



One More Load: Assessing our infrastructure

Federal government embarking on its first-ever National Infrastructure Assessment

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Photo: Andrew Snook/Rock to Road

The federal government has embarked on its first-ever National Infrastructure Assessment that will identify the country's infrastructure needs and priorities and be key in determining how to increase the resiliency of our built environment and drive to net-zero emissions.

The assessment also provides an opportunity to determine the best way to fund and finance infrastructure projects like transit, waterworks and roads and bridges.

The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) is in a unique position to provide input on this issue. We are a coalition of key labour and management stakeholders from the residential and civil construction sectors that is focused on the importance of investing in core public infrastructure.

We commend the federal government for initiating the assessment. Infrastructure lays the foundation for nation building and provides significant opportunity for economic growth and competitiveness.

In our submission to Infrastructure Canada, we noted that the federal government must tackle the country's massive infrastructure deficit and commit more funding to transit, waterworks and

roads and bridges. As we see it, investing in capital projects is one of the best ways to create jobs and help our economy recover from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Greater Golden Horseshoe is one of the fastest-growing regions in North America and is expected to expand by one million people every five years, reaching nearly 15 million by 2051. That is a population increase of more than 50 per cent compared to today. The expected population growth will increase demand for infrastructure across Ontario. We must keep pace with that growth.

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To adequately address this anticipated growth and ensure Ontario's economic competitiveness, there must be a continuous focus on critical infrastructure.

Consideration must be given to both multi-year infrastructure projects, such as the Ontario Line in Toronto, as well as everyday, state-of-good-repair projects. These types of projects are an important source of employment and ensure that critical infrastructure is operating efficiently and safely.

We must undertake significant highway expansion across the province to facilitate trade corridors, continue with current and future transit expansion projects, dedicate funds to address aging water and wastewater systems, and streamline the slow and uncertain development and building approvals process.

Investing in infrastructure, both short- and long-term, is one of the best ways to stimulate the economy and create jobs. For every \$1 billion in infrastructure spending, GDP is boosted by an average additional \$1.46 billion.

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Infrastructure funding for capital projects should be based on evidence-based, business-case approaches, supported by asset management plans for municipal projects. Projects identified in these plans have already been vetted and planned for at the municipal level. Using asset management plans ensures that investment is targeted and addresses and prioritizes municipal need.

There is a significant infrastructure deficit present across our country, with estimates ranging between \$110 to \$270 billion. In Ontario, the municipal infrastructure deficit is estimated at about \$60 billion, with recent studies calculating that \$34.7 billion is attributed to roads and bridges alone.

Just recently, RCCAO released a study that indicates massive amounts of treated drinking water is being wasted by municipalities due to leaky pipes. Many of our underground pipes are past their service life and in need of repair. In Toronto, for example, 13 per cent of the more than

6,000 kilometres of watermains are 80 to 100 years of age and 11 per cent are more than 100 years old.

It's not just funding that needs to be provided, though. Governments should work to foster innovation as part of the infrastructure development process. For example, there needs to be a greatly expanded use of electronic permitting in the planning, engineering, and building permitting areas of infrastructure development.

A comprehensive electronic permitting system would enable municipal, regional and provincial authorities as well as external agencies to be linked together on a common platform.

There is much to be done on the infrastructure front and the federal assessment is a step in the right direction to determine what needs to be done to support future growth and prosperity across Canada.

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