



The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Re: Assistance with the COVID-19 mitigation and recovery

Dear Prime Minister,

We applaud the “all of government” approach to the COVID-19 crisis in protecting the health and safety of Canadians while ensuring the viability of our economy. The Association of Consulting Engineering Companies - Canada (ACEC) and its members across Canada wish to support the government in its efforts to mitigate the current crisis and to facilitate the recovery ahead. ACEC represents over 400 consulting engineering firms across Canada, ranging from large global corporations to employee-owned SMEs, that offer engineering, scientific and other professional services and that are on the front lines of delivering critical infrastructure.

Our members represent critical and essential expertise that Canada will need as we navigate the current crisis and assist with the recovery. In this spirit, ACEC offers the following assistance and recommendations to help Canada and Canadians in these extraordinary times:

- The planning, design, construction and operation of important infrastructure should be deemed as essential services nation-wide. While Canadians are coping with a variety of restrictions as a result of the health crisis, it is essential that they have access to our professionals to build and maintain essential services like transportation, water/wastewater treatment, power and our civic institutions like hospitals, as outlined in the *National Strategy for Critical Infrastructure*. These in turn require reliable electrical, plumbing, HVAC and IT systems. The consulting engineering sector is prepared to continue providing services needed to deliver critical projects in a manner that the health and safety of all involved is appropriately protected.
- To facilitate the recovery in the longer term, the federal government should accelerate/re-profile some of its existing infrastructure commitments through the *Investing in Canada Plan* and other legacy programs from the later years of those programs into the next two or three years as stimulus. This would inject much-needed money into the economy in the short-term with less reliance on finding “new money” for stimulus. Furthermore, through an even distribution of investments over the entirety of the current infrastructure programs, both the owners of infrastructure and the sectors that deliver it could more effectively manage resources and long-term capacity throughout and beyond the recovery.

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- The federal government can also quickly inject stimulus into the economy through the more agile *Gas Tax Fund* to jump start the recovery while provinces and territories agree to the acceleration/re-profiling of the *Investing in Canada Plan* and other federal-provincial legacy programs.
- Governments at all levels, as well as project financiers, need to be seen to be staying the course on, if not accelerating, current infrastructure projects, plans and commitments. The federal government will need to lead by example and send a clear message to provinces and municipalities in this regard. To effectively leverage infrastructure as stimulus, the design process usually requires six months to two years before there are shovels in the ground. Therefore, consulting engineering firms need to continue working through the crisis to ensure that they retain the capacity to deliver on projects during the recovery. Since most firms have significant ability to work remotely, it is feasible for most design work to continue in the coming weeks and months while adhering to recommended social distancing and self-isolation practices.
- The government should streamline and accelerate project approvals in order to get money back into the economy as quickly as possible. Clear and timely decisions on projects allows for informed decision making by consulting engineering firms, contractors and the entire supply chain already under financial duress through this crisis. This will also strengthen industry's ability to respond to immediate demands, retain capacity and to effectively contribute to the recovery. Infrastructure Canada was very successful in implementing a streamlined approval process for these very reasons as part of the stimulus program introduced in response to the economic downturn circa 2009. The government should also allow for a single application process that would allow for the concurrent approval of multiple projects within a municipality's asset management plan.
- The federal government should develop policies to allow for a very significant amount of credit to be made available to consulting engineering and other firms that deliver critical infrastructure. Notwithstanding the recommendations above, some decrease in workload is inevitable should the health crisis continue for an extended period of time. Consequently, many firms will lose much needed capacity to deliver projects during the recovery – either through downsizing or insolvency. If governments back-stop and underwrite loans, banks and lending institutions will be in a position to allow firms to retain their expertise and remain operational. Such policies, concurrent with a commitment to stimulus through infrastructure commitments, will greatly mitigate the risk for such loans and credit offerings.
- The consulting engineering sector is closely linked to the construction industry. Therefore, we also refer you to the recommendations made by the Canadian Construction Association in its recent letter to you.
- With respect to assistance to business in general, we refer you to the joint recommendations of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Business Council of Canada, Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters.

As past economic challenges across Canada and around the world have demonstrated, the effectiveness of infrastructure as a form of stimulus. Infrastructure's added benefit is the significant and lasting return on investment. Once delivered, infrastructure assets continue to enhance our social, economic and environmental quality of life rather than being a one-time expenditure. Further, it improves a nation's resilience to future economic downturns and facilitates more rapid recovery. Investing in infrastructure is a means of growing and strengthening the economy - in addition to all the other societal benefits.

Thank you for your leadership and for your attention to our concerns and our recommendations.

Our twelve provincial and territorial constituent associations are similarly offering their support and assistance to their respective governments with similar recommendations.

Finally, ACEC would like to offer the leadership of our industry – the CEOs and Presidents of our member firms who are experts in the delivery of critical infrastructure – to you and your government to assist with your response to the crisis and to the ensuing recovery. I would be pleased to facilitate any such discussions or consultations.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John D. Gamble', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John D. Gamble, P.Eng.
President and CEO

Cc: Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs
Hon. Catherine McKenna, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
Hon. Anita Anand, Minister, Public Services and Procurement Canada
Hon. Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance
Hon. Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety