



Let's Build California: A Voter Mandate

Report by Thinks Insight & Strategy
for Rebuild SoCal Partnership



Foreword

Southern California's infrastructure challenges are no longer abstract policy debates. Residents across the region feel the consequences of underinvestment in their daily lives: in rising housing costs, constant traffic, unreliable utilities, flooding, and wildfire risk. There is growing concern about whether the region is prepared for the demands of the future.

Despite broad agreement that these are critical issues to address, California continues to struggle to build at the pace and scale needed to fix them. Understanding why was the starting point for this research.

Public debates around infrastructure often rest on assumptions about voters that have not been rigorously tested: that residents oppose growth, are resistant to change, or are unwilling to accept the tradeoffs that come with developing infrastructure systems. Rebuild SoCal Partnership commissioned this study to examine those assumptions directly, in what we believe to be one of the largest and most comprehensive studies of public attitudes toward infrastructure ever conducted in Southern California.

The research combines a representative survey of 5,000 residents across Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura counties with 12 in-depth focus groups conducted throughout the region. Together, this new research provides an unusually detailed picture of how Southern Californians think about infrastructure, growth, governance, affordability, and the future of their communities.

The findings show that Southern Californians overwhelmingly support infrastructure investment and recognize the need for action on housing, transportation, energy reliability, water systems, and climate resilience. At the same time, they are frustrated by delays, rising costs, and a sense that major problems are not being prioritized.

The research also points to a more nuanced public position. Most residents are neither reflexively for nor against development. Their support is conditional: contingent on trust in the institutions delivering projects, confidence that the benefits will be fairly distributed, and the need for development to serve community needs rather than narrow interests. This report describes that majority as 'MIMBYs': Maybe In My Back Yard, in opposition to the traditional 'YIMBY' or 'NIMBY' groups that are often assumed to dominate public views.

The implication is that the principal barrier facing infrastructure development in California is not simply opposition to building. It is a deeper lack of confidence in whether the institutions responsible for delivering projects are doing so efficiently, fairly, and in ways that serve the public interest.

The following report explores those tensions in depth. We hope it contributes to an informed and constructive conversation about how to build the infrastructure Southern California needs – not only to address today's challenges, but to prepare the region for the future.

Jon Switalski, Executive Director, Rebuild SoCal Partnership

Executive Summary

This report draws on a representative survey of 5,000 residents across six counties in Southern California – Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego and Ventura. This is complemented by 12 qualitative focus groups with 85 residents from the same areas, and a Solutions Summit bringing together 27 Southern California residents for a full day of deliberative discussion. The findings below combine insights from all three elements of this research.

1. There is clear, emphatic support for investment in Southern California's infrastructure

- 85% of Southern Californians are in favor of new infrastructure being built in their neighborhood, while only 10% are against.
- Support for building new infrastructure is consistent across counties, demographics and political views: there is a strong and broad voter mandate to invest.

2. Support for investment is driven by daily experiences of poor quality, ineffective infrastructure

- Almost every Southern California resident (98%) has been personally impacted by issues related to poor infrastructure in the last year.
- Challenges around housing affordability and supply, and traffic and congestion are the most widely felt, but a range of other issues have widespread impacts, including one in two residents who say they have been impacted by flooding or poor storm draining, and one in three who say that wildfires have damaged their home.

3. Infrastructure challenges are perceived as some of the most serious problems facing Southern California, making infrastructure a genuine voter priority

- Infrastructure issues are perceived to be a more serious problem for the area than many wider societal concerns, with housing affordability the number one concern, ranking above every other challenge facing Southern California: from the wider economy to healthcare and crime.

4. Current investment is not considered sufficient, but few are prepared to back increased direct taxation to fund new projects

- A majority of Southern Californians (56%) believe that there is currently too little investment in infrastructure, and only a minority think current levels of investment are sufficient (26%). Some also feel that spending is unfairly distributed, prioritizing the views of wealthier residents who are more easily able to take part in consultations due to their working patterns.
- Housing, roads and highways, and wildfire prevention are the areas where residents see the most urgent need for action, in order to address concerns around safety and affordability.

- In the context of stretched household budgets, there is a strong preference for funding models that do not require increases in direct taxation. In focus groups, many feel they already pay specific taxes or levies for infrastructure, and question where their existing money is being spent. Residents are looking for funding models that share the cost of infrastructure development with private interests.
- Participants were only prepared to consider additional taxation if clear accountability and transparency measures are put in place to give them confidence over the way their money will be spent.



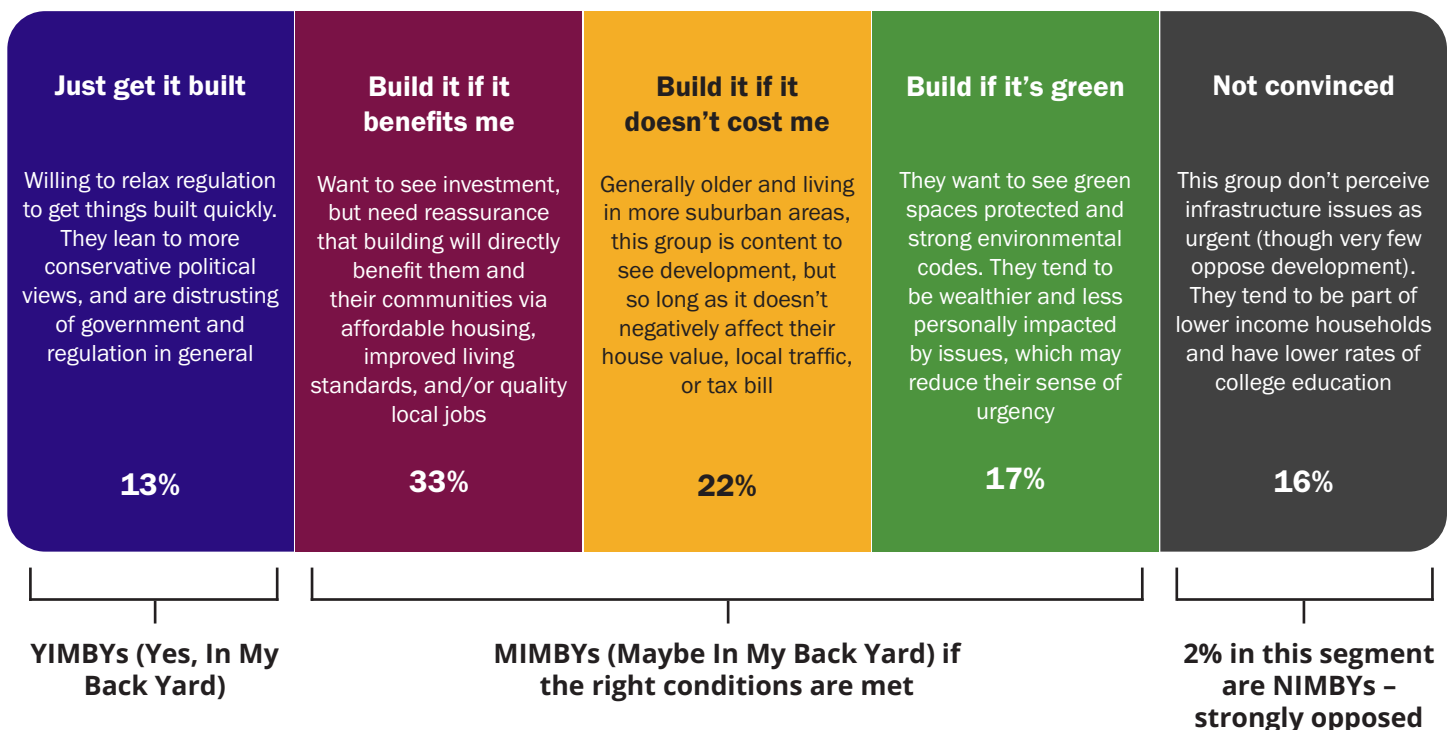
5. There is widespread frustration at the current pace of delivery

- Confidence is low that the current political and planning system is able to effectively and efficiently deliver new housing, transportation improvements and more resilient utilities infrastructure. Participants in focus groups frequently cite long delays and projects that don't seem to make progress.
- There is widespread demand for concrete, ambitious plans to ensure California is ready to cope with future challenges, including a growing population, greater demand for electricity and changing weather patterns.



6. Few Southern Californians are outright NIMBYs. The majority are MIMBYs (Maybe In My Back Yard)

- While demand for infrastructure investment is strong and widespread, segmentation of the population by their attitudes and priorities for development reveals that, for a large majority, their support is in some way 'contingent'.
 - Just 13% of Southern Californians demonstrate YIMBY (Yes, In My Back Yard) attitudes – the 'Just get it built' segment.
 - Three 'MIMBY' segments represent 72% of Southern Californians: 'Build if it benefits me' (33%); 'Build if it doesn't cost me' (22%); and 'Build if it's green' (17%).
- NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard) are relatively rare, with only 2% of Southern Californians strongly opposing any infrastructure development in their neighborhoods. However, 16% fall into the 'Not convinced' segment, who do not perceive infrastructure issues as urgent in the same way as others.
- Understanding these groups and communicating on what matters to each is key to building broad and durable support for infrastructure investment and development.



7. Across every segment, Southern Californians express distrust in a system that seems to only listen to some voices, and prioritizes the wrong interests

- While Southern Californians are deeply frustrated at the pace of change, many place the blame for this at the feet of vested interests – most commonly developers and elected politicians – who are felt to be in pursuit of narrow electoral and/or financial gain.
- Majorities of Southern Californians believe that elected politicians (57%), and developers (53%) have too much say in the system. Meanwhile 65% say that ‘people like me’ have too little say.

8. In the absence of trust that the interests of developers and politicians are aligned with those of ‘people like me’, few are prepared to endorse steps to ‘streamline’ the system by reducing oversight and community consultation

- There is broad recognition that mismanagement and excessive bureaucracy slows down building, and acknowledgement that permits and processes such as CEQA are part of this.
- Nonetheless, trust in the system and its key players is too weak for Southern Californians to feel comfortable with the removal of existing oversight and consultation.
- Instead, residents want to see more efficient, effective project approvals, without compromising the quality of oversight.

9. There is a need to rebuild confidence and trust in the system, ensuring resident voices are more clearly heard when shaping infrastructure decisions

- Transparency in the process will help address concerns about potential vested interests, through regular progress updates and engagement.
- As part of this, residents also call for a meaningful role in decision-making. Developers should actively engage with residents at the outset of projects, answering the specific concerns of the three ‘MIMBY’ segments to win broad support.

Together, these findings evidence demand for infrastructure development in California that is **faster, fairer, future-facing** and delivered **for the people**.

From research to action:

Participants in the Solutions Summit reviewed findings, heard from experts and considered five potential policy responses, as well as developing principles for decision-makers to follow. Their preferred policy response was an annual Governor’s Report on Infrastructure – which would measure whether California infrastructure projects are being delivered on time, on budget, and producing their intended results.

California Infrastructure Performance Act



STATEWIDE PERFORMANCE SNAPSHOT

Data through Q1 2024



Housing Units Built

24,532
units

85% of annual goal

↑ 12% vs. Q1 2023

Transit Riders
(Daily Avg.)**1.26M**
riders

92% of annual goal

↑ 8% vs. Q1 2023

Emissions Reduced
(MT CO₂e)**1.8M**
metric tons

78% of annual goal

↑ 15% vs. Q1 2023



Projects On Time

72%
on schedule

↑ 9 pp vs. Q1 2023



Projects On Budget

68%
on budget

↑ 6 pp vs. Q1 2023



Good Jobs Created

18,642
jobs

↑ 14% vs. Q1 2023

PROJECT DELIVERY PERFORMANCE

Share of Projects

■ On Time & On Budget ■ Over Budget ■ Behind Schedule ■ Not Started

By Project Count

52% 16% 20% 12%

By Project Value

48% 22% 18% 12%

Average Cost Overrun
(Projects Over Budget)**14%**Average Schedule Delay
(Projects Behind Schedule)**5.7 months**

INVESTING IN CALIFORNIANS

Good Jobs and Workforce Development

Well-Paid Jobs Created

18,642 jobs

85% paying \$25+/hr

↑ 14% vs. Q1 2023

Apprenticeships Created

3,256 apprentices

↑ 22% vs. Q1 2023

Diverse and Local Workforce

**46%**
Workforce from
Disadvantaged
Communities**61%**
Local Workers
Hired**30%**
Women
Employed

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

**Bay Area Rapid Transit
Extension**
Alameda CountySchedule **On Track**Budget **2% under budget**Good Jobs **1,250 created**Apprenticeships **210 created**[View Project Details](#)

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Figure 1: Example Governor's report dashboard, improving transparency and accountability in infrastructure development

Methodology

A representative sample of 5,000 people across Southern California (in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego and Ventura) were surveyed by a combination of self-completed online surveys, and interviewer-administrated telephone interviews, in both English (82%) and Spanish (18%). This combination of methods was selected to ensure a wide range of people with different backgrounds and digital confidence were able to take part. Representative quotas were set based on US Census data to ensure the sample is an accurate reflection of views across the population. Data was collected between February 12th and March 9th 2026. For more detail, see Appendix (a).

Following the survey, 12 online focus group discussions took place between April 13th and April 22nd with residents of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego counties. Each group was comprised of 8 participants who all resided in the same county and approximate geographic location. This meant they could discuss and engage meaningfully with each other about the infrastructure issues affecting their local area. Ten of these focus groups were conducted in English and two in Spanish.

After the online focus group discussions, an in-person 'Solutions Summit' was hosted on June 20th in Los Angeles with 21 residents of Los Angeles, along with 6 participants from other counties in Southern California who joined virtually. For more detail, see Appendix (b).



