

January 28, 2022

## Transportation and Infrastructure

*Rural roads and bridges are not only vital to local communities, but serve as important arteries to help Alberta's economy grow by connecting natural resources to national and international transportation corridors. The RMA members are responsible for the largest road and bridge network of any stakeholder in the province. The building and maintenance of transportation infrastructure is the single biggest expense for most rural municipalities.*

### What is the RMA's position on the importance of having a municipal perspective on matters related to transportation and infrastructure?

- ◆ Rural municipalities manage the majority of Alberta's roads (77% or 173,226km) and bridges / culverts (61% or 8,468 km). At a cost of between \$500,000 and \$1 million to construct one kilometer of road and a similar cost to construct a bridge or culvert, the costs of managing transportation infrastructure form a significant portion of rural municipal expenses.
- ◆ Rural Alberta's transportation network connects communities, provides rural Albertans with access to important community services (such as healthcare), and supports the province's tourism industry by connecting major highways to many of Alberta's parks and natural wilderness areas.
- ◆ Rural roads and bridges provide the oil and gas, forestry and agriculture industries with access to the natural resources that they depend on. A safe and viable rural road and bridge network is key to supporting the provincial economy.
- ◆ As the primary manager of bridges and roads in Alberta, rural municipalities should be thoroughly consulted before any changes are made to existing infrastructure grant programs, approval processes, or design standards.
- ◆ Industrial use of infrastructure creates significant damage that requires municipalities to allocate a level of financial and human resources not typical in urban areas.
- ◆ As transportation infrastructure funding continues to lag behind need, rural municipalities in many areas of the province have been forced to weight restrict or close bridges.

### What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to infrastructure construction and maintenance?

- ◆ Municipal taxation revenues alone are not sufficient to build and/or maintain rural municipal infrastructure networks. As a result, municipalities face an increasing infrastructure deficit.
- ◆ Long-term, predictable funding from other levels of government is necessary to ensure the sustainability of rural Alberta's transportation network and the viability of rural communities.
- ◆ Municipal infrastructure funding programs developed by other levels of government must reflect rural infrastructure needs. Per capita funding distribution and merit-based distribution mechanisms that place rural municipalities in competition with higher-capacity urban municipalities do not adequately address rural needs.

## What collaborative relationships are essential to rural municipalities in matters relating to transportation and infrastructure?

- ◆ Municipalities are in the best position to determine local infrastructure priorities and should be empowered to meet those priorities.
- ◆ In situations where industry benefits from the use of municipal roads and bridges, industry should collaborate with municipalities by contributing to maintenance and replacement costs. Local road permits are an effective tool to manage the impact of commercial vehicles on rural roads.
- ◆ The RMA looks forward to collaborating with the Government of Alberta to develop new parameters for the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program.
- ◆ Federal and provincial levels of government must work closely with rural municipalities to ensure that infrastructure, such as: roads, bridges, airports, and transloading facilities are adequately supported, similarly to highways and ports that also serve as links in these supply chains.
- ◆ Technical information from Alberta Transportation must be up to date and reliable to assist municipalities with decision making on transportation infrastructure.

## How does the work of the RMA support the sustainability of Alberta's transportation and infrastructure systems?

- ◆ The RMA advocates on behalf of rural municipalities for consistent funding processes that promote the sustainability and growth of rural transportation networks.
- ◆ Long-term capital planning and asset management initiatives are important tools to maximize municipal resources in the provision of infrastructure. The RMA encourages these efforts and works with various committees in support of this type of planning.
- ◆ The RMA encourages member municipalities to work collaboratively to find innovative, cost-effective solutions to their infrastructure needs (e.g. cost sharing, use of own forces, alternative design).

## What current transportation and infrastructure related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

### Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program

- ◆ The RMA looks forward to collaborating with the Government of Alberta to design program parameters for the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP) or a similar program that will best meet the long-term needs of rural municipalities when the current funding commitment to STIP concludes.
- ◆ Resource roads, local road bridges and community airports are critical to the viability of rural communities and Alberta's industrial and resource development. STIP provides rural municipalities with a dedicated funding source for this infrastructure and should remain adequately funded and accessible to rural municipalities.
- ◆ There is an increasing deficit in bridge infrastructure on municipal roads. Years of underfunding bridge maintenance have created a backlog of unfunded repairs.

## Asset Management

- ◆ By properly monitoring the age and condition of infrastructure and developing a long-term asset management plan for maintenance and replacement, municipalities will increase accountability and efficiency in managing their assets and improve service levels.
- ◆ Asset management is likely to become an important consideration in future grant funding programs. In some Canadian jurisdictions, asset management plans and policies are required to access grant funding, or are mandatory for municipalities through legislation.
- ◆ Due to the long-term nature of asset management planning, it is critical to establish buy-in throughout the municipality, from council to front-line employees. The RMA report, Navigating the Asset Management Journey, can help develop this buy-in.
- ◆ RMA has developed several short asset management training courses for both elected officials and municipal staff. Municipalities and other organizations interested in accessing this material are encouraged to contact the RMA.
- ◆ The RMA is a strong supporter of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Municipal Asset Management Program (MAMP). As of January 2020, MAMP has funded over 500 municipal asset management projects across Canada. The RMA, along with partner organizations, has received significant funding through MAMP to develop and deliver a variety of asset management capacity-building workshops and cohorts.
- ◆ The RMA is a strong supporter of Infrastructure Asset Management Alberta (IAMA), a grassroots organization that provides educational and networking opportunities for Alberta's municipal asset management community.
- ◆ As municipalities both own and conduct activities affecting underground infrastructure, the RMA supports a mandatory notification and registration system. However, such a program must be accompanied by financial support to register historic municipally owned infrastructure.
- ◆ As water flow increases as a result of climate change, bridges and culverts built to handle this increased flow should be eligible to receive funding to support climate resiliency.

## Rail

- ◆ Rail lines are pervasive in rural municipalities and create different challenges than in urban areas. For example, in the event of a blocked crossing, alternate routes are often difficult to access in rural areas. As a significant roadway authority in the province of Alberta, rural municipalities have a vested interest in any regulatory changes to railways (e.g. at-grade crossings, information sharing).

## Investing in Canada Program

- ◆ The RMA is concerned with the eligibility criteria for Alberta's allocation of the Rural and Northern Communities stream of the Investing in Canada program. Allowing all municipalities with a population below 100,000 to apply for funding compromises the ability of small rural municipalities who may be unable to apply for projects under other streams to access a share of Investing in Canada program funding.
- ◆ The RMA is concerned that provincial funding is inadequate or unavailable for certain eligible projects under the federal Investing in Canada Program.

### *Fisheries Act and Navigation Protection Act*

- ◆ Rural municipalities take their role as infrastructure managers seriously, but also prioritize the stewardship of Alberta's waterways. For this reason, the RMA prioritizes advocacy efforts to ensure federal legislation balances the regulation of fish habitats and the navigability of Canada's waterways, with the need for municipalities to operate within a fair and efficient regulatory regime that mitigates any adverse impacts on rural development.
- ◆ Changes to the *Fisheries Act* and *Navigation Protection Act* may increase the costs of bridge, culvert and road construction for rural municipalities.

### Provincial Highways

- ◆ In rural areas, provincially-managed highways are often vital links between communities. The RMA urges the Government of Alberta to provide consistent upkeep of rural highways, as their value to rural residents and the province's economy are significant. This upkeep should include regular maintenance on road surfaces, and the consistent provision of signage, such as mileage markers, for both convenience and safety purposes.
- ◆ Rural municipalities understand local road access issues. As such, the authority to regulate provincial highway access and setback requirements should be delegated from the Government of Alberta to municipal governments.

### Community Airports

- ◆ In many rural and small urban municipalities, community airports provide an important link for industrial development, as well as serving as a hub for emergency services to fight wildfires or attend to seriously ill or injured residents. The maintenance of the provincial funding through the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP) and commitment to long term stable funding after the current programs expiry plays a large role in maintaining rural Alberta's access to air travel.
- ◆ Regional airports are partially supported by the Airports Capital Assistance Program (ACAP), a federal funding program. Current funding levels for ACAP are not adequate to support Canada's regional airports.

#### **Alex Mochid**

*Policy and Advocacy*

780.955.4085

[alex@RMAAlberta.com](mailto:alex@RMAAlberta.com)