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Ron Bell, President

Infrastructure drives everything we do

Is there a word you, as municipal officials, hear more than “infrastructure?” Within the AMM organization, infrastructure is the major issue that drives virtually everything we do. In motivates us and, at the same time, can feel like a weight bearing down on our shoulders. While we may have dozens of issues we are working on at any given time, encompassing virtually every government department, it all relates back to infrastructure in some way. The need is dire, because not only is new infrastructure needed, but throughout Manitoba, existing assets are aging. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has stated that most existing infrastructure is at nearly 80% of its service life. As we look further down the road, we can see the huge costs of replacing that infrastructure that is inevitably coming our way.

As in other provinces, Manitoba faces an ever-growing infrastructure deficit. This problem was brought about primarily because municipalities must rely almost exclusively on property taxes for revenues. We must find new ways of accessing funding to accommodate our increasing responsibilities. The gap between the services municipalities must provide, and the resources at our disposal, continues to widen. That is why the AMM continues to push for the total removal of education tax from property. By shifting this tax to a more equitable method of funding education in our province, dollars would be freed up for

many of the infrastructure-related projects municipalities so badly need.

It is true that all levels of government are recognizing the need for greater infrastructure funding. The federal government’s New Deal for municipalities, the province’s Building Manitoba Fund, and the tri-partite Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (MRIF) all continue to inject dollars into worthy projects. It is worth noting, however, that at a recent intake for MRIF, there were almost \$300 million in applications for \$10 million in funding. The gap is still not narrowing!

However, as with anything else, change begins at home. Long-term planning in each of our municipalities is absolutely key to improved infrastructure within our communities. So, too, is working cooperatively with all levels of government and, ultimately, with each other.

The theme for this year’s AMM Convention is Together, Everyone Achieves More (TEAM). As an organization representing all 199 strong and forward-thinking municipalities, let’s present a united front, to plan with our federal and provincial partners a way of meeting these huge costs that we know are coming down the road. As a strong and united team, together we will achieve our goals. 💡

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