



National Round Table
on Sustainable Infrastructure

network

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Towards a National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure (NRTSI)

Led by the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (CCPE) and with the active involvement of other key stakeholders in the public and private sectors (e.g. Canadian Public Works Association, Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, National Research Council, Infrastructure Canada, and others), members of Canada's infrastructure community have been moving towards the creation of a National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure (NRTSI) over the last few years.

The process began in 2002 with a series of town hall meetings which resulted in a report entitled "Civil Infrastructure Systems Technology Road Map" (or the TRM).

The TRM report described the deteriorating state of Canada's infrastructure assets and, among other things, identified the need for a forum—or Round Table—to promote a more systematic, coordinated approach to strategic infrastructure planning in Canada.

A Vision for the NRTSI

In December 2005, some 50 infrastructure community leaders from both the public and private sectors, met as a group in Calgary to discuss NRTSI organizational questions as well as other specific topics.

While in Calgary, a number of working groups were formed to address the following key issues:

- Governance & Financing of the NRTSI
- Infrastructure Financing
- Innovation in Infrastructure
- Infrastructure in Smaller Communities

The National Asset Management work group, created following a recommendation from the Technology Road Map (TRM), joined the other working groups in February.

The umbrella group also agreed on a vision for the proposed NRTSI. It should be a "non-partisan, multi-stakeholder body that facilitates the understanding of sustainable infrastructure capacities and needs, and helps define issues of national priority (through) deliberations and communications with all relevant sectors."

A second meeting was held in May 2006, supported by Infrastructure Canada, where the five working groups reported on their progress since the Calgary meeting and determined, as a group, the next steps that should be taken to continue to turn the NRTSI vision into a reality.

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

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- NRTSI Meeting, Fall, Toronto

A Public-Private Sector Approach

Although, the TRM project originated in the private sector, it was very timely from the public sector perspective too. All orders of government in Canada have been concerned about the condition of the nation's infrastructure, so the concept of a systematic approach to both identifying and prioritizing infrastructure issues and how to collectively address them was seen as both timely and welcome. As a result, key stakeholders began to come together to identify priority issues and to explore the formation of a National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure (NRTSI).

Priority Challenges

At the Calgary meeting in December 2005, a number of priority concerns emerged. The four highest priority challenges were seen as:

- Integrating diverse interests
- Financing Infrastructure
- Innovation
- Small Communities

Other important challenges included: maintaining the “big picture” purpose of the group (i.e. end user citizens); promoting awareness through communications (aimed at public and politicians); collecting and sharing accurate information; and ensuring sustainability.

In May 2006, a second meeting of the five working groups allowed them to report on their progress since the Calgary meeting and to determine, as a group, the next steps that should be taken to continue to turn the NRTSI vision into a reality.

Working Group on NRTSI Organization-Governance and Finance

Chair: Don Osmond, Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, Newfoundland and Labrador

While governance and financing decisions with respect to how the NRTSI is organized and funded will depend on the mandate and goals the stakeholders ultimately decide on, the Working Group on NRTSI Organization-Governance and Finance has defined some draft operating principles and financing options to guide the discussion.

On governance, for example, the Working Group supports the creation of an advisory council to include representatives of key stakeholder communities including governments, Aboriginal people and industry (e.g. engineering, urban planning and banking). The Council would be supported by a Secretariat and co-chaired by both a public and private sector representative serving a two-year term.

Committees would be formed based on the existing working groups. The Working Group strongly believes that the Council should be autonomous and therefore should not report to a minister.

On financing for the NRTSI, the Working Group has identified potential models, including an initial co-funding formula from governments and private sector stakeholders from the onset, and a five-year funding model, with a commitment to develop a sharing formula after year 3 and to move towards that formula by year 5.

Working Group on Financing for Infrastructure

Chair: Michael Roschlau, Canadian Urban Transit Association

The Working Group is tasked with identifying, assessing and documenting in a credible and balanced manner the most useful funding and financing tools available for addressing infrastructure financing needs across the country. To facilitate this task, the Group has completed a preliminary review of research on the “infrastructure deficit” in Canada and undertaken an initial examination of the availability and limitations of Statistics Canada data on infrastructure financing.

The Working Group aims to develop a “tool box” of infrastructure funding and financing techniques that can be shared with various jurisdictions and contain expert advice for prospective users of different funding and financing tools.

As part of its toolbox, the Group is preparing a series of case studies of innovative approaches to infrastructure financing. It has also produced two preliminary tables to illustrate investments in selected elements of infrastructure by the federal, provincial, municipal and private sectors. The tables use Statistics Canada data to focus on water/wastewater, roads/bridges, transit and other utilities.



Working Group on Infrastructure in Smaller Communities

Chair: Dale Wall, BC Ministry of Community Services

The smaller communities Working Group is the smallest of the working groups. Its activities to date have been supported by research work done in the BC Ministry of Community Services to scope out an Internet based pilot project for skills training and the sharing of information on infrastructure issues by and within small communities in BC.

This research and analysis work has identified the website “waterbucket.ca” as a model for the potential development of a virtual source of information and training resources that can be accessed by smaller communities anywhere. This approach may be of interest to other NRTSI stakeholders.

Working Group on Innovation as a Solution

Chair: Gerry Meade, Canadian Construction Innovation Council

While it is widely acknowledged that innovation is crucial to improved infrastructure performance in Canada, it is less well understood how to define innovation in infrastructure and what its benefits can be. The Working Group developed some proposed definitions on innovation in infrastructure for discussion at the May 4 meeting. It has also prepared a preliminary list of the economic benefits of innovation as well as a description of some perceived barriers to innovation and ways to overcome them.

The Working Group on Innovation is looking forward to sharing the results of their work to date with other NRTSI colleagues and to exploring ways to integrate their activities with other working groups. It is also interested in attracting more members especially from the municipal sector and from Infrastructure Canada.

Working Group on National Asset Management

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

The Working Group on National Asset Management (NAM) is concerned with the adequacy of Canada’s national infrastructure assets and their operation, replacement and management. The NAM Working Group has been active for some time (it actually predates the other NRTSI working groups) and includes a broad and committed cross section of representatives from the national infrastructure community. The Working Group has developed a number of specific proposals to research and develop a body of technical information on Canada’s national infrastructure inventory and its maintenance, but to date has been unable to attract financial partners to support its work.

Future activities of the National Asset Management Working Group may be greatly influenced by the outcome of the governance and financing discussions that are now on the table with respect to the further advancement of the NRTSI itself.