A year ago, we asked “is it time for a water coalition?” ACEC Indiana took steps to build a “voice” for long term investment in water-related infrastructure at the Indiana General Assembly, based on the model of the Build Indiana Council used for highway and road funding. At the same time, we urged lawmakers to introduce a bill that would serve as platform to examine “water-related infrastructure” on the whole. To strengthen our effort, ACEC Indiana hired a highly respected lobbying firm, APPIAN, that served as the chief lobbyists on the highway/road funding effort due to their proven experience.

After many years of educating lawmakers on the funding needs of this infrastructure, we made significant progress; the General Assembly grasped the magnitude of the looming crisis, and passed a bill that established the “Water Infrastructure Task Force” which is meeting over this summer and fall, with the intent to develop legislation for the 2019 session, a “budget session.” Therefore, we abandoned the initial “coalition-building effort” that we thought would be needed to get this bill passed, as the “players” came together naturally through the legislative process.

Helping to paint the picture of needs, a study published by Indiana University’s Center for Urban Policy and the Environment in 2003 found that the funding needs were at least $12.4B to $13.9B (not adjusted for inflation) for the period 2000-2020 for drinking and waste water projects. It was refreshed in 2017 and now shows needs range between $15.6B to $17.5B, with a funding gap of at least $8.5B over the next 20 years.

Current Status: The Water Infrastructure Task Force consists of four legislators and seven lay people appointed by Governor Holcomb, two of which are ACEC Indiana members (Chris Gale, HNTB and Marty Wessler, Wessler Engineering.) An overview of the Task Force’s responsibilities was given at the recent ACEC Indiana Environmental Business Conference by APPIAN. ACEC Indiana is engaged to ensure a comprehensive and methodical examination occurs of water quality and quantity for public health and safety, as well as economic development opportunity based on data. Findings and recommendations for legislative action are expected to be published in December 2018.

The meeting agendas and presentations made to date are available online now for your information at http://iga.in.gov/legislative/2018/committees/water_infrastructure_task_force.

More updates will be shared soon!