

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Critical Investments

Making Critical Investments in Ontario's Infrastructure

By Chris Ballard, MPP

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As a member of the Ontario Legislative Estimates Committee, I have a front-row seat as Ministers bring forward their budget estimates for presentation and questioning by members of all three parties.

This past week, Brad Duguid, Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure presented his ministry's financial estimates related to infrastructure ? and was thoroughly questioned by committee members.

Minister Duguid spoke at length about how the government oversees infrastructure planning and investment, how it manages sustainable growth in communities, and how it develops and implements strategic policies for government-owned assets.

This year, for the first time, the Minister's priorities are being made available to the general public, as ministry mandate letters have been posted online. In these letters, Premier Kathleen Wynne sets out the government's direction for each Minister. These letters make for informative reading.

Minister Duguid reiterated the importance of building modern infrastructure and that no government has done as much as ours to build and repair critical infrastructure.

Investing in infrastructure drives economic growth. The Conference Board of Canada reported in a study released in April 2013 that each dollar invested in public infrastructure in Ontario raises Gross Domestic Product by \$1.14 in the near-term.

In addition, the government's own studies show the return on this dollar grows to \$3.10 in the long-term, while supporting jobs and facilitating private investment.

The government's 10-year infrastructure plan is expected to support, on average, more than 110,000 jobs each year in construction and related industries.

Since 2003, the Province has invested nearly \$100 billion on infrastructure, focusing on what makes our communities strong ? assets like hospitals, schools, transit and highways.

And the 2014 Ontario Budget commits to investing more than \$130 billion in public infrastructure over the next 10 years, including about \$12.8 billion in 2014-15.

In comparison, that's almost twice as much from Ontario alone than the \$70 billion the federal government plans to spend nationwide over the same period.

Minister Duguid repeated his call for a strong federal partner to build the modern infrastructure our growing economy needs ? and asked the federal government to match this provincial government's commitment.

When examples of infrastructure Ontario has invested in are tabulated, the numbers are remarkable:

In the past decade in Ontario we've built 23 new hospitals.

Six-hundred-and-fifty schools have opened or are under construction.

We've invested almost \$17 billion in capital funding to support public transit across the province.

We've expanded or rehabilitated over 7,900 kilometres of highways ? that's more than the distance from Toronto to Vancouver and back.

We've built or repaired 950 bridges, more than double the number of municipalities in Ontario.

Minister Duguid also outlined planned investments as part of this government's 10-year framework that include major transit projects and \$11.4 billion in major hospital expansion and redevelopment projects over the next 10 years. This is in addition to the 10-year funding of almost \$700 million for repairs in hospitals and \$300 million to help shift care from hospitals to community settings.

The government will provide more than \$11 billion over the next 10 years in elementary and secondary education infrastructure funding, which includes more than \$4.2 billion for school repairs, and \$750 million over four years in new capital funding to support school consolidations.

The government recognizes the importance of investing in municipal projects. As a former town councillor, I know all too well the challenge we face both maintaining existing municipal infrastructure and building new infrastructure for the future.

The province has already made nearly \$200 million available under its Municipal Infrastructure Strategy to help municipalities prepare asset management plans and address critical road and bridge projects.

I was delighted to share with the mayors of Newmarket and Aurora last week that the province has approved separate grants

totalling over \$500,000 that will help our communities with infrastructure repair.

More needs to be done to help our municipalities maintain critical road, bridge and water infrastructure. In August, the government launched the permanent Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund that will provide \$100 million per year for small, northern and rural communities.

Minister Duguid says his Ministry has put a strong focus on the importance of asset management for both provincial and municipal infrastructure, and has helped hundreds of municipalities with implementation.

Our government has consulted with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) to develop the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund that will see both Ontario and Canada each invest \$272 million to support critical projects in communities with populations under 100,000.

We've worked closely with AMO on the structure of this new, permanent fund. This is what municipalities were calling for, and this government delivered.

Our government values its AMO partnership in helping communities like Aurora and Newmarket. We will continue to take a strong stand on behalf of municipalities to demand the federal government increase its infrastructure spending and ensure Ontario communities get their fair share.

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