

## Joint Construction Industry Group Vision Statement: Infrastructure Investment Benefits All

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(Toronto) January 19, 2009 – Last Friday, over 60 representatives from a wide cross-section of labour and management organizations, along with engineers and government officials, gathered to create an agenda for concrete change and revitalization for infrastructure in the province. All members were in agreement that infrastructure investments must lead to more sustainable economic activity.

Representatives from the group will be meeting with Government of Ontario today to discuss their recommended opportunities to stimulate the economy over the short, medium and longer-term horizons.

“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. “There is a large group with considerable bench strength that is ready to partner with the government once commitments have materialized.”

“Infrastructure is a long-term asset of value,” added Michael O’Brien of Local 183. “It can’t be stressed enough that both rehabilitation and new investment are required in upcoming government budgets to ensure that value is realized.”

The thrust of the recommendations focused on fast-tracking priority and ‘shovel-ready’ projects, and the main elements of the group’s “move forward” vision include:

### **Working Together in Difficult Times:**

- All sectors of the construction industry (unions, contractors, builders and engineers) want to work in partnership with governments to deliver infrastructure in a timely fashion and to act as a catalyst for an economic recovery.
- Most construction projects result in jobs which are generated locally and regionally.
- Ontario has a highly skilled and experienced construction workforce combined with knowledgeable construction management.

### **Investing in the Future:**

- Construction will have a broader and more immediate impact than other forms of government spending.
- Productivity and multiplier effects are well-established when investments are made in public infrastructure.
- While there are many larger scale construction projects ongoing across Canada, Ontario is being hit relatively hard by manufacturing layoffs and closures, particularly related to the automotive sector.
  - Federal investments and programs must recognize this disproportional impact by making relatively larger investments in southern and central Ontario where road and highway networks are crucial to goods movement and continued trade with the United States.

### **Able and Ready:**

- Perceptions about insufficient capacity to deal with a major infusion of infrastructure capital are no longer valid.

- At the moment, there exists higher than normal unemployment in a number of construction trades, and there are many experienced trades people out of work in certain market areas of Ontario.
- Additional infrastructure investment will assist with the absorption of apprentices.

**Catching up and building for the future:**

- Our built environment is the main determinant of where we are as a society and where we stand in the world.
- Infrastructure investments have not kept pace with population and economic growth over the past few decades.
- Now is an opportune time to catch up by considerably increasing investment levels.

**Building Confidence:**

- This recession is unlike previous ones, and a lack of confidence is pervasive.
- The high visibility of construction projects will instill confidence.
- Moreover, eighty per cent of materials and resources used in construction are locally-based - local procurement will build confidence, support employment and provide many positive spin-offs.

**Sustainable Communities:**

- Notwithstanding red tape, shovel-ready projects have passed the environmental requirements and are poised to help not only in economic recovery but, in many cases, in the greening of our communities.
- Investment in infrastructure will bolster environmental efforts in core areas such as transit and water and sewer projects.
- Opportunities also exist in developing more energy efficient housing and communities.
- Innovative techniques and construction technologies will foster many new economic opportunities globally.

**Innovation and Efficiency:**

- Opportunities exist for further innovation in technology, materials, and systems, with an appropriate environment.
- The industry is committed to work with the government to utilize benchmarking and strategic planning to develop a more sustainable construction sector, as has been achieved in other jurisdictions.
- The regulatory framework has become much more complex over the past two decades.
- Streamlining of infrastructure and housing projects will be critical to delivering economic stimulus when it is needed – now.

**Lasting Impacts:**

- The industry intends to take this infusion of cash as a launching pad for a more agile and competitive construction sector in Ontario.
- With sufficient advance notice about major project investments, the construction industry will be able to respond appropriately with a trained workforce, especially if there is a steady stream of projects (this includes retraining of construction workers and improved labour mobility).

It is important to point out that, unlike many other jurisdictions, the institutional framework of government does not allow for one-stop approaches for the construction industry to address policies and regulations. Moving forward, the industry wants to play more of a policy advisory role in this area.

*Editors Note - The individual organizations and unions involved with the joint statement will communicate individually with government members on specific recommendations.*

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