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Construction industry group delivers infrastructure message to Ontario's finance minister

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Ontario's finance minister has been delivered a clear and unified message from the construction industry — revitalization and investment in infrastructure will create sustainable economic activity.

“There is no doubt that investing in infrastructure will do more to speed a recovery, support local industry and create jobs than anything else,” says Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

RCCAO met with Dwight Duncan, finance minister for Ontario, this week to deliver not only its association's recommendations concerning the current economic slowdown, but also those of an unprecedented collection of construction stakeholders who met at a recent industry roundtable.

More than 60 representatives from numerous industry associations, including labour, management, engineers and government officials came together on Friday, Jan. 16 to find common ground on issues that would not only stimulate the provincial economy but also the industry.

Construction investments in roads, water and sewer infrastructure, bridges, transit and housing, among others, have historically generated large multiplier effects beyond direct job creation, the industry group says in its statement.

Manahan says the finance minister showed interest in suggested environmental assessment reforms and municipal permitting.

Duncan also asked for a further eight to 10 points from the industry on changes the province can tackle quickly to help work get underway faster.

“He also agreed that increased [economic] confidence could result with having more

construction projects on the go,” notes Manahan.

Money spent on short-term and long-term infrastructure projects increases employment opportunities and promotes local sourcing of materials relative to other investments, the industry says.

Building core infrastructure enhances productivity growth and attracts foreign investment, fosters green targets, including more energy efficient communities and buildings and creates opportunities for further innovation in technology, materials and systems, the group says.

“Both our goals and outcomes and those of the government are the same,” said Clive Thurston, president of the Ontario General Contractors Association, at the roundtable. “We are probably more aligned now than ever before.”

The industry stresses that construction plays a central role not only in getting shovels in the ground but also in creating economic confidence, bolsters environmental efforts, improves the province’s commercial competitiveness and provides job and retraining opportunities.

“We are not a band-aid, we are part of a fundamental long-term fix,” said John Gamble, president of the Consulting Engineers of Ontario, during the roundtable discussion.

Many industry stakeholders stated it was “disturbing to hear” reports that questioned the industry’s ability to respond to any additional stimulus work created by governments.

There is capacity in the industry, whether it is on the tools or at the engineer’s table, to get work done, agreed labour and management leaders. Increased infrastructure investment will also assist unemployed trades people find work and help absorb apprentices.

“If governments remain steadfast in their commitment to jump start infrastructure investments now, then the construction sector can deliver,” says Michael O’Brien of LIUNA Local 183.