

INFRASTRUCTURE A HIGHER PRIORITY FOR THE NEW LIBERAL GOVERNMENT

Leading up to the federal election on October 19th, OCSI sent letters to the leaders of the federal parties to ask about their commitment to infrastructure. Specifically we asked:

Q1: What is your party's approach and commitment to supporting the infrastructure challenges faced by municipalities in building sustainable communities that are resilient to potential impacts of climate change?

Q2: What is your party's funding commitment for (municipal) infrastructure?

OCSI received responses from the NDP, Green Party and the Liberal Party of Canada. OCSI did not receive a response from the Conservative Party of Canada. The complete letters from each party were published on an OCSI election specific website (<https://ocsiorg.wordpress.com/>). On October 16th OCSI issued a news release with highlights from the parties' responses.

Mandate Letter

Similar to the Ontario government's approach last year to the public release of mandate letters for Ministers, the federal government has taken the same approach.

In reviewing the mandate letter addressed to federal Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, the Honourable Amarjeet Sohi, we find a strong similarity to the Liberal Party's response during the election. We are pleased to see that the mandate letter reflects the position that we received during the campaign.

An excerpt from the mandate letter includes the following priorities for the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities:

- Develop a 10-year plan to deliver significant new funding to provinces, territories and municipalities. This plan should ensure both immediate increased investments in infrastructure and long-term, predictable funding should support provincial, territorial and municipal priorities, improve access to, and governance of, existing infrastructure programs, increase data collection capacity and promote better asset management of infrastructure in Canada. The plan should focus on:
 - o public transit;
 - o social infrastructure, including affordable housing, seniors' facilities, early learning and child care, and cultural and recreational infrastructure;
 - o green infrastructure, including investments in local water and wastewater facilities, clean energy, climate resilient infrastructure like flood mitigation systems, and infrastructure to protect against changing weather; and
 - o making changes to the Building Canada Fund so that it is more transparent and approval processes are sped up, which would include removing the P3 screen for projects. It should also

Ontario Coalition for Sustainable Infrastructure

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be more focused on strategic and trade enabling infrastructure priorities, including roads, bridges, transportation corridors, ports, and border gateways.

This process should result in bilateral agreements with provinces and territories on infrastructure investments. You should also work with the Minister of Finance to ensure any unspent infrastructure funds are automatically transferred to municipalities through a temporary top-up of the Gas Tax Fund.

- Work with the Minister of Finance to establish the Canada Infrastructure Bank to provide low-cost financing (including loan guarantees) for new municipal infrastructure projects in our priority investment areas. This new institution will work in partnership with other orders of governments and Canada's financial community, so that the federal government can use its strong credit rating and lending authority to make it easier – and more affordable – for municipalities to finance the broad range of infrastructure projects their communities need. This should include preparing for the launch of a new Canadian Green Bond that can enable additional investments when a lack of capital represents a barrier to projects.

Economic Prosperity and Infrastructure

On December 1st, Carl Bodimeade, Chair, OCSI and Executive Director Darla Campbell attended a forum hosted by Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) on Economic Returns of Ontario's Investment in Public Infrastructure. No less than three Ontario ministers spoke in the opening session: Minister Brad Duguid (MEDEI), Minister Steven Del Duca (MTO) and Minister Liz Sandals (Education). Infrastructure is clearly a priority for the provincial government.

The event included a presentation by Paul Smetanin (Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis), author of the RCCAO commissioned report *Investing in Ontario's Public Infrastructure: A Prosperity at Risk*. His research supports looking at investing in infrastructure from an economic perspective that considers the systemic value or benefit of the infrastructure once it has been built. The report encourages governments to look at the bigger picture when selecting infrastructure projects to build, as the choice of infrastructure will shape the future of our communities. A "wrong" choice of infrastructure could have a negative impact on the value in the long term.

Engineers Canada promotes sound core public infrastructure which ensures public safety and supports economic prosperity. The Association of Consulting Engineers of Canada (ACEC) calls on decisive leadership from government, stating that infrastructure grows the economy, strengthens communities and protects the environment creating jobs and prosperity.

OCSI will be adding our voice to the important message of sustainable funding for municipalities, i.e. funding that is predictable and stable, as this has been selected as a priority topic for 2016.

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If you wish to know more about OCSI, please view our website at www.on-csi.ca or contact Darla at ExecutiveDirector@on-csi.ca . If you feel there are issues which OCSI should examine, please let the Executive Director of your respective organization know so that they can bring them to our attention.

Darla Campbell, P.Eng.
Executive Director, OCSI

OCSI brings together the combined resources of six well-established organizations to work toward one voice for infrastructure in Ontario. The Coalition comprises:

*Municipal Engineers Association (MEA)
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Ontario Good Roads Association (OGRA)
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Water Environment Association of Ontario (WEAO).*

The mission of the Coalition is the promotion of “Safe and Sustainable Infrastructure”.

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