

Prime Minister and Premiers Agree to Accelerate Infrastructure Funding

As a result of meetings between the Prime Minister and Premiers a series of actions have been agreed upon in an effort to stimulate the Canadian economy. One of the key actions in the January 16th announcement of specific interest to local governments relates to infrastructure investments.

The Prime Minister's January 16th news release states: "The need for immediate infrastructure investments is critical. This Government has proposed to the provinces and territories to jointly accelerate planned spending to ensure that this money gets into the economy when it is most needed."

The First Ministers have agreed on an action plan in an effort to speed up the delivery of funding under the Building Canada Fund (BCF), including both accelerated funding approvals and cutting red-tape.

Of most direct significance to local governments is the federal government's indication that it is prepared to approve projects this year using the entire funding available under the BCF Communities Component. We understand that the Province of BC is also supportive of expediting approvals. In practical terms, we expect that this will mean approvals based on the first round of Communities Component applications soon and a second call for applications in the near future.

Funding under the other two components of the BCF is also being accelerated, as

follows:

- Under the Major Infrastructure Component, the federal and provincial governments are jointly discussing priority infrastructure projects that could be approved, resulting in construction starting in 2009 and 2010; and
- Under the BCF Base Fund, \$25 million per year was to be delivered to BC over a 7 year period from 2007/08 to 2013/14. The federal government has announced that it is prepared to give the entire remaining funding over the next two years, subject to matching provincial contributions.

The federal government has indicated that these initial actions will accelerate approval of a combined \$1.9 billion nationally in infrastructure projects beyond what was planned for the next two years.

In addition to accelerating approvals, the First Ministers agreed to cutting red tape on infrastructure projects. Of key significance to local governments are plans, over the next two construction seasons, to reduce the number of federal assessments and regulatory reviews, to simplify and develop a more efficient review process to help get projects started, and to provide clarity and predictability for Aboriginal consultation on projects.

This January 16th announcement follows a series of national consultation meetings

that federal Transport, Infrastructure and Communities Minister John Baird held with provincial, territorial, and local government leaders from across Canada. UBCM President Robert Hobson was represented at a western provincial local government associations meeting held in Vancouver on December 15, 2008.

For further details on the January 16th announcement please go to:

www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=2383

UBCM will also be monitoring the January 27 Federal Budget and will issue an "In the House" bulletin on any financial measures of interest to local governments.

UBCM Environment Conference Postponed

Due to changing economic circumstances, UBCM will not be in a position to hold the environment conference on February 24/25, 2009 as previously scheduled. The conference has been tentatively rescheduled to June of 2009 at which time we hope our partners will be in position to financially contribute and participate in the event.

Further updates related to the conference will be posted on the UBCM website and in the UBCM newsletter.

The provincial government has provided UBCM with the following reminder notice:

The B.C. budget will be released on February 17, 2009.

New this year, Budget 2009 will be distributed on CD as well as posted online. Electronic distribution is greener, more cost-effective and makes finding information easier.

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