

Building Ontario's Economic Recovery

By ReNew Canada - April 27, 2020

The economy looks grim. As we slowly creep towards the beginning of the road forward, and people emerge from social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario faces an unemployment rate of nearly one-third. And with greater protectionism in place globally, the road to a speedy economic recovery may not be clear after all.

As governments look to provide economic stimulus to boost the province's recovery, infrastructure will have a key role to play. Much as it did following the 2008 recession, investment in infrastructure has the ability to provide significant benefits for communities, investing in assets the communities will need, paying people in those same communities to build them, and having those people spend those monies within the communities in which they are working.

ReNew Canada partnered with the Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario (CDAO) to host an interactive online conversation on the vital role infrastructure will play in economic recovery post-COVID-19. The conversation looked at the economic case to be had, but also the opportunities for investment, potential roadblocks, and the need for innovation in what gets built.

In order to reap the rewards of infrastructure investment, the money must be spent on the right projects, and the funding needs to be able to flow quickly. Money flowing quickly was a significant hang-up following the 2008 recession, as noted by **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario Executive Director Andy Manahan**. He suggested that projects were held up by the environmental assessment (EA) process, causing months-long and even years-long delays in getting 'shovel-ready' projects off the ground. Manahan noted that the municipal asset management process will provide some relief, as municipalities already have repair and maintenance projects ready to proceed once funding has been secured. This could change the way 'shovel-ready' is defined, allowing asset owners to investment in rehabilitation projects rather than strictly on new infrastructure.

As noted by Sandro Perruzza, CDAO Chair and CEO of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, a new approach to asset procurement will be needed for these new investments, as contracts will have to take into consideration the need for further physical distancing, delays in the supply chain, the potential for a second wave of the coronavirus, as well as other disruptive events that could occur. As of now, no one can fully appreciate how such factors could delay an infrastructure project. Flexibility will then need to be built into the contracts, ensuring contractors do not bear penalties for construction delays that are out of their control.

The investments also need to strongly consider future generations, building flexibility into assets so that changes can be easily made as assets evolve. As was suggested by Claire Hicks, program manager of Future Ready at WSP, designing infrastructure as part of the formation of conscious cities, cities that are aware of its users and adapt accordingly, is an important part of building assets that will meet the needs of future generations. This includes using techniques such as scenario planning, understanding how assets can be impacted by future innovations and disruptive events, and ensuring that those assets can adjust to those shocks and stresses.

Infrastructure investment will play a key role in Ontario's economic recovery. But there are challenges that must be overcome to ensure the money can flow quickly, building assets that address community needs, both now and in the future.

To view the whole conversation, visit:

<https://www.crowdcast.io/e/cdao-infrastructures/register>