

DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

August 19, 2009

Lobbying

Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario pitches process changes to Ottawa

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The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario's recent federal pre-budget submission is not a laundry list of items with price tags, but instead pushes for process improvements.

"We felt that there are a number of structural and process elements that need to be addressed to enhance infrastructure investment decision-making and to effectively tackle the infrastructure funding deficit over the long-term," says Andy Manahan, RCCAO's executive director.

The RCCAO's submission to the federal standing committee on finance consisted of three recommendations: basing future infrastructure funding programs on more rigorous priority-setting and setting in place clear programs for sustainable long-term funding of infrastructure; supporting the development of an Infrastructure Simulation Platform that would enhance infrastructure investment decision-making and streamlining environmental assessment approval processes to get infrastructure funding released faster.

Priority-setting and sustainable, long-term funding would really benefit from the development of a tool like an Infrastructure Simulation Platform, RCCAO says.

The simulation platform could complement and improve traditional models of prediction and decision analysis. It could also address questions such as what should annual spending targets be to address the infrastructure gap or what is the business case for investing pension funds in infrastructure projects?

"All levels of government need to have better benchmarking — you can start at the grassroots municipal level or from the top down," says Manahan.

"Other countries with a more top-down approach tend to be smaller countries. Whereas in Canada, you have this vast swath of geography to deal with. Maybe this is something provinces or municipalities can work at and hopefully the federal government can come on board."

The creation of a long-term infrastructure funding program in the 2010 budget would help with strategic investments and improvements.

The first wave of Infrastructure Stimulus Funding (ISF) projects focused on meeting "shovel-ready" criteria and many municipalities chose projects that had relatively low value and arguably little long-term competitive benefit to the country, says Manahan.

"A number of those municipal projects could be completed using in-house staff and resources and did not really generate new jobs," Manahan says.

RCCAO says in its submission that "many of the construction firms and contractors" they represent have indicated they have not yet seen any tenders as a result of the ISF program. Thanks to delays in the release

of stimulus funds and a compressed construction seasons and schedule, RCCAO recommends that a second wave of projects be “provided with a wider window of opportunity for completion” and that they receive federal funding beyond the arrangement already made with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

“This budgetary measure would provide reassurance to municipalities that they will not be on the hook for projects that could be inadvertently delayed because of lengthy approval processes, winter weather conditions or other unanticipated complexities,” explains Manahan.