



## Report reinforces need to reform Ontario's Municipal Class Environmental Assessments

VAUGHAN (July 17, 2019) – With study costs skyrocketing and timelines exceeding two years, it's time to reform the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (MCEA) process, says a report released today.

The report entitled “Case Studies That Support Reforming Ontario’s Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Process” provides summaries of 12 recent projects where the cumbersome MCEA process has contributed to lengthy and often unnecessary processing delays. Nine of the projects are road-oriented, two pertain to bridge structures and one is a water project intended to prevent sewage from entering the Ottawa River. Ten of these municipal projects took between two years and five-plus to go through the process.

Even though the MCEA process is intended to be a streamlined alternative to the individual EA process for large scale projects such as hydro corridors, standard municipal projects such as road reconstructions, bridge rehabilitation and flood-control projects face longer delays to get approved.

“Under the current regime, rebuilding aging structures or constructing new infrastructure is taking too long under the MCEA process, especially when Ontario municipalities must ensure that our public works are more resilient to withstand severe weather events. This report shows that local governments and, by extension, taxpayers are paying too much to modernize our infrastructure systems,” says report author Frank Zechner, an environmental lawyer and engineer.

“Case Studies” is the sixth report on MCEAs commissioned by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) since 2009. A 2010 study found that it took about 19 months on average to go through the MCEA process with an estimated cost of \$113,300 per project paid by municipalities. A follow-up study in 2014 showed that it took almost 27 months for a similar set of projects, with an average study cost of \$386,500. While the new report does not represent an apples-to-apples comparison, the consultant costs range between \$46,000 and \$8.5 million.

If the project proceeds, EA study costs will total \$8.5 million for Peterborough’s proposed Parkway Corridor improvements project. Even after a four-plus year consultation process, a former environment minister determined that the \$79-million project would be subject to an individual EA even though ministry staff indicated that the MCEA process addressed public concerns and that there was no need for the more rigorous individual EA process. This presented a conundrum for the City of Peterborough as the Minister’s Order would add another five to seven years to the project timeline, at an additional cost of \$6 million or more in project administrative costs. Consultant costs of \$2.5 million had already been incurred and the city cannot afford the extra financial burden at this time.



“It is important to note that for all 12 projects examined, the costs listed exclude staff time and resources, which can be significant, to carry out the various consultations and other measures required by the MCEA process,” Zechner said.

Andy Manahan, executive director of RCCAO, added: “This report represents one decade of effort on this issue, most of that in tandem with the Municipal Engineers Association. We are pleased that the Province released a discussion paper on modernizing Ontario’s EA program, and we hope that this report provides further impetus to reform the Municipal Class EA system. There is a lot of overlap in consultation processes between the *Planning Act* and the MCEA requirements. Furthermore, municipalities are already addressing environmental issues in Official Planning and other processes, so there is unnecessary duplication.”

Manahan added that “RCCAO is committed to working with the municipal sector and the Provincial Government, including Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks Jeff Yurek to continue to implement improvements to the MCEA system.”

[Click here for the report.](#)

### **WHAT IS RCCAO?**

This labour-management construction alliance has advocated for infrastructure investment for 14 years. This research marks RCCAO’s 51<sup>st</sup> independent, solutions-based report to help inform decision-makers.

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