

Nation Takes Inventory of Water Infrastructure

The nation is focused on getting the economy back on track, and an important component of the economic stimulus package is substantial investment in our national water infrastructure.



**Michael
CLOWSER**

Congress will focus on economic stimulus when it returns in January. A roads and bridges stimulus package is getting the most attention, but another key element is water and wastewater.

We can see a road that's crumbling or a bridge that's fallen. Water and sewer systems are invisible. Unless water comes out of the tap in a thick, brown ooze or the toilet won't flush, most West Virginians have no concept of the aging and deteriorating pipes — some 100 years old or older — below our feet.

Water is essential to our quality of life. It plays a critical role in protecting health and promoting economic prosperity. An average American uses 100 gallons of water daily. Water infrastructure is vital for disease control, fire protection and basic sanitation.

Water is equally important for West Virginia's economic vitality. State de-

velopment officials often note that the lack of a modern and safe drinking water supply limits the state's ability to attract new industry and curtails an existing business from expanding its operation. Areas that cannot offer adequate water supplies will see their economic base suffer.

West Virginia's and the nation's daunting water infrastructure needs are well documented. The U.S. **Environmental Protection Agency, Government Accountability Office** and the **Water Infrastructure Network** all have projected shortfalls in clean water infrastructure funding approaching \$500 billion during the next 20 years, with annual shortfall estimated at about \$23 billion. The **West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection** puts the state's water and sewer needs at nearly \$3 billion.

President-elect **Barack Obama's** incoming administration and congressional leaders continue to work on a comprehensive recovery package that may include significant water infrastructure investment. It is expected that the new **Congress** will begin working on the legislation after it convenes on Jan. 6, with the objective of passing it through both houses in time for the president-elect to sign it shortly after he takes office on Jan. 20.

President-elect Obama has repeatedly said this measure is the "top priority" for his new administration.

The new president said he wants to save or create 2.5 million jobs and generate \$439 billion in economic activity by rebuilding the nation's infrastructure. Details of the Obama plan, including the amount, are still being developed and have not been made public. A recent projected total for the entire economic stimulus approaches \$1 trillion, with funding levels of \$10 billion each for water and wastewater projects.

In December, the **U.S. Conference of Mayors** released its report on infrastructure projects that could be started within 180 days, a criteria for project funding. The group notes that there are 3,343 water and wastewater projects totaling nearly \$19 billion that are ready to go as soon as the stimulus bill is passed. The mayors' conference also notes 190,500 jobs would be generated through these projects.

Gov. **Joe Manchin** and the state's congressional delegation have been compiling a list of West Virginia water and sewer projects that would qualify for stimulus funding. While projects are still being added, a conservative estimate of projects ready to go to construction is in the hundreds of million of dollars range.

Regardless of the final outcome of an economic stimulus plan, West Virginia and local communities must keep investing in their water and sewer infrastructure. Congress must continue to provide federal funding, which has continually declined during the past decade.

An excellent documentary has been produced by **Penn State University** that details the critical role our water infrastructure plays in protecting health and promoting economic prosperity.

"Liquid Assets: The Story of Our Water Infrastructure" will air on West Virginia PBS stations at 9 p.m. Jan. 8. "Liquid Assets" provides a greater understanding of America's drinking water, wastewater and stormwater systems and the challenges faced in bringing clean water to all Americans.

Following the 90-minute documentary, WVPBS' "Outlook" show air "West Virginia Assets: Infrastructure in the Mountain State," which will raise awareness of West Virginia's specific water, wastewater and stormwater issues.

For complete information on "Liquid Assets," go to the **Associated General Contractors of America's** Web site at <http://www.ac.org> and type "Liquid Assets" in the search box.

Mike Clowser is executive director of the Contractors Association of West Virginia in Charleston.

Thrift Shops Report Upsurge in Holiday Sales

By **CYNTHIA MCCLLOUD**
For The State Journal

It was a green Christmas in more than one way for thrift shops and consignment stores throughout West Virginia.

An economic downturn, coupled with renewed interest in reusing and recycling goods, brought lots of new customers and higher sales figures to retailers dealing in secondhand goods

seen an increase in sales and donations," said **Kathy McKinley**, director of community relations for **Goodwill Industries of Kanawha Valley Inc.** "At this time, GIKV sales are up just over 20 percent from last year, and our donations are up 15.1 percent from last year."

Twelve stores in the Wheeling-New Martinsville-Moundsville area had all-

such as handbags and shoes, for women and children.

"Everything is very gently worn, and a lot of stuff still has the original tags on it," Corbin said. "We're very picky. It has to be something they bought in the last two years that is current and up to date. It doesn't have to be a brand name."

Corbin is sure the economy is driving her business right now

seen, new customers, and some of the stores 7,000 consigners have crossed the aisle to become shoppers at the high-end secondhand store.

"We used to have customers, and then we had consigners. Now our consigners are our customers," Corbin said. "We used to have two separate sets of people. Now everybody is on board and shopping"