

**The National Round Table On Sustainable
Infrastructure:
Helping to Make a Strong and Prosperous Canada**

**Submitted by:
The Canadian Public Works Association**

**To the:
House of Commons
Standing Committee on Finance**

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Section I: Who We Are

Established in 1986, the Canadian Public Works Association (Association Canadienne des Travaux Publics) is the national voice for the Canadian public works community. Public works, from sanitation to municipal infrastructure to public transit to snow removal, is the backbone of our society. It encompasses these and a myriad of other services that ensure our communities are safe, healthy and sustainable places to live, work, play and invest.

CPWA, whose 2,000 members are drawn from across Canada and encompass all disciplines of public works, provides a forum to improve the quality of public works products and services available to Canadian citizens. Moreover, as the national voice of public works, we also routinely liaise with the federal government to ensure that public policy reflects our input and expertise on matters of vital interest to our practice. Our shared accomplishments with the Government of Canada can be seen through our involvement with the National Asset Management Working Group which is helping municipalities to develop and maintain fixed infrastructure assets, the Canadian Standards Association “Municipal Infrastructure Solutions Program” and the development of best practices for use by public works practitioners.

Section II: Executive Summary

Further to the House of Commons Finance Committee’s (FINA’s) invitation, CPWA is pleased to provide our recommendation for future spending as well as feedback from our membership concerning the effectiveness of stimulus measures that were announced in Budget 2009.

Recommendation:

To enhance the effectiveness of the Government of Canada’s investment in infrastructure it is important to have access to a body of expert opinion and infrastructure research. Therefore, a well-executed national strategy for infrastructure should include long-term, predictable and sustained funding for the National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure.

The concept of a National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure, or NRTSI, was first introduced in 2003, as a recommendation stemming from a ground breaking report on civil infrastructure systems in Canada, authored in part by CPWA.

The vision of the NRTSI was and remains to be a forum for a national network of stakeholders, comprised of leading infrastructure authorities, all levels of government, and First Nations (see Annex for a complete list of round table members) to develop a holistic vision for infrastructure in Canada. The NRTSI was not conceived to compete with governments by becoming a policymaking body, rather it serves as a vehicle to assist governments, industry and communities by sorting out the merits of policy

alternatives, providing access to valid practical research, and facilitating awareness about innovative solutions and new technologies.

The federal government has provided a direct, short-term contribution towards the round table's activities. However, beyond this initial commitment no assurances have been provided by the Government of Canada for the NRTSI despite the valuable work it has been undertaking in areas such as:

- Addressing capacity issues surrounding small community infrastructure;
- Exploring infrastructure financing solutions such as Public Private Partnerships; and,
- Developing consistent structures and approaches for use by the various professions and jurisdictions that are responsible for aspects of asset management directly or indirectly.

Ensuring governments at all levels and industry have access to a one stop shop for analysis, research and consolidated opinion from a broad range of infrastructure experts is a service that is not being performed elsewhere, and it is why the NRTSI is so valuable. NRTSI members have validated the importance of the round table through their own financial and human resources commitments, and we feel there is a role for the federal government to complement these contributions to assist the NRTSI in setting up a management office and hire permanent staff for its operations.

Over the next five years we project the upfront costs to the federal government would amount to \$1.5 million per annum for the first three years, diminishing to \$750,000 per year in years four and five. The reduced federal contribution for the final two years of the five year plan would be offset by anticipated contributions from the provinces and territories.

Assessing the effectiveness of infrastructure stimulus programs

The infrastructure spending announced in Budget 2009 has formed the cornerstone of the federal government's Economic Action Plan. Public works practitioners are the ones responsible for the construction, operation and maintenance of civil infrastructure systems, and in many instances it was our members who worked directly with municipal councils in completing the applications for stimulus funds.

CPWA recently polled its membership about the effectiveness of the various infrastructure stimulus funding measures announced in the budget. Our members were asked to comment on:

- Government communications;
- The accessibility and user-friendliness of application process;
- The funding specifications of the various stimulus funds; and,
- The speed with which money has been dispensed.

Of our members who participated in the survey roughly 45 percent felt that communications, accessibility and flow of money was proceeding well. On a more

positive note, over 60 per cent felt that the provision for matching funding did not complicate the process, and was based on sound rationale.

Criticism of the program generally touched several themes: the short timeline for completing applications; the inability to bundle requests; poor communications; an overly complex mix of infrastructure programs; tight deadlines for completion of projects that are not aligned with industry realities; and poor evidence to demonstrate money is flowing to municipalities for approved projects (although it was noted money appears to be flowing to universities under the Knowledge Infrastructure Program and programs for maintenance and improvements to federally owned buildings).

There was considerable understanding and appreciation of the federal government's objectives, but, in hindsight, also a fair amount of preference for a narrowed range of infrastructure program options in favour of a non-competitive system based on per capita grants, similar to the framework for the Gas Tax Fund.

CPWA recognizes that redesigning programs like the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund (ISF) is not a realistic request. Likewise, we also applaud the recent decision of the federal government to eliminate the claw back provision of the ISF for projects not completed by March 31, 2011 which was part of the initial program design. However, should a second intake of applications occur under ISF or other undersubscribed stimulus programs, we would recommend that application software allow for the bundling of requests moving forward. It was mentioned repeatedly that electronic application process was mired in problems, such as the inability to bundle requests, and issues with "timing out" and losing information, that incurred additional costs and time on the part of applicants. Furthermore, we feel that moving forward, the federal government should explore means to remove confusion among applicants about the various stimulus programs and implement more effective communications and awareness campaigns.

Section III: The NRTSI, important for policymakers and Canadians

In 2003 the Canadian Public Works Association (CPWA), in partnership with other infrastructure stakeholders, published the Civil Infrastructure Systems Technology Road Map (CIS-TRM). Like many other reports produced in recent years by infrastructure stakeholders, the report highlighted the growing infrastructure deficit in Canada. The report was a warning bell to policymakers about the consequences of inaction and the inherent public safety and economic risks of a poorly coordinated infrastructure strategy. The report also identified opportunities and presented innovative expert solutions to help guide the federal government which we believe would result in positive quality of life outcomes for Canadians' and taxpayer savings.

Specifically, the CIS-TRM introduced the concept of a forum that would bring together all levels of government, First Nations and experts from the infrastructure community to develop a long term, integrated and holistic vision for infrastructure in Canada through the National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure (NRTSI). Under the NRTSI,

work would be undertaken to develop a National Infrastructure Action Plan. Additional value is provided to governments, municipalities and industry through research led by NRTSI working groups into a broad range of pertinent infrastructure topics and by enhancing awareness about innovative, and in many cases made-in-Canada infrastructure solutions.

Since the initial work began on NRTSI the federal government has to its credit made historic contributions to improving Canada's infrastructure systems through the Building Canada Plan and through the government's recent stimulus announcements. These are positive investments that we believe could play key role towards achieving the federal government's objectives as outlined in its 2006 *Advantage Canada* policy document to help improve Canada's economic prosperity, enhance our competitive profile and build the advanced economy of tomorrow. CPWA applauds the government for its vision.

We maintain that the NRTSI can play a pivotal role in ensuring the successful implementation of the federal government's infrastructure plan. Because the NRTSI links practitioners with policymakers and facilitates the exchange of information and ideas that will achieve value, it is a framework and a forum worth supporting, and one that is already paying dividends.

The next step in the NRTSI's evolution is to form a governing council which will serve to review requests received from government departments, agencies and industry, where infrastructure community input and advice is sought in response to specific policy or program proposals. In order to provide the resources required by NRTSI working groups to respond to these requests many of the round table's members including provincial and territorial governments, municipalities, institutions of higher learning, businesses and associations have already committed financial and human resources.

At this juncture the NRTSI is seeking funding from the federal government that would allow it to open a management office and hire permanent staff. The size of the initial federal commitment would be valued at \$4.5 million, to be spread evenly over the first three years. Thereafter, for years, four and five, we predict that federal investment would diminish to \$750,000 per year, as provincial and territorial partners begin to make their own contributions to NRTSI's operations. Funding requirements would be reassessed after year five.

Section IV: Conclusion

A nation's rise, fall and survival are linked to its ability to feed and shelter its people. These capabilities depend on infrastructure – the underlying, often hidden foundation of a society's wealth and quality of life. In the same way that doctors and nurses are trustees for public health care, public works professionals are the guardians of our infrastructure.

A forum that brings together all levels of government and experts and promotes the exchange of ideas and best practices and helps to define priorities and assess risk is a

prudent strategy for ensuring that Canadians have sustainable infrastructure systems they will need to enhance quality of life, to compete globally and to attract new business opportunities.

The National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure is the ideal forum for this dialogue, it is in place and it is already achieving results. The fact that the federal government has committed funds for a defined period suggests that it already sees value in the round table process. Expanding this investment over a longer period will help to promote the application of innovation and new ideas that will be pre-requisite to erasing the infrastructure deficit.

Annex A

The following stakeholders collaborated in the creation of the National Round Table for Sustainable Infrastructure:

- Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation
- Association of Consulting Engineers of Canada
- Canadian Automobile Association
- Canadian Construction Association
- Canadian Construction Innovation Council
- Engineers Canada (the business name of the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers)
- Canadian Home Builders' Association
- **Canadian Public Works Association**
- Canadian Society for Civil Engineering
- Canadian Urban Transit Association
- Canadian Water & Waste Water Association
- Cement Association of Canada
- Centre d'expertise et de recherche en infrastructures urbaines
- City of Calgary
- City of Powell River
- Conference Board of Canada
- Government of Alberta, Ministry of Municipal Affairs
- Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Community Services
- Government of Manitoba, Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Secretariat
- Government of New Brunswick, Department of Environment & Local Government
- Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Municipal & Provincial Affairs
- Government of Northwest Territories, Municipal and Community Affairs
- Government of Nova Scotia, Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations
- Government of Nunavut, Capital Projects
- Government of Ontario, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal
- Infrastructure Canada
- InfraGuide: The National Guide to Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure
- National Research Council of Canada
- Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation
- PCL Construction Management Inc.
- Public Infrastructure Engineering Vulnerability Committee
- Road and Infrastructure Program of Canada
- Royal Architectural Institute of Canada
- Town of Vulcan
- Transportation Association of Canada
- University of Calgary
- University of Regina
- Ville de Gatineau

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- Ville de Terrebonne
- Western Economic Diversification Canada
- British Columbia Institute of Technology
- Can/Am Border Trade Alliance
- Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships
- Canadian Institute of Planners
- Canadian Standards Association
- Government of British Columbia, Infrastructure and Engineering
- Government Finance Officers Association
- Université du Québec en Outaouais