



**Thunder Bay Stakeholder Consultation with
The Honourable Bob Chiarelli, Minister of Infrastructure**

**Presentation by:
Mayor Anne Krassilowsky
President, Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association**

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Good afternoon Minister Chiarelli. Boozhoo, Welcome to Northwestern Ontario.

My name is Anne Krassilowsky. I am the President of the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association and Mayor of the City of Dryden.

The Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association represents the interests of 36 municipalities from Kenora and Rainy River in the west to Wawa in the east. Our mission is “to provide leadership in advocating regional interests to all orders of government and other organizations.”

Today, it is my pleasure to provide the views of our membership regarding infrastructure needs in the Northwest.

The Joint Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review, completed in October 2008, estimated that closing Ontario’s infrastructure deficit would require increased investment of \$6 billion per year for the next 10 years.

I would like to thank your Government for recognizing the infrastructure challenges faced across the Province and for the much needed support we received through the ReNew Ontario Program, the Infrastructure Stimulus Program and the Ontario Recreation Program.

We know there is much more to be done but we are encouraged by this initiative to develop a plan to deal with the challenges of replacing and repairing our aging infrastructure.

What types of Public Infrastructure Assets do you use most?

“Public Infrastructure” is such a broad term. It includes everything from Roads, Bridges, Large Culverts and Sidewalks, to Municipal offices, Fire Halls and Police Stations, to facilities such as arenas, parks and swimming pools...all of which are used in daily life by our citizens.

Let us not forget the less visible but equally vital infrastructure of our water systems and waste water treatment plants. These systems are imperative to the health of our citizens, the failure of which can have disastrous impacts.

I am sure that if we asked any family in one of our communities which infrastructure they use most, the answer would be quite clear – all of it! A morning shower using the clean water provided by our water system, driving the kids to school on our roads and bridges, taking a walk during lunch hour on a municipal sidewalk, dropping the kids at hockey practice or swimming lessons after school, or the feeling of safety while lying in bed at night because of the fire and police services keeping our loved ones from harm. These assets are not extravagances...they are the basics of life in every community from Alberton to White River.



What are the key economic and social trends that you think will most affect the province's infrastructure needs over the coming decade?

The trends in other areas of the Province such as the Greater Toronto Area will likely have some stark contrasts to those in the Northwest. Whereas Toronto is concerned with urban sprawl, population growth and the need for expanded transportation systems, the Northwest is projecting the exact opposite. Larger centres like Thunder Bay may see a slight increase in population as citizens from smaller communities around the Northwest move to the City in search of employment or, in the case of our aging citizens, improved health care and senior services.

The loss of population will continue to exacerbate the challenge of maintaining essential infrastructure with a shrinking tax base. In addition, the aging population will require enhanced services on a reduced budget, which will further strain municipal budgets.

Given the deficit challenges Ontario faces, what do you think the most important infrastructure investment priorities should be in the next 10 years?

Northwestern Ontario's municipal governments understand the financial challenges faced by the Ontario Government. Many of our communities are single industry towns and we have been facing the effects of the recession for almost six years now. Many of our mills are closed and in some cases demolished, leading to a total lack of industrial assessment. When you combine that with the lack of jobs you can easily translate that into declining tax revenues. This makes it exceedingly difficult to maintain the services and infrastructure that our citizens need and want.

Infrastructure investment programs must provide flexibility to allow each community some latitude in determining the priorities within their own municipality. Programs cannot be developed with a "one size fits all" approach.

Infrastructure that supports the health and safety of our citizens should be at the top of the priority list – water systems, waste water treatment, well-maintained roads and bridges, fire halls, police stations and required equipment, and health related infrastructure such as hospitals, assisted living centres for seniors and supportive housing for adults, are critical to every community.

It is also important to point out that recreation facilities such as arenas, swimming pools and sports fields are important to improved health and provide an excellent return on investment when compared to the increased costs incurred as a result of the poor health of our citizens. In many small communities these public assets are the only available recreation facilities and the loss of these exercise opportunities would be detrimental to the physical and mental health of young and old alike.



In your opinion, how could we transform the delivery, financing or management of infrastructure to better meet provincial needs?

1. The delivery of infrastructure programs must be improved by levelling the playing field for small municipalities to ensure that they receive their fair share of funding. The first stage of the application process must be simple so that it does not require a municipality to spend significant dollars merely to complete an application form. Many smaller communities employ only one or two staff who act in multiple capacities; they do not have in-house engineers at their disposal. The application process must ensure that no municipality is excluded from consideration because they do not have specialized professionals on staff.
2. The delivery of the Provincial Gas Tax Program should be expanded to include all infrastructure expenditures, rather than only supporting public transit services.
3. The financing of the municipal portion of infrastructure projects is often a great burden on a community. As such, many Councils are required to go into long term debt to meet the one-third portion to ensure a project proceeds. Support from the Province through the implementation of a zero-rate or low interest rate loan program would greatly assist in ensuring financing costs are kept to a minimum.
4. The implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act will require many communities to undertake significant renovations to public buildings to ensure compliance. Funding must be made available to ensure that these upgrades can be completed with minimal impact on other required infrastructure improvements.

Thank you for allowing me to share the views of NOMA members. We look forward to working with you as you develop and implement the Ontario infrastructure plan.

