

December 21, 2012

Tory white paper misses mark on ministries

KELLY LAPOINTE
staff writer

Construction industry leaders are shocked that a new Ontario Conservative Party white paper suggests that the Ministry of Finance should incorporate the Ministry of Infrastructure.

"I am extremely disappointed, I feel completely let down and this is not even something that deserves to be talked about," said Clive Thurston, president of the [Ontario General Contractors Association](#) (OGCA).

The PC's new "Paths to Prosperity: A new deal for the public sector" says there needs to be major change to get the province back on its feet and begin creating jobs again.

Related:

[Ontario government makes \\$90-million commitment to municipal infrastructure](#)

[Ontario municipalities invited to apply for infrastructure funding](#)

"By focusing on the core services that matter most to taxpayers, we believe we can create a leaner public service that delivers more value for less money," says the white paper.

The paper presents the idea of reducing the number of ministries from 24 to 16. In this scheme, the Ministry of Infrastructure would be incorporated by the Ministry of Finance.

The construction industry has been advocating for years for a standalone Ministry of Infrastructure.

"We have always advocated that infrastructure is not a cost, it's an investment and there needs to be a long-term strategic plan to address not only the current deficit in infrastructure and ensure that we're maintaining the existing systems, but a go forward plan of how we continue to expand our infrastructure to meet the needs of the province," said Thurston.

Andy Manahan, executive director of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**, said it's important to have an independent voice advocating for infrastructure.

"The concern was although you could have a very strong finance minister that believed in infrastructure, if you're in a situation where there are cutbacks, that minister cannot be an independent voice for infrastructure," he said.

Industry leaders say the current arrangement with Bob Chiarelli leading both the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Transportation is fine because infrastructure remains a standalone ministry.

Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario (CDAO) chair Joe Accardi said that the standalone infrastructure ministry in the current Liberal government has been a success.

"It's a very key component to a stable economy, to a stable and fiscally responsible province," he said, adding that a standalone ministry has other implications besides financial, such as project delivery and procurement.

In the white paper, the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the Ministry of Labour would be standalone ministries.

The white paper also says the government should establish an Infrastructure Trust where the proceeds of asset sales will be deposited and used to fund regional infrastructure priorities and pay down debt.

"That's a good idea, but not if the whole thing is being controlled by the Finance Ministry. It's just not going to fly," said Thurston.

Other white paper recommendations include giving civil servants the opportunity to bargain individually for their compensation if they choose no union representation and a tightly managed system of performance pay.

Accardi said the CDAO will continue to speak with the PC party.

"I think they do have an understanding of the importance of infrastructure, I think they have a different understanding of how it can fit in the puzzle."