



ASSOCIATION OF CONSULTING
ENGINEERING COMPANIES | CANADA
ASSOCIATION DES FIRMES
DE GÉNIE-CONSEIL | CANADA

March 27, 2020

The Honourable Bill Blair
Minister of Public Safety
House of Commons
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A6

Re: Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers during COVID-19 response

Dear Minister,

I would like to thank you once again for the strong and collaborative approach your government is taking to respond to the COVID-19 crisis in protecting the health and safety of Canadians while ensuring the critical components of our economy continue. As a follow up to the recent correspondence sent the Prime Minister and your Cabinet colleagues, I would like to highlight that the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies - Canada (ACEC) and its members stand ready to support the government in its efforts to mitigate the current crisis and to facilitate the recovery ahead.

As you know, 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.

During this turbulent period, some governments have taken steps to codify essential, federal critical infrastructure workers. For example, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security recently released a "[Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce: Ensuring Community and National Resilience in COVID-19 Response](#)" which highlights industries and employees with a special responsibility to maintain normal work schedules. Should Canada develop similar guidelines, we hope you will consider our industry as part of federal essential services to support the safety of Canadians.

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 recommends that 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.

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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.

However in order to effectively leverage infrastructure as stimulus, the consulting engineering sector will be essential to ensure projects remain on track. Furthermore, 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.

Finally, the government should streamline and accelerate project approvals. 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.

Our twelve provincial and territorial constituent associations are similarly offering their support and assistance to their respective governments with similar recommendations. I would be pleased to speak with you or a member of your team should you have any questions.

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

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John D. Gamble', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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