

Ontario's infrastructure, training plans get construction-wide support

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TORONTO — A cross-section of Ontario construction stakeholders indicates early support for announced investments in transportation infrastructure and skills training by the provincial government.

Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy tabled the 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review: Build Ontario at Queen's Park in Toronto Nov. 4.

As part of the outlook, the government announced an investment about \$2.6 billion for 2021–22 to support of the Ontario Highways Program, which features more than 580 construction, expansion and rehabilitation projects including committed funding to build and advance the Bradford Bypass and Highway 413. In a statement, the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) said Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass will reduce congestion, foster economic recovery, improve connectivity and support the expansion of housing in the region, while facilitating job creation and the training of Ontario's next generation of builders. The Bradford Bypass will connect “two of the most vital provincial arteries – Highway 400 and Highway 404,” said Nadia Todorova, executive director of RCCAO.

“Highway 413 is a transformative infrastructure project that...will ensure a viable corridor for commuters and industries that rely on highways for movement of goods and people across the region. The proposed transitway that will run alongside the highway and be dedicated exclusively for public transit, such as buses and light rail, is the sort of forward-thinking mix of transit and transportation infrastructure that the province needs.”

RCCAO plans to release a commissioned economic report next week that quantifies the jobs and economic impacts of Highway 413 and illustrates how the corridor will play a pivotal role in ensuring that Ontario is equipped for the future transportation demands of the province.

Residential Construction Council of Ontario president Richard Lyall also supports the transportation announcements, stating “The GTA, meanwhile, is expected to grow by 2.8 million people in the next 25 years and it’s anticipated traffic congestion will double, so it is critical that we ensure there are reliable transportation networks for commuters and supply chains.”

Other infrastructure investments in the outlook include close to \$1 billion to support the planning and construction of an all-season road network, as well as other projects for the remote First Nations communities in the Far North.

The government is also doubling its annual investment in the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund program to nearly \$2 billion over the next five years beginning in 2021–22, to provide certainty to 424 small, rural and Northern communities to build and repair roads, bridges, and water and wastewater infrastructure.

In terms of skilled trades training, Ontario is investing an additional \$90.3 million over three years starting in 2021–22 in the Skilled Trades Strategy. Key new initiatives include creating a skilled trades career fair as well as enhancing the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program and the Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program.

The government is also proposing to extend the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit to 2022, which would provide an estimated \$275 million in support to about 240,000 people, or \$1,150, on average. It is also investing an additional \$5 million in 2021–22 to expand the Second Career program.

“We’re pleased to see the focus on training and attracting more people to careers that Ontario needs more than ever: in the skilled trades,” said Patrick McManus, chair of the Ontario Skilled Trades Alliance. “Employers play a critical role in opening doors for aspiring tradespeople through apprenticeship training.”

Karen Renkema, vice-president, Ontario, for the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA) said her association is also pleased the government recognizes the crucial role of getting more shovels in the ground.

“These are the kinds of investments Ontario needs to rebuild the economy, support our communities and open up more well-paying careers in the skilled construction trades,” said

Renkema. “Specifically, we look forward to details of the \$90.3 million Skilled Trades Strategy, and hope that employers will be recognized as a vital component of apprenticeship and skilled trades training.”

RESCON also commended the government for providing funding for skilled trades.

“We are encouraged by the government’s commitment to the goals in the Skilled Trades Strategy and to breaking the stigma by improving guidance about careers in the skilled trades to educators and guidance counsellors,” said RESCON VP Andrew Pariser. “They have a significant influence on a young person’s career decisions, and if they are not informed or have misconceptions about careers in construction, they won’t recommend that pathway to their students.”

Skills Ontario also expressed its support for the training announcements made in the outlook.

“Working together and inspiring the next generation of skilled trade and technology leaders is crucial to our success as a province, and we are looking forward to continuing to provide learning opportunities to Ontarians,” said Ian Howcroft, CEO of Skills Ontario.