



Break up super-ministry

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As Premier Dalton McGuinty ponders a makeover of his cabinet this week (or next), he should give serious consideration to breaking up the super-ministry of energy and infrastructure.

The two ministries were put together 18 months ago under George Smitherman (since departed from cabinet to run for mayor). The rationale at the time was that much of the energy portfolio – such as new power plants – could be described as "infrastructure." But the two ministries turned out not to be a good fit. That's because the mandate of the infrastructure ministry is to work with all the other ministries, not just energy, to ensure that the government gets the biggest bang from its capital spending.

The construction sector – both unions and employers – became convinced that the infrastructure side of the combined portfolio was getting short shrift. In recent weeks, the sector has lobbied McGuinty to restore infrastructure to stand-alone status.

Both energy and infrastructure are huge responsibilities. The energy portfolio includes such vexing issues as proceeding with a new nuclear power plant, weaning the province off coal as a source of electricity, ramping up renewable sources (wind, solar, etc.), and trying to hold the line on rates.

Meanwhile, with an "infrastructure deficit" estimated at \$100 billion, the infrastructure portfolio covers a vast range of capital investments in everything from bridges and roads to schools and hospitals. Also, the spending has to be dovetailed with Ottawa's priorities to take advantage of federal infrastructure funding.

Each portfolio deserves a full-time minister.