

## Construction sector to get moving on transit projects

by Angela Gismondi Aug 31, 2016

A new Public Transit Infrastructure Fund that will help the construction sector move forward on projects across the province is being applauded by several industry stakeholders.



The bilateral agreement between the governments of Canada and Ontario will provide more than \$2.97 billion in combined funding. It includes projects that will improve, modernize and expand transit systems, upgrade transit vehicles, repair subway tracks, create new public transit express routes and enhance accessibility at transit stations.

Andy Manahan, executive director of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario** (RCCAO), said he is impressed with the announcement and although he doesn't know all the details yet, the projects seem like smart investments.

"They're meaningful projects overall and I think they'll make a difference," said Manahan. "I'll give them top marks for thinking this through from a strategic point of view because they could have come out right after the federal budget and said let's do a bunch of stuff, but I think they took the summer, spoke to a lot of people and said here are the types of projects, at least for the first phase, that make some sense."

Five Ontario cities are the first recipients of more than \$688 million of dedicated transit funding for projects that have been approved. Ontario will get nearly \$1.49 billion from the federal government with about \$500 million of the projects in Toronto and \$156 million in Ottawa. Waterloo, Barrie and Sudbury will receive about \$30.6 million combined.

The federal government will cover up to 50 per cent of the funding, with the province picking up half of the costs not covered. It's retroactive to April 1 to cover any costs cities and provinces have already incurred since then.

Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, was also encouraged by the funding announcement.

"It's encouraging to see the feds beginning to live up to their infrastructure commitments," said Cunningham in an email to the Daily Commercial News.

"We saw the first dribble of federal money recently with funding for the renewal of labs at the University of Toronto. These announcements are more significant. These investments are important for the future health of the Ontario economy and will improve the quality of life in the province."

At a meeting earlier this year, an RCCAO board member suggested money should be spent to make transit stations more accessible. Manahan said he contacted the office of Infrastructure and Communities Minister Amarjeet Sohi with the idea for the accessibility project.

"I think the federal government listened to us," said Manahan. "It wasn't so much that our members would be doing the work — although that always comes into play, I would say — but the fact that it needs to be done in the city. Everyone knows we have an aging society and they're not going to be as mobile in the future. We need to do things like improving elevators and escalators so people can get around the city better."

He used the example of a portion of the funds being allocated to create pedestrian crossings on busy streets.

"It's a practical project that doesn't take long to do," said Manahan. "It seems like small potatoes but if you have limited money for buying transit fleet, figuring out the best way to move people around and congestion relief all ties in to improving the economy and the life of people in various cities. Whether or not the agreement provides the right amount of funding remains to be seen."

Manahan was also pleased with the timing of the funding.

"When I was looking at the list, a lot of these projects are retroactive to April 1, 2016," noted Manahan. "They (the government) recognize some things are already underway and I think they're cognizant of the fact that the construction season is not long. There's lots of work that can happen in the winter time but let's face it, if you're doing road work and you're using asphalt, you're not going to be doing that in January and February."

Overall, the announcement is "positive news" for the construction sector, he said.

"We've been hearing from our members that there didn't seem to be a pipeline of projects from either Queen's Park or the federal government yet," said Manahan. "I think this will alleviate some of the concerns that we've been hearing from the construction sector and our members."

The funding is part of the first phase of the Government of Canada's \$120-billion plan to support public infrastructure across the country over the next 10 years.

Manahan believes the second phase is going to require more planning.

"I would encourage all governments to work together and maybe do some pilot projects and testing," said Manahan.

As for the timing of individual projects, he said they seem to be well phased and completing them within the timeframe should not be an issue.

"The planning and engineering kind of work you can do in a couple of years," Manahan said. "If you're talking about core infrastructure and building it — that can always be a challenge with respect to getting the tenders out on time. I have a feeling that the list the municipalities put together, they were very cognizant of the timing. I would be pretty confident that most of this work would be completed, you can't say 100 per cent all the time, but I think in this case you're going to be close to it for most projects."

### **Major transit projects receiving federal funding**

- Toronto: TTC Orion VII Diesel and Nova Artic Bus Rebuild Program — \$41.5 million
- Waterloo: Vehicle replacements — \$12 million
- Ottawa: LRT Stage 2 early works and preliminary engineering — \$45 million
- Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area: Metrolinx — Enterprise Asset Management — \$22.9 million
- Barrie: Barrie Conventional Transit Bus Replacement 2016 — \$1.3 million
- Greater Sudbury: Transit garage upgrades and rehabilitation — \$1.9 million