

Infrastructure as Investment: Building for Future Generations

By Sam Howard

Infrastructure is rarely noticed when it works well. Roads carry traffic without delay, utilities deliver power and water without interruption, and systems built decades ago quietly support daily life.

It is only when something breaks, reaches capacity, or becomes outdated that infrastructure moves to the center of public attention. For communities thinking about long-term renewal, that reactive approach is no longer sufficient.

Modern economic development depends on infrastructure that is planned

ahead of need, not rushed into place after opportunity appears. Manufacturers, logistics firms, and investors evaluate communities based on readiness.

They look for evidence that roads, utilities, and energy systems can support growth not just today, but for decades to come. Infrastructure, in this sense, is less an expense than an investment in certainty.

Energy infrastructure has become especially important. As discussed earlier in this series, modern manufacturing relies on continuous, reliable

power. Facilities operate around the clock, and even short disruptions can be costly.

Communities that plan for capacity, redundancy, and long-term demand demonstrate an understanding of modern industry. Those that do not often discover that opportunity bypasses them, regardless of other strengths.

Transportation infrastructure plays a similar role. Well-maintained roads connecting industrial sites to highways, usable rail access, and reliable river facilities all reduce risk for companies moving goods.

These assets are not created overnight. They require planning, coordination, and ongoing maintenance. When they are in place before they are needed, they shorten decision timelines and make a community more competitive.

Infrastructure investment also directly benefits residents. Reliable utilities lower long-term costs for households and small businesses. Improved roads enhance safety and accessibility.

Modern systems reduce emergency repairs and unexpected disruptions. In this way, infrastructure planning supports both



economic development and quality of life, reinforcing the connection between community well-being and long-term growth.

One of the most difficult challenges facing rural communities is timing. Infrastructure often must be built before demand is fully visible. That requires confidence in long-term goals and coordination among local, regional, and state partners.

The return on these investments may not be immediate, but it tends to be durable. Communities that wait for certainty often find themselves reacting rather than leading.

Lewis County has foundational assets that position it well—location, transportation access, and a capable workforce. Infrastructure determines

whether those assets can support opportunity over the next 50 years.

The real question is not whether infrastructure investment carries a cost, but whether the cost of inaction is greater.

As this series approaches its conclusion, the focus turns toward community engagement and shared decision-making. Infrastructure choices made today will shape the county's economic options for generations.

Building for future generations requires patience, foresight, and a collective commitment to planning beyond the immediate horizon.

About the Author

Sam Howard is a construction executive and economic development professional with more than 30 years of experi-

ence in the building and infrastructure sectors.

He serves as Chief Executive Officer of Trace Creek Construction, Inc., where he oversees company operations, financial management, and long-term strategy. The firm specializes in design-build construction, construction management, and pre-engineered building systems, with completed projects across the public and private sectors, including schools, hospitals, church-es, judicial facilities, detention centers, and industrial developments.

Howard also serves as Managing Member and Economic Development Manager for Northeast Kentucky Development, where he works to attract new and expanding industries to the region. In that role, he is directly involved in project development, site promotion, and financing strategies, including design-build leaseback models. His work brings him into regular collaboration with local and state officials, business leaders, and community stakeholders.

Howard's focus is on job creation, infrastructure development, and strengthening the long-term economic vitality and quality of life in Northeast Kentucky.

Editor's Note

This column is the sixth part of a guest series authored by Sam Howard, published by The Lewis County Herald as a forum for examining ideas and opportunities related to Lewis County's future.

Howard is the primary author of the series, and the views expressed are his own. I am hosting the series and collaborating in the presentation for *Herald* readers. Sam and I are lifelong friends, and I have confidence in his vision for Lewis County and in the value of thoughtful discussion about where our county is headed. Readers are encouraged to follow the series and engage in the conversation as it continues.

This installment continues a thoughtful examination of the long-term choices that shape our community's future. Infrastructure is not simply about roads, utilities, or systems we see every day. It is about whether Lewis County is prepared to support opportunity, growth, and quality of life for the next generation.

The goal of this series is not to promote specific projects, but to encourage informed discussion among citizens, local leaders, and stakeholders about planning ahead rather than reacting later. The decisions we make today will influence what is possible tomorrow, and that conversation belongs to all of us.

- Dennis Brown

COOPERATION

Cont. from page 1

Our volunteer firefighters went above and beyond with many staffing fire stations around the clock to reduce response times and ensure equipment is fully operational if needed.

Our sheriff's department, police department, and KSP also exceeded expectations, as they always do, by efficiently and professionally responding to every call and patrolling all corners of our expansive county.

Earlier in the event, Lewis County and the City of Vanceburg declared states of emergency, and county operated under a Level 3 Snow Emergency to protect public safety and allow road crews and first responders to operate safely.

As conditions improved, we transitioned to a Level 2 Snow Emergency Tuesday. Road and weather conditions are continuously being monitored closely, and adjustments will be made as needed.

While snowfall has ended, extreme cold temperatures are expected to continue throughout the remainder of the week, with daytime highs remaining in the teens and low 20s and overnight lows dropping well below freezing.

Residents are urged to continue using caution when traveling, to dress appropriately when outdoors, and to be mindful of the physical strain associated with shoveling snow, which can be dangerous in cold conditions.

Warming centers re-

main on standby, with facilities in the Vanceburg area fully prepared for immediate activation if conditions warrant. Residents needing information or assistance are encouraged to contact Lewis County Emergency Management at 606-796-3464. As always, in the event of an emergency, call 911.

Severe winter weather reminds us how interconnected our community truly is. The cooperation, patience, and care shown during this storm reflect the strength of Lewis County.

Emergency Management will continue to monitor conditions, work with our partners, and keep the public informed as we move through the remainder of this cold stretch and the remnants

HOWE

Cont. from page 1

mitment, compassion, and responsibility, and we are grateful for everything she has given to this community."

The certificate was pre-

sented during the January meeting of fiscal court on behalf of the citizens of Lewis County, recognizing Howe's years of service, her compassion, and her unwavering commit-

ment to public safety.

Sparks wished her well as she begins the next chapter of her life, noting that her contributions to Lewis County will not be forgotten.



THE LEWIS COUNTY HERALD
Judge Executive George Sparks assists in snow and ice removal Tuesday at the Lewis County Courthouse. The facility and Justice Center were closed Monday and Tuesday because of the winter storm and cold temperatures.

FSA county election underway

Herald Report

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has mailed ballots for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committee elections to eligible farmers and ranchers across the country. To be counted, ballots must be returned to the Vanceburg FSA office or postmarked by February 2, 2026.

Each committee is comprised of three to 11 elected members who serve three-year terms.

Newly elected committee members will take office March 2, 2026. Lewis County committee members play a key role in how FSA delivers disaster recovery, safety-net, conservation, commodity and price support programs, as well as making decisions on county office employment and other FSA pro-

gram delivery issues.

Amy Brown is nominated in LAA 2 of Lewis County to serve a three-year term. Amy resides in LAA 2 and along with her husband, operates a beef cattle farm on Lower Kinney. She has been actively involved in cattle farming for the past five years, managing daily farm operations and working to expand their family farm.

Amy brings diversity and a strong commitment to ensure our local farmers and ranchers are well served, supported and connected with resources available to them. She is willing to serve if elected.

To be eligible to vote in the county committee elections, producers must participate or cooperate in a USDA program and be assigned to the LAA that is up for election.

Each year, at least one Local Administrative Area (LAA) in each COC jurisdiction is up for election on a three-year rotation, and each producer is assigned to vote in a single LAA. A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation to FSA, even if they have not applied or received program benefits.

Producers can identify LAAs up for election through a geographic information system locator tool available at fsa.usda.gov/elections and may confirm their LAA by contacting their local FSA office. Eligible voters who do not receive a ballot in the mail can request one from the Vanceburg FSA office or call 606-796-3866.

IMPROVE

Cont. from page 1

ceived snowfall totals of up to 12 inches, while central portions of the state saw 4 to 6 inches. Although counties such as Allen, Barren, Monroe, and Pulaski were among the hardest hit, every county experienced significant impacts.

"Thankfully, Kentuckians were prepared," Beshear said. "This is our 15th major weather disaster, and the steps taken by citizens and agencies made a real difference."

Kentucky Transportation Cabinet Secretary Jim Gray said road conditions remain hazardous and unnecessary travel is not advised.

Nearly 1,500 plow trucks and 12 heavy-duty wreckers have remained active statewide, prioritizing interstates, parkways, and high-volume routes

for emergency access.

"Even if you're seeing bare pavement in some areas, don't let your guard down," Gray said. "Ice remains a serious threat, and extreme cold limits how effective salt can be."

The Kentucky National Guard reported personnel stationed at 53 armories statewide, with cut-and-toss teams deployed and evacuations conducted where needed.

Kentucky State Police responded to thousands of storm-related calls, conducted hundreds of wellness checks, and assisted motorists stranded by hazardous conditions.

Water and wastewater systems were also impacted across the state, with hundreds of drinking-water systems under boil water advisories and others operating under

limited conditions.

The state Emergency Operations Center remains activated at Level 2, and price-gouging laws remain in effect under the governor's emergency declaration.

Kentuckians are encouraged to report suspected price gouging to the Office of the Attorney General.

Beshear also reminded residents to use caution when shoveling snow, noting several snow-removal-related deaths in recent years, and urged proper generator use to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.

Residents with immediate but non-life-threatening needs are encouraged to complete the Rapid Needs Assessment or call 502-607-6665.

In emergencies, citizens should call 911.



Support democracy

Subscribe