

Industry Perspectives Op-Ed: 3 infrastructure updates to watch for in the Ontario government's Fall Economic Statement

Nadia Todorova October 30, 2023

Ontario's Fall Economic Statement is right around the corner, with industry and public policy experts eagerly waiting for next steps in the government's agenda to resolve longstanding challenges.

Stubbornly persistent economic challenges caused by inflation, a housing crisis and gridlock in the Greater Toronto Area are all issues surely to be top of mind for Ontario's Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy.

The Fall Economic Statement serves as a mid-year progress report.

In addition to an update on fiscal accounts and budgetary projections, in recent years governments have used the Fall Economic Statement to provide progress updates on key files and on the government's approach to the challenges of the day.

Here are the top three progress updates RCCAO members are watching out for in this year's Fall Economic Statement:

The Bradford Bypass and Highway 413 are signature projects the government has done a lot to advance.

The recent Supreme Court ruling that the federal government's duplicative Impact Assessment Act was unconstitutional paves the way for Ontario's building ambitions.

An update on next steps of building the Bradford Bypass should be imminent.

Highway 413 is not quite as advanced and updates on completing the land acquisition process and commencing the next phase of engineering work for the highway are two updates to watch for.

The completion of these critical infrastructure projects will be key to moving people and goods efficiently.

With the population of the Greater Golden Horseshoe expected to reach 15 million by 2051, it is crucial to build new transportation infrastructure capacity now, for the future prosperity and quality of life for Ontario's residents and businesses.

Public and Business Service Delivery Ontario has a new minister and Todd McCarthy takes the helm of the ministry with a lot of opportunity to create lasting reforms to improve the ability to build in Ontario.

Improving Ontario One Call and bringing the province's utility locates provider in line with service standards in other jurisdictions will be key.

There is a lot of opportunity for the government and Ontario One Call to implement legislated reforms and continue to focus on improving a critical function of building infrastructure and housing.

Persistent locates delays increase costs and slow down construction on projects large and small. Addressing these serious gaps and providing consistency and predictability to the locates delivery process through ongoing legislative and regulatory channels will be crucial. We need to see the needed fixes implemented in advance of 2024 as planning and paperwork for next year's "construction season" begins now.

Former minister Monte McNaughton accomplished a lot in his time to improve working conditions for trades workers and recruiting a new generation of builders to help grow Ontario. Watch out for updates on how Minister David Piccini will address domestic recruitment and training initiatives, and a progress report on implementing the expansion of Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program.

The 43rd Parliament at Queen's Park is approaching the middle of its mandate, and the Doug Ford government's Fall Economic Statement should include strong clues on how it plans to get Ontario through the turbulence to better days.

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