

Background to the NRTSI

Support for an NRTSI emanated from a series of town hall meetings held in 2002 by the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers, the Canadian Public Works Association, the National Research Council and the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers which culminated in a consensus report produced in June, 2003. The report is called the “Civil Infrastructure Systems Technology Road Map 2003-2013 (TRM).

The TRM made 10 specific recommendations including the creation of an NRTSI.

In reaching its recommendations the TRM concluded that:

- Infrastructure is central to our quality of life, public health and economic prosperity;
- Canada’s infrastructure is deteriorating;
- There are growing needs for the repair and rehabilitation of existing infrastructure and a significant gap in the building of new infrastructure;
- Technology innovation and management tools are not being developed or harnessed effectively;
- There is a need and an appetite to develop a long-term vision and strategic priorities based on that vision;
- The inconsistent quality of data, forecasting and management tools made the development of investment priorities difficult;
- There is an excellent opportunity to bring a diverse community together to address an important domestic challenge and to advance Canadian expertise internationally.

In short, the recommendation for a National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure comes from experts within the professional, construction and research industries of the infrastructure community itself.

Public Sector Awareness and Commitment to Sustainable Infrastructure

While the idea originated within the infrastructure community, it is clear that provincial and territorial leaders have been concerned with the state of infrastructure for a number of years as evidenced by their inclusion of the subject on Provincial and Territorial Premiers meeting agendas and recently the formation of a Task Force on Advocacy and Municipal Infrastructure (TFAMI) by the Council of the P/T Ministers Responsible for Local Government.

Municipal governments across the country have been equally aware of the need to address Canada’s failing infrastructure and the efforts of cities to broker a new deal with the federal government is recognition of the seriousness with which they wish to address infrastructure gap.

As for the federal government, in 2000 it created the Infrastructure Canada Program. In 2002, it created the Department of Infrastructure Canada, providing a focal point for the Government of Canada on infrastructure issues. In 2003, Transport Canada’s “Straight

Ahead – A Vision for Transportation in Canada” included a focus on competitive communities.

In 2004, the federal Speech from the Throne called for “a new deal for Canada’s municipalities....a new deal that targets infrastructure needed to support quality of life and sustainable growth.”

Development of the NRTSI and Core Mandate

To consider how an NRTSI might work, its mandate and governance structure, a working group was formed in 2004 under the leadership of the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers and included senior representatives from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Conference Board of Canada, the Canadian Construction Association, the Canadian Public Works Association and Infrastructure Canada.

Members were attracted to the Round Table model, e.g. National Round Table on the Economy and the Environment, because of its non-partisan, multi-stakeholder focus comprising senior leadership and reporting to a very senior and committed member of the governing party. Members agreed that while the NRTEE and NRTSI could be similar in design, they would be distinct in both their mandate and their deliverables. The working group further concluded that NRTSI’s advice, recommendations and output would be produced for and shared with all stakeholders, both within the public and private sectors.

Members discussed the scope of the NRTSI’s business and concluded that in the early years it should focus on public works at the municipal level i.e. water and sewer systems, roads and bridges evolving over time to include other sustainable infrastructure interests.

In designing the NRTSI’s mandate, members were conscious of the immediate needs within the sustainable infrastructure community that are not being met:

- a national forum for a diverse and complex community to meet on sustainable infrastructure – a “go-to place” promoting networking, collaboration and greater understanding across and within the community;
- a forum of stakeholders with expertise to collect, analyze and disseminate infrastructure knowledge, innovation, indicators, models and commission research – an engine for capacity building, management best practices and innovation;
- a forum to develop and inform policy makers on a broad strategic framework for sustainable infrastructure with alternate planning scenarios respecting a short-term framework applicable to municipal, provincial and national governments;
- a forum that would develop and inform policy makers on a long-term (30 year) planning framework within which shorter-term investment decisions at all levels would find their strategic rationale.

The working group was conscious that a lot of work is being committed to infrastructure both within the public and the private sectors. It strongly believed that the creation of an

NRTSI will provide a strong impetus to help better planning, better development and dissemination of innovation and best practices ultimately leading to a better use of investment dollars targeted at sustainable infrastructure in the years to come. The NRTSI will become a valuable, informed and trusted resource to decision-makers at all levels of government and within the private sector in Canada.

Meeting of the NRTSI on December 8th 2005 in Calgary, Alberta

At the inaugural meeting of the NRTSI in Calgary, a working group was formed to develop a governance and financing model for the Round Table to be presented to the stakeholders at a meeting in May 2006 for their input with the goal of implementation in the fall of 2006.

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