



National Round Table
on Sustainable Infrastructure

network

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National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure Gathers Steam

Plans to set up a National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure (NRTSI) took another big step forward recently when eight important new stakeholders joined the group's planning team. The addition of these new players means more than 50 leading members of Canada's infrastructure community are now engaged in the planning for a new advisory forum dedicated to advancing the debate on Canada's infrastructure needs.

Organizations within Canada's infrastructure community have long recognized the need for a national forum that would focus on the nation's infrastructure needs and priorities in recognition of the key role infrastructure plays in sustainable development. The emergence of infrastructure as a priority concern for all three levels of government in Canada has added broader impetus to the need to create some kind of national advisory body to focus on infrastructure issues.

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Concept paper for permanent NRTSI prepared

The concept paper developed by the stakeholders of the National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure envisages a multi-partite, non-partisan advisory body that would be governed by an advisory council appointed by the stakeholders and supported by a small secretariat. Its key functions would be to:

- provide decision makers and stakeholders with advice on sustainable infrastructure;
- develop and share data and information on trends and management tools;
- facilitate high-level cooperation on major infrastructure initiatives; and
- offer a forum to bring together diverse but related parties with a shared interest in sustainable infrastructure development in Canada.

Discussions are now underway to identify and pursue sources of funding to turn the concept into a reality.

The concept paper can be viewed at http://www.nrtsi.ca/e/doc_documents.cfm

Activity Summaries...

Following are short summaries of the activities of each working group.

Working Group on NRTSI Organization-Governance and Finance Chair: Don Osmond, Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, Newfoundland and Labrador

This working group was originally tasked with giving form and substance to the concept of a National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure. The group took a major step forward in fulfilling its mandate when it prepared a concept paper setting out governance and financing options for the proposed round table. This paper was presented to stakeholders at the Montreal planning meeting in May and has also been discussed with federal and provincial/territorial officials.

While the ultimate form and function of the National Round Table will be determined by the specific mandate it is given, the working group's concept paper sets out

(NRTSI gathers steam-continued)

An initial planning meeting in Calgary in December 2005 organized by the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers brought together representatives from all three levels of government as well as private sector companies, associations and universities to explore the idea of a round table. The group at the Calgary meeting agreed the idea of a round table should be pursued and five working groups were formed and tasked with addressing key organizational and policy issues.

As word of the group's activities began to spread, other stakeholders in the infrastructure community expressed interest in getting involved. When a second planning meeting was held in Montreal in May 2006, supported by Infrastructure Canada, more than fifty individuals representing a broad cross section of the public and private sectors and organizations and communities large and small took part.

Following the Montreal meeting, a new website was created (nrtsi.ca) and a concept paper setting out some ideas for the form and function of a new Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure as well as other planning information was posted on the site.

some important operating principles and financing options - as well as the operational means needed to achieve them. The paper provides recommendations for the composition of the Advisory Council that would be selected by the stakeholders as the organization's governing body and it describes the proposed duties of a Secretariat to support the Advisory Council. The paper also proposes a suggested Committee Structure.

The concept paper can be seen at www.nrtsi.ca/e/doc_documents.cfm

The paper has now been submitted to Infrastructure Canada for consideration as the department is seen as the logical and initial source of funds.

Working Group on Financing for Infrastructure

Chair: Michael Roschlau, Canadian Urban Transit Association

Having examined the issue of an infrastructure financing "gap", the Working Group on Infrastructure Financing found there were both methodological and practical difficulties inherent in trying to quantify a gap with any certainty. However, the group recognizes there is a need for more infrastructure financing in general and is working to identify, assess and document the most useful funding and financing tools available to address infrastructure needs in all parts of the country. The group believes funding and financing should be recognized as one policy area with an important influence on sustainable infrastructure, but it notes there are other non-financial policy areas that also have an important influence. These include: life cycle management, innovation and environmental goals such as clean air and water.

The group sees potential for public-private partnerships (P-3's) in infrastructure financing but notes that political and policy concerns can make it difficult to introduce the concept into financing discussions. As a useful information resource, the working group prepared case study reports on two major Canadian P-3 projects.

The group also produced two other useful reports. One is on trends in infrastructure financing in Canada and the other on the funding and financing tools that are currently available for infrastructure projects in Canada.

A group objective is to produce a "tool box" of funding and financing techniques that can be utilized by policy planners and investment decision makers throughout the national infrastructure community.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- NRTSI Meeting, Fall, Toronto
- Future of Canada's Infrastructure/Third Annual Summit - September 27-28, Toronto

Working Group on Infrastructure in Smaller Communities

Chair: Dale Wall, BC Ministry of Community Services

One of this working group's initial objectives was to look for ways to help build community capacity to manage and finance local infrastructure initiatives. Related objectives were to find ways to facilitate access to and use of best practices in infrastructure management and also to do skills assessment and training gap analysis.

The group's early research identified an Internet-based project already underway in B.C. that appeared to have potential to help meet those general objectives. Accordingly, the group sees potential to form a working relationship with the project (called waterbucket.ca) to evaluate its value as a pilot project that would provide some useful direction to help the working group meet its broader national goals.

Working Group on Innovation as a Solution

Chair: Gerry Meade, Canadian Construction Innovation Council

Recognizing that innovation is crucial to improved infrastructure performance in Canada, the Working Group on Innovation in Infrastructure is looking at how innovation is defined and how existing definitions might apply (or not) to sustainable infrastructure.

The group has conducted a literature review of selected reports to identify the benefits of innovation and potential barriers as well as potential methods to overcome identified barriers. This work resulted in a preliminary report on the benefits and barriers to innovation, which was shared with others at the Montreal planning meeting.

The group is conducting an assessment of the benefits of using innovation from previous examples and is developing a compelling case for governments to consider the inclusion of innovative technologies and processes in their infrastructure projects.

Working Group on National Asset Management

Co-Chairs: Peter Enslin, City of Calgary (rep CPWA) and Tony Varriano, Infrastructure Canada

The membership of this Working Group includes a broad cross section of representatives with practical experience in infrastructure operating issues. Drawing on its own resources, the group has spent a considerable amount of time and effort over the past several months identifying areas in which the national knowledge base with respect to infrastructure inventory and its operating and maintenance requirements needs to be developed. The group has prepared specific proposals to undertake needed work in areas such as Asset Valuation Guidelines, Infrastructure Deferred Maintenance Guidelines and other technical areas.

As individuals, the members of this working group know what are the technical information needs of the infrastructure community. Collectively they are ready and able to lead the work that could meet those needs.