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<https://www.registercitizen.com/opinion/article/Opinion-Plan-now-for-federal-infrastructure-16551462.php> (Torrington)

**THE REGISTER CITIZEN**

# Opinion: Plan now for federal infrastructure dollars

James J. Roberts

Oct. 21 on the Internet and Oct. 22, 2021 in print



*The Grass Island Waste Water treatment plant in Greenwich in 2015. File photo*

Connecticut municipalities that haven't already begun the process need to start planning right away if they are going to get a piece of the federal infrastructure dollars that are likely going to be spread around the nation.

In particular, it seems reasonable to expect that billions of federal dollars are going to be made available to water and sewer systems across the country, including Connecticut, for projects to enhance drinking water quality, improve storm and wastewater management and expand systems to further protect our environment and waterways.

Specifically, water systems are faced with a consequential requirement that will require strategic planning and managing the issue of lead service lines. Many

wastewater treatment facilities statewide are in need of upgrades if we are going to continue compliance and meet ever more stringent water quality standards.

Nationally, in drinking water, there is an increasing focus on so-called emerging contaminants. We are going to see increased regulatory oversight related to issues that hover like a cloud over the landscape of drinking water compliance.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, and 1,4-dioxane have become a heavy focus on systems both large and small. These are manmade chemicals that have been used in a variety of industries since the 1940s. They don't break down in the environment and can bioaccumulate over time. There is evidence that exposure to these chemicals can lead to adverse human health effects. They are now found in some food packaging, water repellent fabrics, Teflon and some cleaning products. And small amounts can end up, at some point, in our water.

Complicating this issue, individual states, including those surrounding Connecticut, have begun enacting varying regulatory limits on some or all of the compounds. Gov. Ned Lamont's Interagency PFAS Taskforce, in November 2019, identified as a potential legislative objective: "Establish a Safe Drinking Water Advisory Council to make recommendations regarding Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for emerging contaminants, including PFAS, in drinking water."

Given what we have learned, this action seems likely. The federal infrastructure funding could assist local governments in preparing to address concerns. With significant capital investment dollars in the balance, thoughtful planning in the arena of emerging contaminant treatment is needed.

Meanwhile, anyone who has lived along the Connecticut shore for a decade or more has already seen great improvements in the quality of the water in Long Island Sound.

Can we do better?

Let's consider important upgrades to sewage treatment facilities — a significant way to improve contaminant removal before they reach our streams, rivers, lakes, aquifers, Long Island Sound and the ocean. Many towns delay expansions and upgrades because of the cost. Now, new technologies and innovative

methods make it possible to address aging or inadequate infrastructure while implementing solutions to improve the environment at the same time.

These upgrades can be funded by the infrastructure bill, some version of which seems likely to become law. It will allow local governments to invest in a host of important environmental projects, providing greener, more sustainable living for the residents of Connecticut.

Long-term strategic planning has become a focal concern for all water utility managers. Issues such as drought, flooding and climate adaptation will continue to, appropriately, garner major attention and funding. As the state and individual municipalities engage with their federal partners in this conversation, it is critical that the needs of water and wastewater infrastructure are not overlooked. These critical systems, often invisible and highlighted only during calamity, require investment and planning now, to serve the generations of Connecticut residents that will inherit our legacy, the environment we leave behind.

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