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Toronto Board of Trade asks Ontario political parties for infrastructure proposals

VINCE VERSACE

staff writer

The Toronto Board of Trade has called on provincial parties to clearly address Toronto's infrastructure deficit that is hindering the city's ability to compete economically, it says.

"It is imperative for our next provincial government to reveal how it will finance the regional transportation plan by spring 2012," said Carol Wilding, president and CEO of the Toronto trade board. "The Toronto region cannot afford to stall progress on a financing strategy for its infrastructure needs."

The lack of expansion and maintenance of Toronto's infrastructure has resulted in \$6 billion in economic losses annually and 80-minute commute times, approaching two hours.

With the city growing by 100,000 people annually, the infrastructure that supports it requires action.

"Infrastructure investment is essential for continued provincial economic growth and prosperity," said Andy Manahan, executive director, Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

"While there will clearly be positive impacts on construction job creation, these investments are vital to build a stronger foundation for Ontario and the many regional growth centres, including the Toronto region."

The Toronto trade board's new report, "Reaching Top Speed," aims to encourage provincial parties to address infrastructure issues heading into October's provincial election. Wilding said that all levels of government, citizens and the private sector "must work together" to secure the financial resources to address infrastructure challenges.

Innovation and private sector investment with a new approach to financing, funding and delivering infrastructure is needed, the board's report stated. Also, attracting private investors requires a return on investment and project certainty.

Manahan would like to see a rhetoric-free discussion about potential ways to fund new infrastructure, especially around issues like road tolls.

"My feeling is you cannot go zero to 100 on road pricing, you have to take incremental steps," he said. "Concepts such as HOV (high occupancy vehicle) lanes are ones even politicians can get behind."

Earmarking of revenues for infrastructure projects via different funding mechanisms would likely build more public support for concepts such as road pricing as well, added Manahan.

The board's report noted the "decreasing ability" for development charges to mitigate costs of capital as "build-out and intensification plateau."

A sustainable, long-term investment plan, managing growth demands, controlling program costs, and the need for a federal government partnership are considered "core components" to addressing Toronto

infrastructure needs.

“Infrastructure projects have long planning and construction timelines, so long-term and predictable funding, from all levels of government, is critical to long-term infrastructure planning,” the board’s report concludes.

Among the items in the province’s recently announced 10-year-infrastructure plan are a focus on economic growth, improved asset management, an expanded role for Infrastructure Ontario and identified preconditions for capital ministries to come forward and ask for new capital.

“The good thing about the 10 year plan is it provides a longer horizon for planning and there is a renewed focus on asset management,” said Manahan.