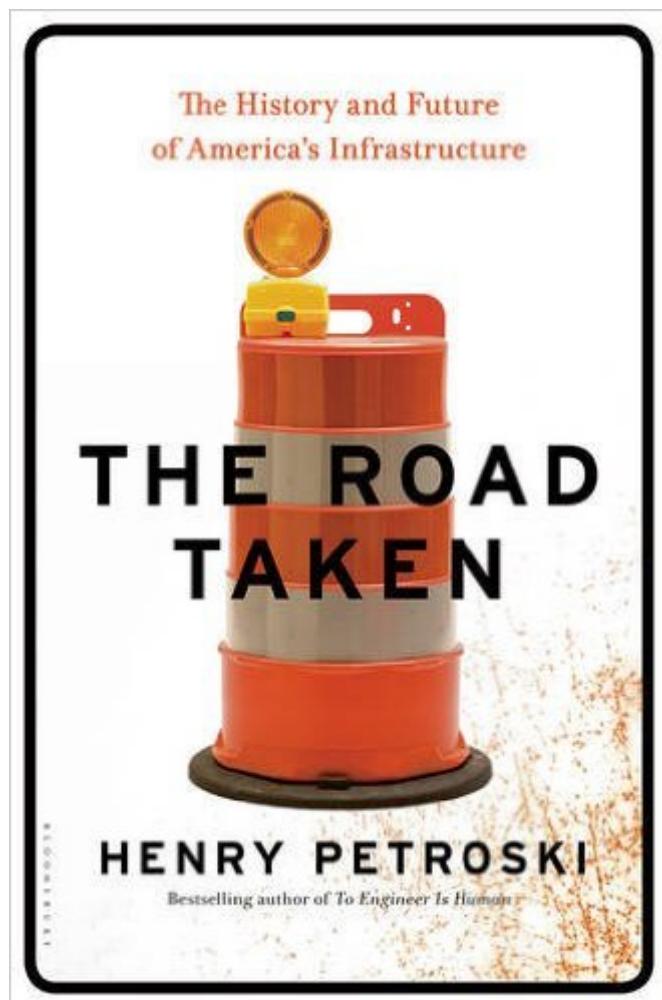


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The Road Taken: The History And Future Of America's Infrastructure



Synopsis

Physical infrastructure in the United States is crumbling. The American Society of Civil Engineers has, in its latest report, given American roads and bridges a grade of D and C+, respectively, and has described roughly sixty-five thousand bridges in the United States as "structurally deficient." This crisis--and one need look no further than the I-35W bridge collapse in Minnesota to see that it is indeed a crisis--shows little sign of abating short of a massive change in attitude amongst politicians and the American public. In *The Road Taken*, acclaimed historian Henry Petroski explores our core infrastructure from historical and contemporary perspectives and explains how essential their maintenance is to America's economic health. Recounting the long history behind America's highway system, Petroski reveals the genesis of our interstate numbering system (even roads go east-west, odd go north-south), the inspiration behind the center line that has divided roads for decades, and the creation of such taken-for-granted objects as guardrails, stop signs, and traffic lights--all crucial parts of our national and local infrastructure. His history of the rebuilding of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge reveals the complex and challenging interplay between government and industry inherent in the conception, funding, design, and building of major infrastructure projects, while his forensic analysis of the street he lives on--its potholes, gutters, and curbs--will engage homeowners everywhere. A compelling work of history, *The Road Taken* is also an urgent clarion call aimed at American citizens, politicians, and anyone with a vested interest in our economic well-being. The road we take in the next decade toward rebuilding our aging infrastructure will in large part determine our future national prosperity.

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We tend to be oblivious to much of our infrastructure, until something goes wrong with it. (Water pipes under the White House are said to still be made of wood, as are some others in D.C. and some other cities.) Last year Japan demonstrated its new maglev train, capable of going 375 mph (China's commercially-used maglev in Shanghai only goes up to 288 mph); we have none in existence or under construction. Today our major source of funds for highway building and maintenance is in danger of hitting empty - thanks to cost inflation, improved fuel efficiency, and decades of failure to raise the tax. We're now at a 'fork in the road' regarding choices that must be made regarding the nation's infrastructure. Structurally-deficient bridge (about 65,000) and building collapses, gas lines, water main breaks (average 650/day, wasting about 16% of our clean water), lead in our drinking water, sinkholes, levee breaks during Katrina, ports - now becoming inadequate for new, larger container ships, deteriorating roads have brought attention to the importance of our physical infrastructure. The ASCE's 2013 report card gave us an overall grade of D+, and estimated getting everything to acceptable levels at \$3.6 trillion by 2020. Romans began construction of a road by defining its course and width with parallel furrows, then digging down about 3' to excavate, as much as possible, a stable trench. Into this were placed first a course of two of large flat stones set in lime mortar. Onto this about 15" base was placed small stone fragments also embedded in mortar. Next, a concrete consisting of pieces of broken pottery and brick, crushed stone and gravel, all mixed into more lime mortar, compacted to a thickness of about 6".

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