

Industry Perspectives Op-Ed: New Infrastructure Policy Council lays foundation for economic recovery

Nadia Todorova June 11, 2021



Infrastructure is what we are all about at the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO). We believe that to recover from the devastating effects of COVID-19, all stakeholders – industry, labour, the private sector and government – must be on the same page when it comes to investments.

That's why we are incredibly excited to be a founding member of a new Infrastructure Policy Council (IPC) which was formed by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to support the very important infrastructure policy and advocacy work of the chamber, its network and boards of trade across the province.

There is little doubt that investing in critical infrastructure is one of the best ways to help Ontario recover from the effects of COVID-19, as each dollar spent on infrastructure has a positive effect on the economy.

Allocating funds to build roads, bridges and replace leaky or broken watermain transmission pipes and crumbling sewers, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure would have a tremendous

positive multiplier effect by creating jobs that lead to lower unemployment and, conversely, higher growth.

For every \$1 billion spent on infrastructure, GDP is boosted by an additional \$1.46 billion. Every \$1 billion invested in water infrastructure construction can create up to 11,500 direct and 47,000 indirect jobs.

But I digress. Back to the IPC.

We held our inaugural meeting June 1 and hit the ground running.

I am pleased to report that several strategic priorities have been mapped out for the rest of this year and four distinct themes have emerged: competitiveness, economic recovery, innovation and sustainability.

Policies have also been identified that will focus on the issues of the environment and resource management, funding and accountability, innovation, transportation and regional economic development.

We'll be doing a deeper dive into those at future meetings, but it's certainly a good start.

I feel this is an incredibly important initiative as the IPC will help guide the chamber's narrative on the infrastructure file. The group will also ensure the province works in tandem with the private sector to make the infrastructure investments that are needed to keep Ontario competitive.

While the IPC's work will be guided by a focus on economic recovery, it will also ensure that new infrastructure is in line with climate change initiatives and seek to ensure latest technologies are embraced.

There is a good cross-section of stakeholders on the IPC. Companies like Bruce Power, Via and CN Rail and Hydro One are participating, along with the Labourers' International Union of North America, the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association, and Progressive Contractors Association of Canada, to name a few. The Canada Infrastructure Bank is also on board as is Infrastructure Ontario as an observer.

The council is in very good hands with Ester Gerassime, economic analyst at the chamber, as the chair.

We are a very diverse group and I expect that the various stakeholders will have equally different thoughts and opinions on the issues, and perhaps even some robust discussions will ensue.

I don't expect everybody to agree all the time. But we will be working towards a common goal, and this will allow us to exchange ideas and information on costs and benefits of different policy options.

The thought leaders around the table have a vast wealth of knowledge and valuable expertise that can be tapped into. I am confident we can provide the chamber with new thoughts and perspectives.

From RCCAO's perspective, this will be an opportunity to contribute our ideas and initiatives to help kick-start our economic recovery. We are unique in the sense that we are a labour-management construction alliance and have a distinct perspective on infrastructure issues.

Over a 16-year period, we have commissioned 58 independent, solutions-based research reports to provide decision-makers the information they need to make decisions about infrastructure in Ontario.

We consistently advocate for investment in Ontario's infrastructure – big and small. While we realize that big projects like the Ontario Line are vitally important, we are also equally focused on advocating for everyday state-of-good-repair projects which might not be as glamorous but are essential to the economic health of Ontario.

Being a part of the IPC will enable us to have input into the work of the chamber, and provide guidance on its pre-budget submissions, advocacy documents, media statements and public campaigns.

I expect the chamber will lean heavily on the IPC for its perspective on many infrastructure issues, given the unpredictable year ahead.

RCCAO appreciates that both the federal and provincial governments have signalled in their stimulus plans that infrastructure will play a vital role in our economic recovery.

I look forward to working with stakeholders at the IPC table to support the advocacy efforts of the chamber and ensure that adequate funding is set aside for critical infrastructure projects. I am hopeful that the work of the IPC will provide a clear roadmap that will help guide decision-making.

If you'd like to learn more about the IPC, [click here](#).

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