

Minister outlines opportunities for partnerships under Infrastructure Canada Program

The Honourable Lucienne Robillard, president of the Treasury Board and minister responsible for infrastructure, sees the federal government's Infrastructure Canada Program as an excellent example of "new and innovative relationships between the public and private sectors."

Mme. Robillard addressed an audience at the Fitness Institute in Toronto on February 23, 2001 as part of The Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships breakfast series. She left attendees with a sense that Infrastructure Canada will open some real opportunities between all levels of government and the private sector.

Minister Robillard indicated her enthusiasm for P3's by affirming "An incredible amount can be accomplished when we manage to dovetail the profit motive with the public policy imperative." This belief led the government to develop the Infrastructure Canada Program, and they are "determined to seek private sector participation in this new program."

Thus far, the Government of Canada has signed agreements with all the provinces and the Yukon Territory. Agreements with the other territories and detailed guidelines are to follow soon.

The two components to the physical infrastructure program are Infrastructure Canada and a highways component. Mme. Robillard's comments focused on the former of these initiatives. The federal government contribution will be \$2 billion. Combined with the contributions from the provinces, territories, municipalities and the private sector, the total investment is expected to exceed \$6 billion. The Canada-Ontario Infrastructure Program

investment alone is estimated to be \$2 billion, with \$680 million from the federal government.

Mme. Robillard indicated, "there is a general consensus" to focus on the following areas:

1. Green municipal infrastructure such as water/wastewater treatment facilities and recycling.
2. Local transportation infrastructure.
3. Cultural, recreational and sports infrastructure.
4. Rural and remote telecommunications and high-speed Internet access.
5. More affordable housing.

Management committees with equal representation from each province and territory (with municipal input) have been formed in each jurisdiction to process project applications. Mme. Robillard emphasized that "we have opened the door for projects fostering partnerships" but there are no strict criteria for including these projects.

The three main principles of the program are:

1. A focus on "select projects" rather than a large volume to ensure that the right ones are chosen.
2. The partnerships must show a "clear benefit to the public good."
3. The partnerships must have a "transparent accountability regime" so that they do not appear to be "just another business."

The Minister sees the program as a place to showcase the public policy benefits of P3's and provide "an important catalyst to jump start public-private partnership development in Canada."

As for accountability, "regular and thorough audits" will take place with a national program review in the program's fourth year and at

program completion. A Shared Information Management System for Infrastructure (SIMSI) will be finished in the summer for 2001 and will support all stakeholders and users. This unprecedented central information repository will allow municipalities to apply online and receive answers more quickly. Anyone with Internet access will also be able to track the progress of applications through a central website.

In order to encourage cost saving projects, a *National Guide to Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure* will be developed for municipalities. It will contain best practices and information on infrastructure planning, construction, maintenance and repair. The

Treasury Board Secretariat, National Research Council and Federation of Canadian Municipalities are collaborating on this initiative. The projected savings through adopting best practices are estimated to be from \$800 million to \$1.5 billion per year.

As for Mme. Robillard's "dream" for the program in two years, she said, "ten to twenty truly successful projects will demonstrate to citizens that P3's are good for them too." In closing, she stressed "We must strike a balance - incorporating the best of private and public sector practices into a new management style that serves the public interest better than ever before."
