

## **Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act a positive step, but there needs to be more: stakeholders**

Angela Gismondi October 29, 2020



The Ontario government’s proposed package of legislative measures and policy changes that’s meant to accelerate the building of priority infrastructure projects is a step in the right direction, say construction industry stakeholders, but it doesn’t address some of the key barriers the industry is facing.

“Anything they can do to speed up approvals we applaud and we thank the government, but there are still underlying issues that have not been addressed,” said Sandro Perruzza, chair of the board of the Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario (CDAO) and CEO of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers.

Perruzza made a number of presentations to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs but the concerns he brought up were not addressed in the legislation. Although the legislation aims to make it easier for more companies to bid on projects, the risk lies solely on the contractors, he said.

“We talked to the government about contract language for provincially funded infrastructure projects,” he said. “The language in the contracts make it very risky for businesses to sign on.

The insurance companies have been burned and liability insurance is going up because of it... That needs to be addressed.

“This government has made a lot of announcements about the skilled trades and we applaud that. We understand there is a shortage of skilled trades but there is another shortage and that’s on the design side, on the engineering side that the government still hasn’t addressed,” he added.

The Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act, 2020 aims to reduce barriers in the planning, design construction and delivery for major projects such as highways, public transit and transit-oriented communities. The measures in the act could help to further reduce risk and costs, mitigate unnecessary delays and could encourage competitive bidding associated with transit projects, indicates a government release.

“This legislation will definitely put the shovels in the ground faster and build the infrastructure that we need to keep the people moving but there has to be more,” said Giovanni Cautillo, president of the Ontario General Contractors Association, adding in his presentation to the Standing Committee he made it clear that small, medium and large construction projects are needed to stimulate the economy and create jobs.

“This is a great first step in getting the economy back on track. We are far from out of the woods yet.”

**Nadia Todorova, senior director, government relations for the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, said the acceleration announcement reflects the government’s understanding of the importance of infrastructure to the economy.**

**“We have consistently been advocating for the acceleration of infrastructure projects and transit projects especially in the COVID-19 environment because the pandemic has significantly affected Ontario’s civil and engineering contractors and has resulted in a dramatic drop in tenders being issued for municipal projects,” said Todorova, adding she is looking forward to seeing what is included in the upcoming provincial budget.**

**“We’ll see if there is any infrastructure stimulus or the continued focus on infrastructure this government has been showcasing.”**

**Todorova said the RCCAO is happy to see the continued focus on improving the utility locates process included in the bill.**

**“Getting that right, making sure that timely locates are the norm is so essential to getting infrastructure built on time because locates are intrinsically linked to the infrastructure development process,” she said.**

Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, said the act appears to speed up the delivery of projects “which is unquestionably a good thing.”

“As with all pieces of legislation, the devil is in the details, and with all public policy, it’s about striking the right balance,” he noted. “Investment in public infrastructure will be a big part of Ontario’s economic recovery. These investments in transit create good jobs, get money flowing through the economy immediately and build critical systems that allow people to get to work and move around their communities for decades into the future.”

The Ministry of Transportation has posted the bill on the Environmental Registry of Ontario for a 30-day comment period.