided at the state level consider offering a sliding scale of requirements for how much local governments would be responsible for providing themselves based on population size.
- **Shared barriers for small, medium and large communities:**
 - **Workforce shortages for administering federal funds, pursuing federal grants, constructing and delivering projects.**

- **Shared actions needed from the State or Hub for small, medium and large communities:**
 - **State-initiated resource networks for regions.** Participants noted how helpful it was to have collaboration opportunities among all sectors across a region. To develop infrastructure champions and foster coordination among communities, participants said they could use help from the Hub in facilitating regional discussions. They noted KDOT’s local consult meetings are good model of how to convene at the regional level and would like to see an ongoing effort with all infrastructure sectors to help regions prioritize their needs and actions.
 - **Assistance with studies to help meet eligibility requirements.** To be eligible for some BIL funds, communities must complete studies or inventories, which can be difficult due to limited staffing and resources.
 - **Matchmaking for the completion of projects.** Participants noted it would be helpful to have the Hub provide a directory to help Kansans connect both with people who might be interested in collaborating on an infrastructure project and those who might have the skills and expertise needed to deliver it. In response, the Kansas Infrastructure Hub launched an online directory - [click here to learn more and sign up for it](#).
 - **Federal fund swap program for all infrastructure sectors.** KDOT provides a federal fund exchange program where local governments can provide their federal funds received to the State in exchange for state dollars, which carry fewer restrictions. In exchange, KDOT collects a small administrative fee from local governments and invests the federal dollars on other federally-eligible projects. Given the challenge to administer federal funds at the local level, participants would like the State to consider providing additional federal fund swap programs in other infrastructure sectors where applicable.
 - **Develop toolkits and host Kansas-specific webinars to educate about BIL.** The information about BIL is vast and can be difficult to understand. Participants expressed a need for more “bite-sized” information and content tailored to Kansas.

The capstone session of the two-day Summit focused on regional discussions where participants were asked to combine all the things they had learned over the last two days and prioritize what next steps would be most advantageous for their regions to take. Below are the highlights for each region:

- **Northeast Kansas:** Please note, due to the large number of participants for this region it was split into three groups which is why there are more steps identified than other regions.
 - **Actions for the region to take in the first two years of BIL:**
 - Increase grant writing expertise and technical assistance needed to apply for and take advantage of funds.
 - Work with state agencies to identify places where the region could bundle projects for a grant application.
 - Foster regional thinking on both projects and needs.
 - **Actions for the region to take in the last three years of BIL:**
 - Comprehensive mapping and inventory of existing infrastructure to understand gaps, needs and better prioritize.
 - **Most important, next step for the region to take:**
 - Summit participants need to share what they learned with other community leaders, promote the Infrastructure Hub, identify partners to collaborate with and build a pipeline of support.
 - Host another regional meeting(s) to continue the conversation.
 - Cities and counties need to list their projects and prioritize. This will help identify which projects are eligible for BIL grants and determine what is realistic to pursue.



- **Action for the Hub to consider:**
 - The Hub should set criteria for which grants or type of projects the state wants to support. Local communities who meet Hub requirements would receive letters of support from the State as part of their federal application. This will increase an applicant's likeliness of being awarded funds and helps ensure statewide priorities are being met.
- **North Central Kansas**
 - **Most important, first step for the region to take:**
 - Establish a regional planning group of volunteers and make a list of top needs.
 - Hold a regional one-day grant workshop with the North Central Regional Planning Commission serving as the lead convener.
 - Ask all communities to prioritize their infrastructure needs (all sectors) and bring their list of needs to the regional meeting. Prioritize those needs at the meeting.
 - Standing office hours – virtual, in-person (TBD) for follow-up and Q&A.
 - **Next action for the region to take:**
 - Identify the preliminary studies or inventories needed for eligibility.
 - **Action for the Hub to consider:**
 - Create a cliff-notes version of talking points about BIL that infrastructure champions could utilize to communicate with their community leaders.
 - Create a step-by-step process, templates and standard questions.
 - Create an at-a-glance matrix of grant opportunities provided under BIL.
- **South Central Kansas:** Please note, due to the large number of participants for this region; it was split into two groups which is why there are more steps identified than other regions.
 - **Actions for the region to take in the first two years of BIL:**
 - Conduct an inventory of needs/needs assessment and identify opportunities.
 - Assist communities with the studies they need to complete to be eligible for funds.
 - **Actions for the region take in the last three years of BIL:**
 - Continue to work through and address the needs identified in the first two years.
 - **Most important, next step for the region to take:**
 - Establish a formal resource network, which could combine groups already working in the region such as chamber of commerce, economic development groups, etc.
 - Move quickly to take advantage of these opportunities – be aware of crucial deadlines to hit.
 - **Actions for the Hub to consider:**
 - Create a statewide listserv of statewide, regional and cluster-base groups to allow for cross pollination.
 - Establish a social media presence to promote the work of the Hub and its partners.
 - Provide technical assistance particularly for smaller communities – consider creating a BIL Help desk.
- **Southeast Kansas**
 - **Actions for the region to take in the first two years of BIL:**
 - Better define the region to understand who all the essential partners may be for each infrastructure sector (there may be variance among sectors).
 - Create a resource network database using Commerce's housing developer network template.
 - Gather data and studies to better determine funding eligibility of projects.
 - **Actions for the region take in the last three years of BIL:**
 - Submit applications for regional projects.

- Create toolkits to help communities.
- Continue to update needs data.
- **Most important, next step for the region to take:**
 - Become more collaborative as a region. All summit attendees from this region shared their contact info with each other to begin collaborating immediately.
 - Increase communication across southeast Kansas. Be aware of other communities' actions/applications.
 - Work with the Southeast Kansas Regional Planning Commission to help develop a regional plan that would make communities aware of each other's actions and build a future together.
 - Schedule first meeting for regional planning.
- **Western (north & south) Kansas**
 - **Actions for the region to take in the first and last years of BIL:**
 - Advance shovel-ready water projects. Important to pursue quickly as more funding is available for water infrastructure projects in the early years of BIL. This includes projects for aging water infrastructure, water and groundwater storage, drought-contingency planning and more. This will continue to be a priority throughout the life of BIL for western Kansas.
 - **Most important, next step for the region to take:**
 - The Kansas Water Office will work with the Bureau of Reclamation to help identify shovel-ready projects quickly.
 - The region would like to replicate the southwest (highway) coalition across all western Kansas to enhance coordination, advocacy, and education to local officials about the BIL opportunities available across all infrastructure sectors.

Next Steps for the Kansas Infrastructure Hub: The Hub Sub-Cabinet and Advisory Group will meet in August 2022 to discuss the input provided at the Summit, determine what actions are feasible for the Hub to take and discuss which actions will require additional State authority to pursue. For example, the Hub does not have any funding or funding authority to provide state matching funds or provide significant technical assistance. The Hub will provide ongoing updates to Summit attendees on the Hub's progress, particularly as it relates to actions it's pursuing based on attendee feedback.

Concluding Thoughts: BIL funding provides Kansas an important opportunity to improve the physical infrastructure of our state - addressing some of our most pressing infrastructure needs. The launch of the Infrastructure Hub was very successful. We know that community leaders want and need more information. There is great interest in collaborating within regions. Thank you for your participation – we need to get to work.

