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From left, Infrastructure Ontario executive vice-president John McKendrick and Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships president and CEO Mark Romoff discuss infrastructure opportunities during a panel discussion at the recent **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario Pre-Budget Roundtable**.

Collaboration can help slay Ontario infrastructure deficit

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With a \$60-billion infrastructure deficit hanging over Ontario, it's imperative that both the government and industry work together to tackle the issues.

“Back when I started at [Infrastructure Ontario](#) (IO) in 2005, we had an \$8-billion hospital infrastructure deficit. Nobody talks about that anymore because we've slayed the hospital infrastructure deficit. It's now time to slay the transit and transportation infrastructure deficit,” said IO executive vice-president, major projects John McKendrick, at the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) Pre-Budget Roundtable on infrastructure investments**.

McKendrick says this is only possible through collaboration between all levels of government and the industry.

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[VIDEO: RCCAO Pre-Budget Roundtable on infrastructure](#)

Currently, IO has \$2.4 billion in AFP (alternative financing and procurement) public transit projects in the construction phase and \$8 billion still going through planning and procurement, as well as \$1.8 billion worth of transportation projects under construction and \$2 billion in the planning and procurement stage.

Altogether, IO has been assigned 93 public infrastructure AFP projects.

IO plans to work closer with the industry to ensure cost efficiencies, quality standards

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and that deadlines are met.

But, as important as collaboration is during the development of these projects, IO is careful not to micromanage and allows the industry to do their work.

“The people that actually work on the projects know exactly what goes on a day-to-day basis,” he said.

“It continues to be important for us that the ideas come out of the industry, that we do not tell the industry how to build something, that we give them some objectives and let them come up with a solution.”

Consistent dialogue is also key to trading innovative ideas, he added, which usually results in significant reduction in costs. Collaboration has also birthed some successful and efficient methods such as using the public-private partnership (P3) model, which

has garnered strong support from government.

“The first immediate issue is the reality that, like a lot of countries, we have this infrastructure deficit in Canada, at the same time we’re faced with serious fiscal restraints,” said [Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships](#) (CCPPP) president and CEO Mark Romoff. “When those two elements of the equations are in play it really demands you look at innovative ways to deliver on your infrastructure agenda”

Romoff added that Canada’s global reputation, when it comes to P3 (public-private partnerships) and AFP projects, is “best in class” and are known for being on-time, on-budget and present “good value for taxpayers”.

There are currently 206 P3 projects across Canada representing \$64 billion and almost half of them in Ontario.

Communication between the different levels of government is also key, according to the City of Barrie mayor Jeff Lehman, particularly with how infrastructure funding trickles down from the federal all the way down to the municipal level.

He says city officials require a sense of financial certainty from the province and federally in order to make long-term investment decisions on infrastructure.

“We need to start to be able to make real plans, we need to start to be able to get into the project planning, commissioning of infrastructure, not just what will happen in the years to come,” he said.

Lehman also applauded the industry and government for creating better public awareness on the issues surrounding the infrastructure deficit by inviting them into the conversation in a way they can comprehend.

“As much as we in this sector understand what we’re talking about when you talk to one another, the general public, to fully understand just how important this issue is, you need to do even more than hit them with the big numbers,” he said.

“When you talk about clean water, when you talk about school buildings, parks and libraries, you start to make it real for people.”