

**Presentation to
House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance
Pre-Budget Consultations
October 16, 2006**

**Présentation
au Comité permanent des finances
de la Chambre des communes
Consultations prébudgétaires
Le 16 octobre 2006**



**CANADIAN COUNCIL OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS
CONSEIL CANADIEN DES INGÉNIEURS**

**Marie Lemay. P.Eng., ing.
Chief Executive Officer
Chef de la direction**

I would like to thank you for your kind invitation to appear once again before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance.

My name is Marie Lemay and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (CCPE).

CCPE and its constituent members, the provincial and territorial regulators of the practice of engineering in Canada, represent over 160,000 professional engineers throughout Canada.

Throughout Canada's history, engineers have been at the leading edge of technology and innovation to build our nation, to bring people together, and to ensure Canada has the tools required to compete in the global marketplace. For that reason, we welcome your choice of theme for this year's consultations -- "Canada's place in a competitive world".

Actions by governments can have a significant long-term impact on Canada's economic health and prosperity.

That is why engineers welcome the opportunity to work with government to share our experience and expertise related to the public interest.

You will notice in my remarks today that there are two words I will say often and I urge you to remember them when you are making your recommendations. The words are: " LONG TERM"

Today, I will focus on one issue identified by your Committee in its announcement of this year's hearings – the need for governments to ensure that citizens have access to the infrastructure required for a high quality of life.

Before doing so, however, I want to mention briefly on two other issues where we also work closely with government. I will not discuss these in detail, but would be pleased to respond later to questions.

The first issue: Canada's ability to compete globally depends on the availability of skilled professionals. In recent years, in terms of numbers, self-identified engineers have formed the largest group of immigrants coming to Canada.

In recent years, governments have come under increasing political pressure to ease the settlement process for these newcomers and to find ways to improve the assessment of their credentials.

The engineering profession has already introduced measures aimed at streamlining the assessment of foreign credentials, without compromising public safety or lowering professional standards. We look forward to continuing our work with government on this important issue.

There is a need for long term support from the government on this issue. It is not an easy one to address but a very important one. If we are to succeed, we all need to be committed for the long run.

We are, and we hope that the federal government is too!

Turning to the second issue -- changes in climate and extreme weather events. Innovative approaches are needed to deal with these new realities and the engineering profession has been at the forefront in developing solutions.

CCPE appreciates the support we have received from the federal government for shared initiatives such as the Public Infrastructure Engineering Vulnerability Committee (PIEVC) in dealing with climate change. Initiatives like this serve as useful mechanisms for the engineering profession to bring together stakeholders and help to focus government attention on solutions needed to deal with the challenges we face.

We look forward to continuing to work with government on the climate change issue, which will also require a long term commitment.

Let me now return to infrastructure renewal.

Canada's infrastructure—our highway systems, water systems, sewers, and bridges—is vital to our quality of life, public health and economic prosperity. It is also ultimately a question of public safety and public protection.

Yet, there are increasing signs that our infrastructure is deteriorating rapidly.

Volumes of scientific, engineering and insurance industry research support what Canadians already know to be true from their own daily experiences: the need to repair and rehabilitate our existing infrastructure, and to build new infrastructure, has never been greater.

The tragic deaths in Laval just a few weeks ago provide an all too vivid reminder of what can happen when infrastructure fails.

In this instance, we will not know what caused the bridge to collapse until we learn the outcome of the inquiry. While our sincere sympathies go out to the families of the victims in this terrible tragedy, let us hope that it did not happen in vain, and that we, as a society, are able to take away important lessons from it.

We need to change our approach to infrastructure; we need to change the 'infrastructure culture' in Canada. We have to make a conscious decision to increase our efforts to re-invest in existing infrastructure stock and to maximize our investment.

This means adopting a long term, holistic approach as well as implementing life cycle management guidelines for infrastructure.

The "cost" of infrastructure should automatically include the cost of building it, and the cost of maintaining it until the end of its serviceable life span.

In recent years, governments in Canada, have made considerable strides in allocating new money for Canada's public infrastructure. In the 2006 Budget, for example, the federal government provided substantial new funding for public infrastructure over the next four years.

We welcomed, in particular, the emphasis on a long term approach to infrastructure planning as outlined in the 2006 federal budget.

Long-term plans for strategic infrastructure investments cannot be developed in isolation. Government policy, regulatory or legislative decisions need to have input from infrastructure practitioners.

In September, CCPE joined with other non-government stakeholders from the infrastructure community in a very productive session with the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities in order to discuss ways for governments in Canada to gain a better understanding of the gaps in Canada's infrastructure assets and to identify ways to assist governments in setting priorities when planning long-term budgets.

If they are to be successful, governments also need support from the public in implementing new policies.

In this regard, there is an urgent need to educate Canadians on the importance of infrastructure maintenance and on the crucial need to re-invest in existing roads, sewers, and water systems upon which we rely daily.

It is a lot easier to invest in things you see, but much more difficult to spend money on "things" that are buried, or on maintenance -- BUT that's what leadership is all about -- making the RIGHT decisions -- and they are not always the easiest ones!

CCPE is keenly aware of the need to maximize taxpayer dollars in developing a new long-term approach to infrastructure.

For the past four years, CCPE has taken a leadership role in calling for the creation of a National Round Table on Sustainable Infrastructure (NRTSI), an independent, multi-stakeholder body that aims to facilitate decision-making on sustainable infrastructure.

Some members of this Committee may recall that I raised this concept before. The engineering profession has been holding discussions with various governments throughout Canada to brief them on our concept and I have been greatly encouraged by the responses we have received.

With an initial focus on public works, the NRTSI would create a “go-to” place for infrastructure information and resources. It would provide a broad perspective that could draw upon the expertise of a highly diverse community of practitioners from government, industry and professionals working together so that the long-term vision is reflected in future government policies.

Practitioners recognize the value of sharing and disseminating information on best practices and technology as it relates to the management and future development of infrastructure in Canada. All stakeholders seem to recognize that there are synergies to be gained by bringing together the diverse and diffused community of infrastructure practitioners, managers and users to focus on better asset management and to bring together all orders of government and industry.

We believe that the NRTSI could allow us to gain an improved understanding of infrastructure gaps and help governments address funding priorities.

The Round Table has already held two successful planning meetings in Calgary and Montreal, with a third meeting planned for Toronto in November. Indeed, we hope formally to launch the Round Table at the Toronto meeting in November provided that we have secured the necessary funding.

As a final comment, I would like to note how pleased I was to read the various party positions on infrastructure during last winter’s federal election. The similarities in the positions articulated by each party suggest there is likely broad political consensus for what we and other key infrastructure partners and stakeholders are trying to achieve.

I would like to thank you again for inviting CCPE to appear before your committee. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.