



Ontario's \$130-billion infrastructure investment appropriate but major trends must be acted on to maximize returns

TORONTO (Marketwired: Sept. 10, 2015) – The future of infrastructure in Ontario looks bright after the Wynne government's budget pledge of \$130 billion over 10 years. But the province desperately needs to choose the right infrastructure and build it right, using long-term, forward-thinking financial instruments and tax policies. In order to overcome short-term thinking, governments at all levels will also need to adopt more integrated decision-making models and work collaboratively.

What do our political leaders have on their infrastructure and public policy agendas today that will be relevant in the next 10-15 years? What should we be doing to anticipate that very different world? Will societal trends and new technologies render some infrastructure unnecessary, or open the door to different solutions?

Those are questions that a new report, spearheaded by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO), tackles. The report, "Building Our Tomorrow: The Future of Ontario's Infrastructure", written by Michael Fenn, addresses how megatrends – major trends or movements – and the rise of new infrastructure will impact Ontario (and Canada) between now and 2030.

Brad Duguid, the Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure Minister, said: "After allocating the largest investment for infrastructure in Ontario's history, our government is committed to making the right decisions to build the right infrastructure for a prosperous future. Through its research, RCCAO has offered valuable input into the development of the province's infrastructure policy and this report is no exception."

The report highlights some new forms of infrastructure that will emerge – for rapid and public transit, complementary innovations such as platform-side doors, automated train control, and multi-purpose fare-media to increase throughput and reduce congestion; in others, such as in the health care and educational sectors, bricks-and-mortar solutions will become less necessary; others will take on light, adaptable forms.

Canadian futurist Richard Worzel contributed to the report. Both he and Fenn believe that megatrends such as technological changes, globalization and demographic shifts (including aging Millennials and Baby Boomers) will play a key role in building innovative infrastructure that changes the direction of Ontario's future.

A great example of such innovative infrastructure planning occurred almost a century ago, making a pivotal impact on Toronto and the TTC, report author Fenn says.

"When the first Bloor-Danforth subway ran in 1966, it saved money and construction time using infrastructure built under the Bloor Viaduct in 1918 for a subway that didn't exist and wasn't planned,"

Fenn says. “Today’s infrastructure seems expensive, but yesterday’s infrastructure seems like a prudent investment.”

As for the future, the daunting pace of change has great potential, Fenn says. New materials, components and processes will make infrastructure quicker, easier and cheaper to build and maintain – and then to adapt it, repurpose it and refinance it, when needs change or to drive some economic or social objective.

“In a constrained fiscal environment, it is paramount that we build the right infrastructure,” says RCCAO executive director Andy Manahan. “Good infrastructure decisions pay dividends for generations.”

But that can only be accomplished with a clear-sighted economic development strategy and high-priority, focused, fact-based decision-making from our government in partnership with industry.

Mr. Fenn reiterates the practical advice of Walter Gretzky to his son Wayne: “Don’t skate to the puck. Skate to where the puck is going to be.” It is in this spirit, that RCCAO commissioned this independent report on how society and our governments might respond more quickly and think differently about infrastructure than we have in the past.

To obtain a copy of the report, click on this link: rccao.com.

Michael Fenn is a former Ontario deputy minister and founding CEO of Metrolinx. He will be speaking at the Canadian Urban Institute forum on Oct. 8th (Daniels Spectrum, 585 Dundas St. E., Toronto).

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