

## Ontario budget 2019: construction sector highlights

DCN News Services April 12, 2019



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TORONTO — The Ontario government's 2019 budget delivered by Finance Minister Vic Fedeli April 11 confirmed funding for major transit projects in Ottawa and Hamilton, reiterated the massive pledges for Toronto transit Premier Doug Ford had made the day before and promised legislation to create a new skills training regime to replace the Ontario College of Trades.

Highlights for constructors included:

— a total infrastructure investment of \$14.7 billion in fiscal year 2019-2020. The government intends to spend about \$144 billion over the next decade, with \$66.7 billion for transit and \$22.1 billion for highway infrastructure, in the analysis of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO)**.

— the \$28.5-billion plan to build new transit in the Toronto, including the new 15-kilometre Ontario Line, replacing a planned shorter relief line, was highlighted as the cornerstone of transit infrastructure. The Hamilton LRT plan was left intact, with \$1 billion towards 14 kilometres of new rail including 17 stops. There is also \$1.2 billion pledged for Ottawa's Stage 2 LRT project.

— continued support to reduce regulatory barriers that hold up delivery of infrastructure projects as part of its Open for Business program. There were no corporate income tax cuts but there was a promise to implement faster write-offs for investment in machinery and equipment through a \$3.8-billion Ontario Job Creation Investment Incentive.

— Ontario Place will be redeveloped, with an expression of interest process to begin in spring 2019 to solicit ideas and designs from potential partners to create a “new vision.”

— a promise for a “new kind of partnership” with the private sector for transit-oriented projects such as new and expanded GO stations, along the lines of the Woodbine and Mimico station projects. The budget explained, “for example, allowing developers to build above transit stations in exchange for building new transit infrastructure can help create mixed-use communities around stations.”

— along with a “first pillar” principle to adopt programs to eliminate red tape and indicate Ontario is “open for business,” a second pillar is a skilled workforce, which includes “helping employers attract skilled workers, aligning postsecondary funding with labour market outcomes, modernizing the apprenticeship and skilled trades system and reviewing employment and training services.”

There will be a new governance framework to replace the Ontario College of Trades, apprenticeship and the skilled trades will be promoted as a “pathway choice” in elementary and high schools, and apprenticeship service delivery will be improved with a new “one-window digital portal for apprentices.”

— more broadly in jobs initiatives, the government will expand the occupations eligible for the Employer Job Offer: In-Demand Skills Stream and will begin a pilot initiative with select communities to explore new approaches to bring skilled immigrants to smaller communities.

— there were several initiatives aimed at northern Ontario, including expanding the Northern Ontario Internship Program, reiteration of a plan to create a Mining Working Group to focus on reducing red tape and attracting major new investments in that sector, a pledge to similarly reduce red tape to enable the launch of Ring of Fire investment, and promises to continue to support the Wataynikaneyap Power and East-West Tie Transmission Project initiatives.

— a Health Capital Investment of \$17 billion in capital grants over the next 10 years to modernize and increase capacity at hospitals.

— a pledge of \$13 billion in capital grants over a 10-year period to help build new schools in high-growth areas and improve the condition of existing schools.

— a promise to continue to support the refurbishment of the Darlington nuclear plant and supports the continued operation of the Pickering nuclear plant until 2024.