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Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation – a new approach to a major challenge

By Ron Lemieux, Minister of Infrastructure & Transportation

The restructuring of several Manitoba government departments has resulted in the replacement of many old familiar names with new ones. Several of these reorganizations reflect the new provincial emphasis on building and renewing Manitoba's vast infrastructure network announced by Premier Doer in October 2006.

For Manitoba Transportation and Government Services, this has led to the transformation into *Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation (MIT)*. This has added the responsibility for the Manitoba Water Services Board, the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Programs, and the Red River Floodway to my portfolio. As well, Water Control Regional Operations has been transferred to MIT from Water Stewardship. These changes reflect the recognition of the diversity of Manitoba's infrastructure and its importance to local, regional and provincial economic growth and development – and the need to coordinate planning and operational strategies in a single organization within government.

The Manitoba Water Services Board assists rural residents, municipalities, water co-operatives and other organized groups with the development of safe and sustainable water and/or sewer facilities. This includes ensuring that public health and environmental concerns are addressed, providing technical and financial assistance and serving as project managers on behalf of the project partners.

To meet these responsibilities, the Board operates a number of initiatives that AMM members will be familiar with, such as the Municipal Water and Sewer program and the Rural Water Pipeline, Farm Water Source and Community Water Source Development Programs. These programs are co-operative ventures between the Board and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration. The Board does not assist in infrastructure development to new subdivisions and/or cottage developments.

Another new addition to the range of my department's responsibilities is the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Program, a joint federal-provincial secretariat involving Western Economic Diversification Canada and MIT. The secretariat was established to improve federal-provincial program delivery, and provide single window program delivery to local governments. The secretariat provides assistance with Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Programs and the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund.

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These programs are funded by equal contributions from the federal government, Manitoba, and the local government or community partner. The programs support the construction, renewal, expansion or improvement of infrastructure throughout Manitoba with an emphasis on environmental protection or enhancement. This includes projects such as water and wastewater systems, water management, solid waste management, recycling, public transit, and environmental energy improvements. Projects to improve other local infrastructure for transportation, culture and recreation, or tourism are also eligible.

I am proud to have the Manitoba Floodway Authority, one of Manitoba's most prominent and vital infrastructure components, under my jurisdiction. The Authority was created in 2004 to oversee the expansion of the Red River Floodway. While we are now at 1-in-300 year flood level protection, the five-year renovation of the floodway will more than double its capacity, allowing it to handle a 1-in-700 year level of flooding,

which is significantly greater than the levels experienced in the 1997 flood. Work now underway includes modifying the channel, replacing and upgrading bridges, inlet/outlet control improvements, and expansion of the West Dike.

Regional Water Control Operations, formerly with Water Stewardship, has been integrated into the Engineering and Operations Division of MIT under the Water Control and Structures Branch. This group is responsible for the construction, maintenance, management and operation of Manitoba's vast waterway drainage, associated crossings, and flood protection infrastructure. There are approximately 100 staff members across the province taking care of the daily operation and maintenance of our waterways and dams. They also serve as the frontline emergency responders in the event of flooding along the water network to help protect communities and restore damaged infrastructure in the aftermath. The administration of water rights licensing and regulatory compliance programs remains with the Department of Water Stewardship.

The restructuring of MIT and integration of new areas of responsibility represent the significant provincial commitment to renewing, restoring, expanding, maintaining and operating Manitoba's diverse array of infrastructure components. Working in partnership with Manitoba's many infrastructure stakeholders, such as the members of the AMM, we can ensure the long-term viability of our infrastructure. Recognizing that every component, directly or indirectly, contributes to some aspect of economic development or community well-being highlights the need to bring the effective management of these resources into a single department and build cooperative partnerships across the stakeholder sector. Now that this integration process is complete, we can proceed to coordinate our resources, identify priorities and invest in the future of Manitoba's vast infrastructure network. ♣