



From the Bureau of  
Governmental Research

# QUESTIONS ? FOR A NEW MAYOR

## PART III OF IV: REBUILDING THE CITY'S ASSETS

JANUARY 26, 2010

### INTRODUCTION

Recovery funds are now making their way into the city to rebuild infrastructure. In recent months, the impact has become increasingly apparent as heavy machinery tears into major streets to replace subsurface elements or to prepare streets for repaving. A number of public facilities have been refurbished or rebuilt. Four and a half years after Katrina, recovery efforts are finally gaining traction.

Yet, once the recovery funds run out, billions of dollars in work will remain to be done. For instance, many of the city's minor streets will remain dilapidated because of long-term neglect, the impacts of disaster and rebuilding, and crumbling subsurface infrastructure that undermines the pavement. Many playgrounds and other facilities sit dormant and blighted. Nagin administration officials claim that even City Hall is in such disrepair that it's not worth fixing.

The next mayor will inherit a city with immense infrastructure challenges and a limited amount of money with which to address them. Even if the capital needs were fully met, the city in some cases provides inadequate operating funds to properly maintain its assets.

For this installment of *Questions for a New Mayor*, BGR asked candidates how they would address the city's infrastructure problems and to lay out their capital investment priorities. It also asked them to give their views on privatizing the airport.

#### About this Series

With the mayoral primary on the way, BGR submitted questions to all candidates on topics in four areas: the city's budget, city services, infrastructure and blight. We received timely responses from Rob Couhig, John Georges, Mitch Landrieu and James Perry. BGR is presenting the Q&A to the public in this web-only series. This installment, *Rebuilding the City's Assets*, is the third of four. We will issue the final installment on Thursday, Jan. 28.

**Question 1: Between the city's sewer, water, drainage and street infrastructure, New Orleans faces billions of dollars in needed repairs. These systems are interconnected, with the failure of subsurface infrastructure contributing to the deterioration of streets, for instance. What is your plan for dealing with the city's profound infrastructure woes? Where would the money come from?**

**Mitch LANDRIEU**

New Orleans faces critical infrastructure needs.

Bad roads and leaking pipes kill jobs and undermine quality of life.

The streets of New Orleans are in deplorable condition. In the short term, we must immediately fill potholes to make streets safe for traffic. In the long term, we need to take a holistic approach and repair our city's damaged water systems. The water lost from broken pipes and sitting water that accumulates during storms contributes to crumbling streets.

I strongly support the Complete Streets Work Group created during the 2009 legislative session. The interagency group is seeking ways to retrofit old streets with bike lanes, wheelchair-accessible sidewalks and pedestrian crossing lights. I also believe that public transit should be wheelchair-accessible.

I will perform a full review of current and planned projects, identifying the gap between what needs to be done and the resources we have.

New Orleans taxpayers will never be able to generate enough revenue to fix the infrastructure problems so the city needs to aggressively pursue federal funds. Money for shovel-ready projects is available through the federal stimulus act. As mayor, I will aggressively pursue these untapped funds and reexamine our rebuilding program to achieve efficiencies.

**James PERRY**

Implementing a comprehensive infrastructure development plan will be a

priority for my administration. Within 100 days, I will introduce an Executive Order to establish a 21<sup>st</sup> Century pavement management system. It will require a central infrastructure database and a comprehensive street network inventory and a condition survey. Coordination of city services and departments will be a hallmark of my administration. Our plan will ensure that there is coordination between city departments so that pavement management is linked to subsurface infrastructure development, communications and energy utilities, traffic and transportation improvements, and economic development initiatives. Utility companies and city departments must communicate long term construction plans to the city, and Public Works must be given the manpower to monitor and enforce updated excavation rules and fees. I will develop a transit-oriented infrastructure plan that utilizes public transportation to connect neighborhoods, promote community development, and support economic growth. We will fund these improvements through efficient collection of tax revenue and fines, and by working aggressively to secure federal funding such as the FTA's New Starts program for transportation infrastructure. We will work creatively, using public-private partnerships, to leverage existing recovery and economic development dollars for infrastructure improvements.

**Rob COUHIG**

I will work to combine the sewer, water, drainage and street infra-

structure projects by insisting on cooperation between the city and the various agencies. We will also have a fully formed plan so that the public will be able to comment and be able to see how their money is spent. Experts will be appointed to various commissions rather than political friends. We will use the money that we presently have to deal with the infrastructure.

**John GEORGES**

I would work with qualified experts, including

industry professionals, to develop a Master Plan for Infrastructure and a Master Pavement Management Plan so projects are not completed piecemeal but with a bigger picture in mind. I would ensure that we are not leaving available funding on the table and will work with state and federal agencies to tap every available dollar for roads, drainage, bridges, and other infrastructure projects. The funds would come from the State and Federal Government.


**Question 2: The mayor plays a major role on the Sewerage & Water Board, as a member and through appointments to the board. What will you do to address the immense financial challenges that agency faces? Be specific.**

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**Mitch LANDRIEU**  
The New Orleans Sewerage & Water Board

holds great responsibility for sustaining water, sewerage and drainage systems, and it faces financial and organizational challenges as post-Katrina rebuilding efforts continue.

Serving as president of this body, and holding authority to appoint most of its members, I will give close attention to long- and short-term infrastructure needs, working closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies that control resources critical to infrastructure repair. As I consider appointments to the board, I will seek a balance between community advocates and individuals who are experts in fields relevant to the S&WB's mission. I will work with the S&WB board and federal agencies to find solutions to the large, but not insurmountable financial problems facing the S&WB.

  
**James PERRY**  
In making appointments to the Board I will be guided by the impor-

tance of Board members with professional expertise, as well as necessity in developing a Board that represents the diversity of our community. My appointments to this extraordinarily important Board will be guided by the need for the most capable leadership, not by patronage politics. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers was not immune from its liability for work on the MRGO because it was not a flood control project, but a navigation channel project. The pioneering vision of Judge Duvall opens the door for a renewed conversation with the Obama administration about the fairness of federal funding to repair and rebuild infrastructure which was so badly damaged by flooding during Katrina that resulted from work by federal agencies. Numerous residents were adversely affected by the failure of federal officials to perform their duties adequately. The federal government bears some responsibility for restoring neighborhoods and the damaged infrastructure of our city. I have testified numerous times before Congress in pursuit of federal assistance for New Orleans, and I will continue to advocate for federal funding to repair the extraordinary damage inflicted on our sewerage and water system during Katrina.

  
**Rob COUHIG**  
There will be a public display of the priorities for the expendi-

ture of monies for the sewerage and water board. First we must take steps to eliminate the waste of water. Second, we must build a system that is responsive to the population base as it exists. Third, we must utilize those resources that are available to us to maximize recoveries of monies owed. Fourth, we need to assist the sewerage and water board to make sure that it is credit worthy in order to bond out any necessary spending.

  
**John GEORGES**  
The City needs a new analysis to determine

the exact extent of the problems. If we are to make significant repairs, our citizens will have to pay higher monthly fees for improved city services if we are to make significant repairs to water and sewer lines. Though the federal match for drainage repair projects has increased, federal dollars will provide much of the funding needed.

**Question 3: What would be your administration's top five priorities for capital investment and why?**

**“ Mitch LANDRIEU** 1. The (LSU /VA) Medical Complex: I will push for a state-of-the-art biomedical complex and will work to ensure that the plan moves forward. There has been enough delay in the planning and securing of funding for the new Louisiana State University and Veterans Administration hospitals in lower Mid-City.

2. Streets: Everyone knows how bad the streets are. We all rely on them every day, and they must be safe and in good condition.

3. Schools: I believe that rebuilding school infrastructure is fundamental to our success. One of my priorities as mayor will be to secure a lump sum payment from the federal government to rebuild our school facilities. I have already traveled to Washington and met with Obama administration officials about the issue.

4. Port: The port is a key economic engine for the city and region. To remain a world center of trade, New Orleans should cultivate financial support from the federal government and other sources to improve port infrastructure.

5. Sewerage and Water Board (S&WB): The Sewerage and Water Board faces large financial and organizational challenges as post-Katrina rebuilding efforts continue. Money invested in the overall infrastructure responsibilities of the S&WB will pay dividends in long-term savings.

**“ James PERRY** A hallmark of my administration will be investing in the fundamental capital projects that affect the everyday lives of residents.

First, we must invest in streets and sidewalks, which contribute so significantly to the appearance and quality of New Orleans' neighborhoods. We should coordinate the pavement projects of the DPW with the drainage work done by the SWB through a cooperative endeavor agreement.

Second, we must re-invest in our Police and Fire facilities. I will begin by conducting a comprehensive survey of facility needs and prepare a plan for capital improvements.

Third, as we expand NORD to better meet the needs of youth, we must also address the infrastructure demands on parks and recreation centers.

Fourth, our strategic investment in the riverfront can yield significant returns in terms of community and economic development. I will ensure that riverfront development is compatible with and enhances adjacent neighborhoods and economic development projects.

Lastly, City Hall is in need of major investment. I favor the development of a complex for city services. For example, the current location could serve as a site for a public-private development venture through which private partnership could help finance a new city hall.

**“ Rob COUHIG** (1) Streets (2) Blight (3) Sewerage, Water and Drainage Systems.

It is my belief that a city must be livable in order to prosper. In order to be livable we need safe streets, remove blight, and provide those services that one can reasonably expect from a municipality including clean water, drainage and removal of sewerage. Without those things, it is impossible for a city to grow and prosper.

**“ John GEORGES** I would focus on public buildings (police, fire stations etc.), streets, community health clinics, sewage and drainage and recreation. These capital improvements would increase public safety, quality of life and economic development.

**Question 4: What is your position on privatizing the airport? How would you use the proceeds from any sale or long-term lease?**

**Mitch  
LANDRIEU**

The most important goal is to ensure that the Louis Armstrong International Airport maintains an excellent reputation in the travel industry and is an effective engine for economic growth. All options should be considered in accomplishing that goal.

As Mayor, I will be a strong partner to the Southeast Regional Aviation Authority (SERAA) and Aviation Board in ongoing efforts to improve Louis Armstrong International Airport, whether that means privatizing the airport or maintaining it as a City asset.

**James  
PERRY**

Eight years ago, Ray Nagin boldly said with regard to the airport, "Let's sell that sucker!" Bold proposals are not enough if they are not preceded by thorough research and evaluation. Many assume that privatization is the only course of action, while I favor a more thorough consideration of our alternatives. The state has created a vehicle to study appropriate alternatives for the airport. The Southeast Regional Airport Authority (SERAA) will consider possible expansion of the city's existing airport and runways to accommodate larger airplanes and more traffic. I believe the airport authorities should also evaluate the alternative of a new airport located in New Orleans East, which could bring value to existing neighborhoods and generate an extraordinary economic development opportunity. As Mayor, I will ensure that all three of these alternatives (privatization, expansion, and a new airport) remain on the agenda for fair and thorough evaluation by SERAA.

**Rob  
COUHIG**

I am in favor of removing the ownership of the airport from New Orleans to either regional or state ownership. I would utilize the revenue from the sale to pay down the bonded indebtedness of the city in order to lessen taxes. I would utilize some part of it to pay for needed infrastructure repairs.

**John  
GEORGES**

I am opposed to the privatization of our Airport. The privatization of US airports has had limited success. Stewart International Airport in New York was privatized but eventually taken over by the Port Authority of NY/NJ. An effort to privatize Chicago Midway fell through due to the collapse of the credit markets in 2008 and 2009.

One of the benefits of the FAA Privatization Program, which the Airport has applied to be included in, is that the proceeds of the lease (a sale is not permissible under current law) may be used for non-airport purposes including general economic development and infrastructure improvements. Of course airport bonded indebtedness would have to be first paid off from the proceeds of the lease. At some point, the Airport will need another runway parallel to RV 1/10 to relieve anticipated delays which do not exist now but might come with growth in traffic.



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*Street Smarts: Maintaining and Managing New Orleans' Road Network* (2008)

*On the Ballot: New Orleans, October 2008* (2008)

*School Facilities Plan Leaves Financing Questions Unanswered* (2008)

*On the Ballot: Orleans Parish School Tax Renewals* (2008)

*The Clarity Deficit: New Orleans' Capital Budget* (2007)

*Wanted: A Realistic Development Strategy* (2005)

*New Orleans International Airport: Governance, Regional Cooperation and Airport Expansion* (1999)

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