



10 years of advocacy comes to fruition in Ontario's infrastructure-laden budget but RCCAO still encourages using revenue tools such as HOT lanes, gas tax

TORONTO (Marketwired: April 23, 2015) – The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) is thrilled to learn of the Ontario government's plans to focus on desperately needed infrastructure as the focus of this year's provincial budget.

RCCAO, in its 10th year, is seeing a decade of advocacy efforts come to fruition.

Finance Minister Charles Sousa pledged \$31.5 billion over 10 years through the Moving Ontario Forward plan for transportation, transit and other critical infrastructure – including \$16 billion for transit in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). RCCAO welcomes this funding boost, especially considering that it will support more than 110,000 jobs per year.

This figure has risen by \$2.6 billion from the 2014 budget after the government increased its asset optimization target to \$5.7 billion.

Unlocking the value of the province's assets to finance critical infrastructure was a key recommendation made by former deputy minister Michael Fenn in a report he wrote for RCCAO in December. The report, "[Unlocking Ontario's Advantages: Building New Infrastructure on the Foundation of Existing Public Assets.](#)" was intended to provide advice to both the Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets being chaired by Ed Clark, and to the Ontario Government.

That \$2.6 billion increase will go towards efforts such as:

- Accelerated service enhancements to the GO Transit network
- A new Connected Links program (municipal roads connecting to provincial highways)
- Improvements for regional mobility through Metrolinx's Next Wave projects of the Big Move (such as Hurontario-Main Light Rail Transit project in Mississauga and Brampton)

About \$11.9 billion in projects are earmarked for 2015-2016, including building rapid transit bus lanes in both York Region and Mississauga.

RCCAO executive director Andy Manahan welcomed the announcement, saying "Clearly, this majority government was able to make a strong statement about the importance of investing in infrastructure but the capital demands are so great that a rigorous evaluation process will be critical to ensure that the projects with the best value are chosen.

“For example, does it make sense to build an expensive subway to replace the existing Scarborough RT when SmartTrack is proposed to be in a corridor so close by?”

These kinds of questions inspired the creation of RCCAO’s video series, [“Take the Politics Out of Transit Planning.”](#)

Sousa – who reiterated the government’s pledge Thursday to invest \$130 billion in infrastructure over 10 years – said the budget reflected the government’s vision of creating “a competitive, modern economy that creates jobs and growth. The best way to do that is to work together – as Ontarians – to build infrastructure that benefits us all.”

Manahan, who was appointed to the Premier’s Transit Panel in 2013, said that while the budget answered many of RCCAO’s calls for increased spending on infrastructure, the Ontario government could implement other revenue generating methods.

“RCCAO continues to support the concept of a suite of revenue tools, as recommended by both Metrolinx and the Transit Panel. Despite the recent funding announcements which have been made, asset sales are one-time only and, like other sources such as development charges or sales taxes, do relatively little to influence driving behaviour,” Manahan said.

While the government says in the budget that it recognizes Ontarians are “concerned about gridlock,” Manahan says the budget doesn’t do enough to fight traffic congestion all over the GTHA.

RCCAO continues to advocate for a dedicated fuel tax to build up a trust account to pay for the many transportation projects projected to be delivered in the future.

“Building public transit is one side of the congestion management coin but the other side is demand management,” Manahan said. “We encourage more rapid implementation of High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes as an incremental step to road pricing. The Ministry of Transportation has funded a study to test lane-tracking devices during the Pan Am Games but there are no plans to use the Games’ HOV Network to test HOT lanes immediately following the Games. We think that needs to change.

“These revenue tools encourage travel behaviour choices,” Manahan said. “More incentives to leave the car at home will help the economy, as congestion costs the province up to \$11 billion a year.”

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