

LONG-TERM INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN (2024)

Issue

The transportation industry in Canada is grappling with growing concerns related to the absence of a comprehensive, long-term infrastructure plan, as highlighted by the annual WESTAC Compass Report. The absence of such a plan is particularly worrying given the critical need to address capacity constraints, infrastructure bottlenecks, and the efficient functioning of trade corridors.

To address these concerns effectively, it is imperative that a collaborative effort is undertaken to enhance cooperation among stakeholders within the supply chain. This collaboration should result in the creation of a forward-looking, strategically designed long-term infrastructure plan. This plan would serve as a crucial tool in achieving Canada's environmental and trade objectives.

Background

The report by the Western Transportation Advisory Council (WESTAC) is widely recognized as a key indicator of the transportation industry's state in Canada. It is based on insights gathered from senior executives within the sector. The report underscores the pressing need for strategic action in the face of several significant infrastructure bottlenecks. Notable among these are:

1. Second Narrows Rail Bridge and the New Westminster Rail Bridge: The inadequate state of these rail bridges is recognized as a major bottleneck within the transportation network. Their improvement or replacement is essential to ensure smooth rail movement.
2. Rail Congestion and Capacity: Respondents highlighted the challenges posed by rail congestion and limited capacity. These issues hinder the efficient movement of goods and necessitate attention for effective resolution.
3. Shortage of Industrial Land: The shortage of suitable industrial land compounds the infrastructure challenges. Addressing this shortage is vital to accommodate the growth and expansion of transportation operations.¹ Recognizing the complexity of these challenges, the report emphasizes the necessity of a well-structured, long-term strategy. This strategy should incorporate a framework to facilitate data sharing and the objective identification of investments or regulatory changes that would alleviate capacity constraints, minimize end-to-end costs, and streamline cycle times.

Industry leaders reached consensus on the urgency of investing in highway infrastructure. This includes the development of rest areas and the provision of support for commercial services like food, lodging, and fuel. These investments should be strategically linked to ports (both sea and air) and railway systems, forming an integrated transportation network.

¹<https://bcchamber.org/policy-search/protection-industrial-lands-future-prosperity-2022>

Equally important, regulatory bodies must ensure that their actions offer a competitive advantage to the industry. Transparency and predictability in decision-making, particularly concerning infrastructure projects, are critical components to ensure timely and effective implementation.

In conclusion, the transportation sector in Canada faces significant challenges due to the absence of a cohesive long-term infrastructure plan. A united effort among supply chain stakeholders and government bodies is essential to formulate a proactive, future-oriented plan that can address capacity concerns, infrastructure bottlenecks, and trade corridor efficiency. By strategically investing in key areas and ensuring regulatory alignment, Canada can pave the way for a resilient and successful transportation industry that supports both economic growth and environmental sustainability.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Federal and Provincial Governments:

1. Upgrade the Second Narrows and New Westminster Rail Bridge.
2. Collaborate to build a provincial Long-Term Infrastructure Plan in conjunction with regional transportation plans.
3. Ensure regulators are providing a competitive advantage, and a transparent and predictable policy environment for relevant industries within the long-term infrastructure strategy.