Madrid becomes the global hub for debate on the future of infrastructure

- More than 400 international infrastructure leaders from 44 countries gather in Madrid to address the future of infrastructure and global challenges in energy, water, and digital transformation.

- The first day of the World Infrastructure Forum focuses on investment needs through 2035 and the public-private collaboration required to advance sustainable, resilient infrastructure.
- The WIF expresses its deep sorrow over the rail accident that occurred in Spain today and extends its condolences and support to the victims and their families.

Madrid, October 28, 2026 — The World Infrastructure Forum (WIF) held the first day of its international gathering in Madrid, focusing on investment needs and the solutions required to advance more sustainable, efficient, and resilient infrastructure. More than 400 leaders from over 44 countries gathered to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the necessary renewal and sustainable development of energy, water, and other resource systems through 2035.

The program brought together representatives from business, academia, finance, and government to discuss integrated infrastructure planning and opportunities for public-private collaboration. Discussions highlighted the importance of coordinating energy, water, and resource systems to drive economic growth, create jobs, strengthen industrial competitiveness, meet rising digital demand, and advance climate change adaptation.

The opening ceremony began with welcoming remarks from José Miguel Atienza Riera, dean of the School of Civil Engineering at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), who presented the forum as a global platform for dialogue on shared challenges. Ali Jadbabaie, head of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), then described the event as a “Davos for infrastructure” and emphasized its role in bringing together engineers, investors, and public-sector decision-makers to address challenges such as artificial intelligence and climate change.

Valerie Levkov, vice president of Infrastructure at the World Bank Group, underscored the role of infrastructure as a driver of employment and entrepreneurship in developing

countries. Alberto Garrido, professor and vice president for Academic Strategy and Quality at UPM, closed the ceremony.

Condolences and Solidarity

Just as the World Infrastructure Forum was about to begin, a tragic rail accident occurred near Madrid. The WIF organizers issued the following statement:

"The World Infrastructure Forum (WIF) wishes to express its deepest sorrow over the rail accident that occurred this morning near Los Yébenes, Toledo. On behalf of the more than 400 participants from around the world attending this international event, the WIF extends its condolences and expresses its full solidarity with the victims of this tragedy and their families."

Mobilizing the Infrastructure Systems We Must Build by 2035

The *Global Leaders Dialogue: Mobilizing the Infrastructure Systems We Must Build by 2035* opened the discussion program with an examination of the infrastructure that must be developed over the next decade and the mechanisms needed to mobilize investment and foster collaboration across sectors.

The first panel, moderated by **Sasha Twining**, a BBC journalist, featured **Alfonso García Mora**, vice president for Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean at the World Bank Group; **Ignacio Madridejos**, CEO of Ferrovial; **Juan Santamaría**, CEO of ACS; and **Lara Poloni**, president of AECOM.

During the discussion, Alfonso García Mora emphasized the importance of taking risks and working together to support the global market. He argued that the main obstacles are not a lack of financing or engineering expertise, but bureaucracy. Ignacio Madridejos noted that the opportunity exists, but seizing it requires clear rules, a fair allocation of risk, and collaboration among all stakeholders.

Juan Santamaría highlighted Europe as an example of how difficult infrastructure planning can be when decision-making is spread across multiple countries, underscoring the need for greater coordination and a shared vision. Lara Poloni stressed the importance of creative thinking and collective action, calling on governments to work with the private sector by establishing clear rules, streamlining permitting processes, and adopting a long-term vision.

The second conversation brought together **Valérie Levkov**, vice president of Infrastructure at the World Bank Group; **Fernando Fajardo**, CEO of ACCIONA Construction; and **Thierry Déau**, chairman and CEO of Meridiam. The participants examined priorities for accelerating infrastructure development.

Valérie Levkov emphasized that unlocking infrastructure investment requires stronger institutional capacity, faster reforms, and easier access to land, guided by the principle of "infrastructure for people and with people." Fernando Fajardo noted that "the capital is there," but that bold governments must enact legislation to attract private investment and, above all, ensure that the talent needed to deliver projects is available. Thierry Déau identified capacity constraints across the entire value chain as the main bottleneck, stressing the need to plan and anticipate future needs: "The time for thinking is over; now it's time to act."

The third conversation explored the perspectives of the water, energy, and climate sectors, featuring **Chen de Guangzhe**, vice president of Planet and the World Bank Group; **José Díaz-Caneja**, head of ACCIONA's water business; and **Evelyn Wang**, vice president for Energy and Climate and the Ford Professor of Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

During the discussion, Chen de Guangzhe emphasized that technological advances, from energy storage to small modular nuclear reactors, will only be deployed at the necessary pace if public authorities clear the way through clear regulations, faster permitting, and financing mechanisms. Without this support, innovation risks remain confined to pilot projects, slowing the energy transition.

José Díaz-Caneja highlighted the growing efficiency and affordability of solar photovoltaic technology, as well as desalination plants developed under the build-operate-transfer (BOT) model. Under this approach, the private sector finances and operates the plant, helping secure water supplies for millions of people and agriculture, while the public sector retains long-term ownership.

Evelyn Wang pointed to significant opportunities, from new approaches to energy storage to recovering and using waste heat. However, she stressed that these opportunities will only be realized if all stakeholders, including academia, work together from the outset and demonstrate their ability to move from planning to execution.

Energy Systems: Grids, Flexibility, and Digital Demand

The session *Energy Systems of the Future: Grids, Flexibility, and Digital Demand* examined how energy systems must adapt to rapid electrification, industrial growth, and rising demand driven by artificial intelligence and digital services.

The discussion addressed power grid expansion, interconnection bottlenecks, energy storage, flexibility, and the need to maintain an affordable, reliable, and decarbonized

energy supply. It also explored the role of energy companies and regulators, as well as how energy markets must evolve to meet changing consumption patterns.

Moderated by **Sudeep Maitra**, the session featured **Jennifer Obertino**, senior vice president and global energy practice leader at AECOM; **Luca Passa**, CFO and head of Sustainability and International Asset Management at Snam; **Melchert Dujive**, vice president of Energy Solutions Europe at Prologis; **Philip ten Bosch**, managing director, head of Global Power Investment Banking for Utilities and Renewables, and head of Natural Resources for the UK and EMEA; and **Javier García Arenas**, director of Strategy and Corporate Development at Grupo COX.

Sudeep Maitra opened the discussion by noting that affordability has become the top priority amid the significant investment required to expand power grids. Jennifer Obertino responded by arguing that no single technology can meet every need and that the key lies in intelligently managing demand with the help of AI.

Building on the need for a diversified energy mix, Luca Passa advocated for natural gas as the most flexible option for supporting decarbonization and ensuring reliable supply, while warning that constant regulatory changes are currently a major obstacle for investors. From the demand side, Melchert Dujive presented self-consumption as a complement to the grid rather than an alternative to it. Philip ten Bosch stressed that "the money is there" and that the real challenge is reducing risk. Finally, Javier García Arenas called for a market that rewards availability, not just price.

Water Infrastructure as a Strategic Driver of Growth and Resilience

The session of *Water Infrastructure Solutions for Growth, Sustainability, and Resilience* explored the strategic role of water infrastructure in economic development, public health, and adaptation to water scarcity and climate variability.

The discussion covered universal access to water and sanitation, the supply needs of cities and industry, water reuse, consumption efficiency, governance, and the financing of new projects. Speakers highlighted the need to increase investment to ensure water security and meet the demands of growing economies.

Moderated by **Christopher Gasson**, the session brought together **Beverley Stinson**, global water business leader at AECOM; **Edouard Pérard**, head of the Water Division at the European Investment Bank; **Pablo González Taberna**, global head of Infrastructure and Real Estate Project Finance at BBVA; and **Rubén Ruiz Arriazu**, chief operating officer at Veolia Spain.

During the discussion, Beverley Stinson emphasized that water underpins economic growth, as industries such as semiconductor manufacturing and data centers depend on reliable water supplies. With climate change making supply increasingly variable and demand continuing to rise, she argued that water must be recognized as a strategic resource rather than treated as a passive utility.

Edouard Pérard noted that the first and most cost-effective priority is to stop wasting the water already available. This means reducing leaks, which can reach 50% in some areas, replacing aging networks, and using AI to improve resource management before turning to new water sources.

Pablo González Taberna stressed that adapting to climate change, including floods and heavy rainfall, requires infrastructure capable of treating, storing, and reusing water to strengthen resilience.

Rubén Ruiz Arriazu highlighted that Spain's main priority is to ensure the security and resilience of its water infrastructure, recognizing it as a strategic asset for industrial and economic growth. He also emphasized its importance in sustaining tourism, one of Spain's key economic drivers, which depends on a reliable water supply under all conditions, including droughts.

The Energy-Water-Resources Nexus: Shared Challenges, Shared Solutions

The interdependence of energy, water, and resource systems was the focus of the session *The Energy-Water-Resources Nexus: Shared Constraints, Shared Solutions, and Synergies*. The discussion highlighted the need to move beyond isolated decision-making and toward integrated planning that takes into account the shared constraints and needs of these systems.

Topics included the relationship between water and power generation, the needs of industrial clusters, desalination, hydrogen, data center cooling, and opportunities to optimize resource use.

Moderated by **Fan Zhang**, the session featured **Alejandro Jiménez**, head of Business Development and director of Strategy at ACCIONA; **Igor Lukin**, managing director at Allianz Global Investors; **Patrick Hill**, president of Global Operations at Jacobs; **Guillaume Lucci**, president and CEO of Prime Infrastructure Capital; and **Evelyn Wang**, vice president for Energy and Climate and the Ford Professor of Engineering at MIT.

Alejandro Jiménez emphasized that water is a unique and highly valuable resource, essential to life. However, he warned that water management cannot rely solely on politically

determined pricing; it also requires sufficient funding to ensure service quality and continuity over the long term. Igor Lukin noted that there has always been a balance between cost and complexity on the one hand, and cost and associated risk on the other.

Patrick Hill explained that energy is the most difficult challenge to address in data centers, whereas water-related solutions are more straightforward. Guillaume Lucci focused on the role of engineers and infrastructure in emerging markets, which need solutions tailored to their specific contexts rather than spending time trying to change those contexts.

Evelyn Wang stressed that the first step is to define the problem in an integrated way, using integrated metrics as well. Using thermal power plants as an example, she illustrated the link between energy and water and explained how innovation can lead to plant designs that deliver the same power output while using less water at an equal or lower cost.

About the World Infrastructure Forum (WIF)

The World Infrastructure Forum is an international platform that fosters dialogue and collaboration among institutions, companies, universities, investors, and experts to address the transformation of infrastructure. Its agenda encompasses energy, water, and resource systems; climate adaptation and resilience; artificial intelligence and digitalization; financing; and mobility and urban development.

WIF is a joint initiative of the MIT Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, the School of Civil Engineering at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), the World Bank Group, and The University of Texas at Austin.

The Forum is supported by a committee of leading organizations representing the entire infrastructure value chain, including ACS, Ferrovial, ACCIONA, Aecom, BCG, COX, Prime Infra, Rogers Electric, AGI, Alvarez & Marsal, Arup, BBVA, Jacobs, Siemens, Snam, Vinci, Bechtel, Cemex, Citi, Eiffage, Eptisa, Liberty Mutual, Macquarie, Meridiam, Montera, Nippon Koei, OHLA, Prologis, Renfe, Swiss Re, Typsa, Webuild, Yapı Merkezi, Veolia, ADB, Digital Twins, École Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, Escuela de Caminos (University of Cantabria), IDB, Institut Jacques Delors, Tongji University, El País, Mediatree, EMT Madrid y Madrid WCC.

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