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Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario

Infrastructure czar needed, says RCCAO's Manahan

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An infrastructure asset management strategy with performance benchmarks would play an important role in Ontario's future management of infrastructure assets, finds a Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) report.

"An asset management approach ties into a stimulus plan," said Andy Manahan, executive director of RCCAO.

"If we are going to get a better understanding of our priorities we need to have an idea of our assets."

The RCCAO commissioned report, *Benchmarking Infrastructure Funding in Ontario: Towards Sustainable Policies*, delved into how the province can become more open and accountable in its management of infrastructure assets.

Among the report's recommendations were:

- increasing the responsibility, role and resources of the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure (MEI) to become the Infrastructure Czar for Ontario
- creating a multi-stakeholder infrastructure council and think tanks to support the efforts of MEI in taking on this expanded role
- establishing long-term funding commitments for infrastructure renewal, and leveraging this funding to encourage municipal adoption of best practices in asset management
- comparing Ontario to some of its international counterparts to measure infrastructure performance.

“The multi-stakeholder council would be important because having cross-sector representation, from labour to management and across all the trades, could plug into and work with the MEI,” said Manahan. “The think tank’s approach is important because there are professionals out there exploring different ways of doing things.”



The report’s analysis found that most infrastructure funding goes to new investments to meet population growth. Research showed that the provincial and federal share of funding does not meet current infrastructure replacement needs. A larger share of the funding is supplied by end users through rates or municipal property taxes.

Andy Manahan

MEI has begun to look at developing an infrastructure asset-management framework and that Ontario is prepared to share best practices with municipalities, since there is a varying degree of expertise at that level.

Establishing benchmarking in Ontario that focuses on comparing organizational performance in areas such as cost, time, quality and productivity to competitors in the same sector, would be integral to management and strategic planning.

An infrastructure asset management strategy that includes both long and short term objectives, predictable funding and performance measures, would not only help the province but the construction industry as well in its planning.

The report recommends drafting a strategy would need to be based on collaboration with all levels of governments. Also, the strategy should be based on local and international best practices.

Two of the international examples explored were Australia and Singapore. In Australia, the government’s benchmarking is transparent and its management of assets uses the most advanced technical and management practices. In Singapore, the government established a knowledge-enabled coordination environment to promote best practices and a spirit of collaboration between the construction industry, and government.