



Chorus of voices calling for infrastructure investment

By Stephen Dupuis

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The chorus of voices calling for infrastructure as the top priority for the pending federal budget has grown dramatically, with over 60 representatives from a wide cross-section of labour and construction management organizations urging all levels of government to act now to help stimulate the economy. The industry group – which the Building Industry and Land Development Association, the Ontario Home Builders' Association, the Greater Toronto Sewer and Watermain Contractors Association, the Labourers

International Union of North America (Local 183), RESCON and many others are a part of – is stressing that the timing is ideal for government to invest in infrastructure to generate economic growth and job creation while building core assets that will serve Ontarians for decades to come.

The unprecedented gathering last Friday of such a wide range of organizations reflects the broad consensus that industry can respond immediately to government's readiness to ramp up infrastructure investments. "Increased infrastructure investment is the most beneficial action governments can take to spur the economy," says Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario. "Ultimately, the construction industry can lead Ontario out of this recession with government investment."

Cutting red tape

"Rationalization of the regulatory regime must be accomplished in order to achieve the goal of fast-tracking priority infrastructure projects," Manahan adds – a point on which BILD wholeheartedly agrees. Construction investments in roads, transit, sewer and water infrastructure have historically generated large multiplier effects beyond direct job creation. There are many reasons spending money on short-term and long-term infrastructure projects is crucial during turbulent economic times, such as:

- Creating many local and regional jobs.
- Enhancing productivity growth and attracting foreign investment.
- Bolstering environmental efforts, including reducing gridlock and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Creating opportunities for further innovation in technology, materials and systems.

- Instilling consumer confidence, the lack of which is a large part of the current problems we collectively face.

Federal investments and programs should take into account the decline in the Ontario manufacturing sector by making relatively larger investments in southern and central Ontario, where road and highway networks are crucial to goods movement and continued trade with the United States.

Civilized society

“If governments remain steadfast in their commitment to jump-start infrastructure investments now, the construction sector can deliver,” says Michael O’Brien of Local 183. “Infrastructure investment in Ontario – and Canada, for that matter – has been falling behind over many decades. There are real opportunities right now for the government to take positive steps by replacing, renewing and expanding the basic backbone of a civilized society – a workable infrastructure.” Once government commitments have been made, the industry as a whole will be ready to work in partnership with all levels of government to do its part in reviving the economy during this challenging time.

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