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Long Beach Public Works needs a centralized system to track spending on streets, audit says



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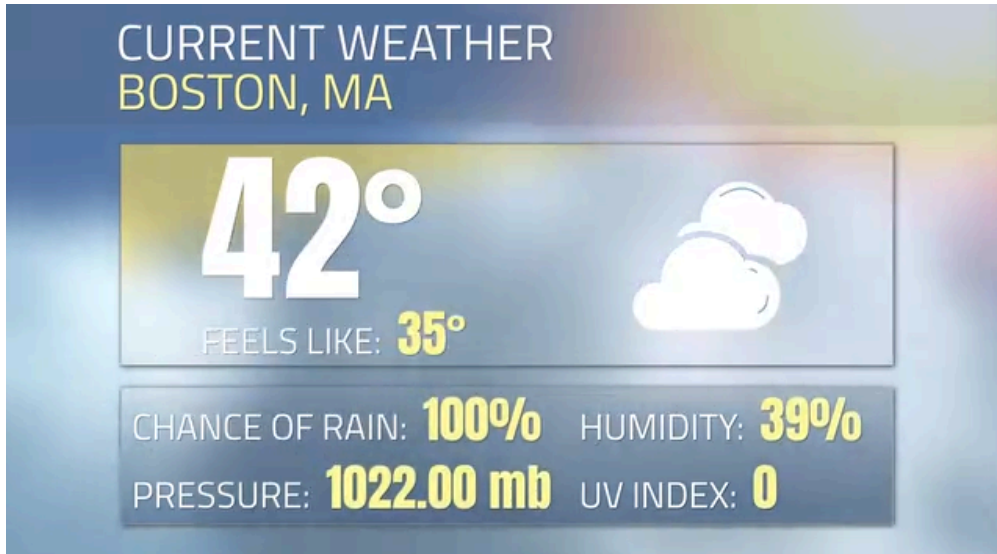
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Though Long Beach is making historic investments in infrastructure with its nearly \$800 million [Elevate '28](#) five-year plan, the city needs a more efficient way to manage spending on certain projects, according to a recent audit.

The [report](#), released by City Auditor Laura Doud's office in May, specifically focused on evaluating Long Beach's investments on street capital improvement projects.

Every two years, Long Beach develops a pavement management plan, which essentially gives city streets a pavement conditions index score out of 100 based on their quality. While Long Beach has given itself a benchmark goal of 60 on the PCI scale for its streets, the current citywide average street quality

“The city is investing approximately \$52,577 per centerline mile,” Doud said in a Monday, June 23, interview. “If you compare that to the lowest spending city, which is San Diego at \$13,939, (Long Beach) is investing four times more than the lowest spending city.”



Long Beach, for example, spent \$87 million and \$83 million on street capital improvement projects in fiscal years 2024 and 2023, respectively — a large increase from just \$48 million during the 2022 fiscal year.

But despite that investment, the audit found Long Beach had the third-lowest PCI score when compared to 12 other major areas, including both the city of Los Angeles and LA County.

“They’re committing a lot of money, and I think city management and (the) Public Works Department are proud of the money they’re investing,” Doud said. “But the audit report showed that the city lacks a centralized system to track street projects.”

Without a centralized system, the audit said, Long Beach can’t effectively track street project progress — which limits the Public Works Department’s ability to manage project timelines and costs, project outcomes, and more.

“So, we make the summation that the city doesn’t really know if they’re doing a cost effective or timely job at performing these street projects,” Doud said. “We’re not really sure how cost effective we are at managing these street projects.”

As it stands, the audit said, Public Works uses spreadsheets tailored to specific project types to track its projects, rather than a standardized system with cumulative data that all project managers can access to inform their work.

A majority of project managers, for example, track project schedules individually using Microsoft Excel, the audit said, with inconsistent terminology and data summaries.

“A review found no baseline schedules to compare actual progress against planned timelines. Additionally, no formal policies exist to define reporting frequency and required data elements, resulting in inconsistency across project teams,” the audit said. “Implementing a citywide project management system would improve data consistency, streamline oversight and support informed decision-making.”

The audit also found that Public Works doesn’t track how accurate its own initial estimates for project budgets are compared to actual construction bids, which creates additional challenges for the department’s ability to budget and forecast future project costs, the audit said.

“While Public Works acknowledges market fluctuations, these changes are not factored into cost estimates or included as contingency adjustments,” the report said. “In one project, average bids were 34% higher than the initial estimates, highlighting the need for improved cost estimation methods. Without tracking this data, the city risks underbudgeting and cost overruns.”

The audit also found that Public Works could implement a more structured reporting system to track staff and consultant hours as they relate to the overall cost of a project.

“Implementing a structured reporting system to track staff time and consultant hours by project phase and as a percentage of total construction costs,” the audit said, “would help Public Works assess staffing needs and improve project efficiency.”

In a response to the audit, City Manager Tom Modica wrote that the Public Works Department concurs with many of the recommendations put forth — including the need to develop a more cohesive, centralized system to track projects

“Public Works acknowledges certain areas requiring improved project tracking, enhanced communication processes, and refined project management procedures,” Modica’s letter said. “Efforts are already underway to address a majority of these concerns.”

Those efforts include establishing Public Works’ Transportation Management Bureau in fiscal year 2024, the letter said, which is charged with standardizing transportation project management, improving internal procedures and expediting project delivery.

“Despite ongoing hiring process inefficiencies, the bureau is close to fully staffed and prepared to achieve its goals,” the letter said, “which include many of the recommendations presented in this audit.”

Public Works is also working on updating its Project Management Manual, the letter said, and ensuring that new staff with project management responsibilities are trained on the manual as part of their on-boarding process.

But to fully implement all the recommended changes — specifically as they relate to project controls, data collection, reporting standardization and more — the department will need more resources, the letter said, which Public Works plans to ask for during the fiscal year 2026 budget cycle.

“In the past, the city’s priorities have been different, and (they are) now playing catch up. It’s important that the city continue to keep the money flowing — and you can tell the (city is committed to) street repairs,” Doud said. “It’s just that we need to do a better job of tracking the money to make sure we’re getting the most mileage out of the tax dollars we have.”

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