

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES:

RCCAO celebrates 10 years of infrastructure advocacy

By **ANDY MANAHAN** Oct 7, 2015

Infrastructure is an important topic across Canada, boosted by a hotly contested federal election campaign, the Ontario government's commitment to invest \$130 billion in infrastructure over 10 years and clarion calls by the municipal sector for access to more sustainable funding sources.



Growing media attention has also shaped public opinion about aging and obsolete infrastructure, especially with the prevalence of extreme weather events.

The **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO)** was formed 10 years ago with representation from labour and management to promote infrastructure investment. One of the fundamental goals was to commission independent research reports which could then be used to influence government decisions. Speaking with a united voice to politicians of all stripes to advocate for long-term approaches to infrastructure and for proper, ongoing asset management has been a hallmark of RCCAO's approach.

Our group's reports have: examined the building permit process; paved the way for Ontario's Guide for Municipal Asset Management Plans in 2012; promoted different ways to address deferred maintenance of municipally-owned bridges; recommended better governance and funding for transit and transportation projects; created an online soil-matching registry; assessed the state of water and wastewater systems; used leading-edge modelling to demonstrate how underinvestment will affect Canada's future prosperity; explored ways to improve the Municipal

Class Environmental Assessment process; and analyzed the price implications of construction procurement practices.

To celebrate 10 years of advocating for infrastructure investment, RCCAO published its 35th report in September to take a hard look at how megatrends — the scope and pace of technological change; urbanization, globalization and connectivity; our changing economy and workplaces; environmental and energy trends; new political and fiscal currents — are developing and how they will shape the future of Ontario's infrastructure to 2030 and beyond.

Former deputy minister and Metrolinx founding CEO Michael Fenn penned a detailed, insightful study that we're very proud of, viewing it as RCCAO's signature study over our decade of existence. Among Fenn's more salient points, he writes that new forms of flexible, adaptable infrastructure will emerge — speeding up infrastructure planning and enabling convergence, from transportation fare-media to health care.

Bricks-and-mortar solutions, however, may become less relevant for health care and education. The need for a hospital will lessen when technology can monitor people's health wherever they are; similarly, the need for big college campuses could decrease when the world's best scholars and educational programs are available on screens in our homes or our mobile devices.

Megatrends will affect both our daily lives and what must be built. Scale, distances and elapsed times will all shrink; margins of all kinds will be squeezed; individual customization will be expected and consumer choices will drive urban designs. Global impacts will become local impacts, and climate change will demand more resilient infrastructure.

But the point from Fenn's study that we'd like to highlight most is this: public infrastructure doesn't just respond to today's needs — it creates a better future. Although there is broad recognition of the need for infrastructure investment, there is less awareness of how major societal trends and disruptive technologies will determine what we should build. In a constrained fiscal environment, it is paramount that we build the right infrastructure. Good infrastructure decisions pay dividends for generations; bad decisions burden us for decades.

We believe in evidence-based approaches from urban planners, engineers and others to help foster political and public support. RCCAO's four-part video series "Take the Politics out of Transit Planning," nominated for an Ontario Professional Planners Institute award, provided examples of where political interference (think of Toronto's former mayor and his "subways, subways, subways" mantra) has thwarted our ability to deliver transit projects in a timely and cost-effective manner.

When everyone is on the same page, understanding the implications of infrastructure investment decisions, we can build a better future. We're looking forward to seeing how the construction industry will continue to work with governments at all levels over the next 10 years.

To read our reports, please visit rccao.com/research.

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