

Summit Explores Ways to Rebuild Puerto Rico's Transportation System

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GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico – Building back smarter and more resilient is at the core of Puerto Rico's recovery from the devastation of hurricanes Irma and Maria, and finding creative solutions to achieve that goal was the focus of a recent transportation summit.

The "Leveraging Resources Today to Rebuild Puerto Rico's Tomorrow" summit was a joint effort of FEMA, the Puerto Rico Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency, Enterprise Community Partners, Inc., and in coordination with the U. S. Department of Transportation and the Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works. The one-day event drew about 300 participants and brought together Government of Puerto Rico and federal officials, as well as representatives from the worlds of finance, engineering and academia.

The Government of Puerto Rico's economic and recovery plan calls for repairing and rebuilding roads and bridges, as well as port and ferries. The goal is to rebuild infrastructure in the key sectors of transportation, energy, water, and education to stimulate the economy and make the island more resilient to future storms.

Joe M. Girot, director of FEMA's Transportation Sector Solutions Team, told the summit's participants that collaboration among U.S. and Puerto Rico government agencies and the private sector is crucial to help the island recover.

"We need innovation and creative solutions to increase resources," Girot said. "We also need to have a sound financial strategy to build back better and stronger."

Funding from FEMA and the Federal Highway Administration has paid for much of the emergency work to repair and rebuild roads and bridges. However, the Government of Puerto Rico's plan estimates that \$8.4 billion will be needed to rebuild the transportation system. Expanding capacity of ports is also part of the



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recovery plan.

Carlos Contreras, secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works, said much of the transportation infrastructure, particularly bridges, was not designed to withstand the effects of a catastrophic storm such as Hurricane Maria.

"We have to change (building) design assumptions to account for more frequent and larger storms," Contreras said.

The current economic condition of Puerto Rico creates funding challenges for the recovery. However, some summit participants indicated that effective use of tens of billions of dollars from the federal government and private investment over the next few years would be imperative for a successful recovery. Developing public-private partnerships to complete a portion of the rebuilding work is also a key component of the recovery plan.

For more information on Hurricane María recovery, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339.

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