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Ontario's infrastructure plan is construction story of the year

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[Ontario's 10-year infrastructure plan](#) was the highlight of 2011 for many construction industry stakeholders.

Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario executive director Andy Manahan said the stimulus program somewhat replaced talk of the 10-year plan, but Bob Chiarelli, Minister of Infrastructure and now Transportation, brought it forward again in June.

It's really important that the Progressive Conservatives and the New Democratic Party are on-board with the plan, said Manahan.

"Typically there's a lot of debate politically about the importance of various programs, but the two opposition parties agreed with the statement in the plan that there should be \$35 billion spent over the next three years, so there's a lot of consistency in the outlook that infrastructure is important across party lines," he said, adding that the finance minister, Dwight Duncan, will have tough decisions ahead of him.

"But I think that they recognize that one dollar spent on infrastructure has a multiplier effect that's going to have benefits for the economy."

The [appointment of the Ontario College of Trades Board of Governors and registrar](#) was also a major story for the industry this year.

"Incremental steps in the formation of the new college are being made all the time, but these are kind of marquee appointments that tell the public they're moving ahead," said Ian Cunningham, President of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations (COCA).

There has been much debate among industry stakeholders about the value of the institution.

"The College of Trades continues to be that issue that is percolating and on a daily basis is getting larger, bigger and more concerning to the industry," said Karen Renkema, Ontario Road Builders' Association (ORBA) director government relations.

"That continues to be a lead story for the industry, especially concerning the election and now for the latter half of the year with a number of the appointments going on."

The [October 6 provincial election](#) was a big story for COCA as it saw Ontario's first minority government in 26 years.

"I think the average Ontarian would like to see what might be typified as minority style of government, which is more engaging, more collaborative among the three parties in the legislature and trying to achieve consensus on the issues that are of greatest importance to Ontarians," said Cunningham.

"We haven't seen this yet, but this may emerge and is often the product of a minority government."

Other important developments to COCA were the [appointment of George Gritziotis, former executive director of the Construction Sector Council \(CSC\), as Ontario's first Chief Prevention Officer](#) and the [Harry Arthurs Workplace Safety Insurance Board Funding Review](#).

"The WSIB's own numbers and thinking were exposed to the critical scrutiny of these technical experts and I think it was almost transformational the kind of feedback they got from independent outside experts," said Cunningham.

The CFAAST Audit was an important part of the year for ORBA. The report was commissioned by the Deputy Minister of Transportation late last year and released to ORBA at the end of August.

CFAAST (Corporate Financial Assurance Audit Service Team, Ontario Internal Audit Division, Ministry of Finance) was asked to review MTO's claims and infractions process from the perspectives of 'fairness, equity and transparency'.

Its final report and recommendations calls to question the fairness, equity and/or transparency of numerous aspects of current claims and infractions processes.

Twenty-one strong recommendations were made for moving forward, said Renkema.

"Some of the issues that were identified have been issues and complaints for 10 to 12 years within the industry," she explained.

"The Ministry is committed within the audit to look at some of their practices and move forward and take action," added Renkema.

"We're working with the Ministry in a positive light right now to try to make that happen together."

With these issues continuing to play a leading role, 2012 is already shaping up to be yet another busy year for the construction industry, agreed stakeholders.