



# Infrastructure Policy Priority Brief

## Sustainable Infrastructure

### What is Sustainable Infrastructure?

Sustainable infrastructure refers to the design, construction, and maintenance of infrastructure systems that meet current community needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. This involves incorporating environmental, social, and economic considerations into infrastructure projects, with an emphasis on reducing environmental impacts, improving resource efficiency, and fostering long-term community resilience. Sustainable infrastructure encompasses projects in transportation, energy, water management, and public facilities, which are built or retrofitted to minimize carbon emissions, conserve resources, and adapt to climate change. By integrating renewable energy, eco-friendly materials, and resilient design principles, sustainable infrastructure aims to support the well-being of communities while protecting the environment.

### Sustainable Infrastructure in the South

Sustainable infrastructure has begun to gain traction in the Southern United States, but progress is mixed. While some Southern states and cities have implemented ambitious projects to promote sustainability, others have been slower to embrace the concept. Federal initiatives like the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act \(IIJA\)](#) and the [Inflation Reduction Act \(IRA\)](#) have allocated funding for green infrastructure and clean energy projects, spurring state-level conversations around sustainability in infrastructure.

Several Southern cities, such as [Atlanta](#), [New Orleans](#), and [Austin](#), have taken steps to incorporate sustainable practices into their infrastructure projects. These cities are investing in green buildings, public transportation, and renewable energy initiatives, with an eye toward reducing their carbon footprints and enhancing community resilience. However, many rural and economically disadvantaged areas in the South face barriers to adopting sustainable infrastructure due to limited financial resources, political challenges, and outdated

infrastructure. These disparities create uneven progress in the transition to sustainable infrastructure, with marginalized communities often left behind.

## **How Sustainable Infrastructure Can Advance Equity in the South**

Investing in sustainable infrastructure presents a unique opportunity to advance racial and class equity in the South by addressing long-standing environmental and economic disparities that disproportionately impact low-income and minority communities. Sustainable infrastructure investments, such as clean energy development and green building practices, can reduce the environmental burden on marginalized communities that have been disproportionately affected by environmental hazards. These projects also have the ability to create green jobs as communities transition to sustainable infrastructure. By ensuring that these jobs are accessible to residents of the community, we can help address racial and class disparities. Additionally, as sustainable infrastructure projects are designed to be more energy-efficient and resource-efficient than traditional infrastructure, the result is often long-term cost savings for communities. For low-income families, reducing energy costs through energy-efficient housing or transportation can have a significant impact on household budgets, freeing up resources for other essential needs like healthcare and education.

## **Legislative Efforts Related to Sustainable Infrastructure**

**South Carolina:** [Senate Bill 542](#) (failed): This bill would have established a commercial property assessed clean energy and resiliency program that local governments may implement to ensure that owners of agricultural, commercial, industrial, and multi-family residential properties can obtain low-cost, long-term financing for qualifying improvements. The goal of the programs would be to increase economic development, add jobs, and increase the sustainability and safety of the building stock, improve disaster and emergency response at no cost to local governments, decrease water and energy costs and consumption, and encourage energy and water sustainability.