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Construction industry seeks voice on public-private partnerships panel

Infrastructure Investment Coalition finds Flaherty receptive to the idea

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An advisory P3 council that includes a construction voice was a key recommendation made by the Infrastructure Investment Coalition (IIC) in a recent meeting with Canada's finance minister.

"We believe an advisory council would help and the construction representative, rather than being a permanent member, could be someone the council can call on when specific, or expert advice is needed," notes Andy Manahan, coalition member and Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) executive director.

The IIC, which consists of the RCCAO, Labourers' International Union of North America Local 183, Greater Toronto Sewer and Watermain Contractors Association and the Building Industry and Land Development Association, met with Jim Flaherty, the federal finance minister, on Dec. 31.

Flaherty asked the IIC members to supply some possible candidates to represent the construction sector on the advisory council and it will comply, notes Manahan.

The federal government is in the process of establishing its P3 office and the IIC informed the minister that the private-public partnership concept for projects is one it recommends and supports. How to apply the P3 model so it can help municipalities with smaller projects was another concept discussed in the meeting.

"We indicated that construction labour and management strongly supported Ontario's past SuperBuild direction and, subsequently, the AFP (Alternative Financing Plan) direction," says Manahan.

“Our industry continues to promote innovative financing as a way to lever limited financial resources.

Bob Nairn, an IIC consultant and author of an RCCAO bridge study, also attended the meeting.

Nairn spoke about the State of Missouri’s attempts to secure one single contractor to replace or rehabilitate more than 800 of its bridges by 2012 and maintain them for at least 25 years.

The cost of this contract has been estimated to be from \$400 to \$600 million. This type of P3 arrangement would be the first of its kind in North America.

“We suggested that Ontario could initiate such a pilot project somewhere in the province, perhaps in a county,” says Manahan.

Addressing core infrastructure issues such as roads, water, sewer and transit is a dire necessity.

The IIC recommended that more long-term planning and national infrastructure programs be implemented.

“Across Ontario and Canada we are witnessing more frequent infrastructure failures such as road closures and burst mains,” says Manahan.