

Closing the Gap: The Rural Infrastructure Deficit

**Member Briefing Package and
Advocacy Toolkit**

Purpose of This Toolkit

The [*Closing the Gap* campaign](#) builds on RMA's 2024 Rural Municipal Infrastructure Deficit Project (RMIDP) report series, which included separate asset deficit reports for roads, bridges, and water utilities, as well as a summary report.

For more detailed information to enhance individual member advocacy or to review RMA's specific analysis of the rural municipal infrastructure deficit, the RMIDP reports can be found here:

- ◆ [RMA Bridge Asset Deficit Report](#) and [At-a-Glance Bridge Report](#)
- ◆ [RMA Road Asset Deficit Report](#) and [At-a-Glance Roads Report](#)
- ◆ [RMA Utility Infrastructure Report](#) and [At-a-Glance Utilities Report](#)
- ◆ [RMA Asset Deficit Summary Report](#)

The 2024 research showed that rural municipalities face an infrastructure deficit (the amount of investment required to upgrade the infrastructure to its ideal condition state) of approximately \$17 billion. In addition to quantifying the deficit, the RMIDP included the development of 15 recommendations directed at the Government of Alberta, RMA, and rural municipalities. The recommendations related to areas such as infrastructure funding levels, grant program design, data gathering and usage, and other financial and non-financial approaches to how both levels of government can work together to reduce the deficit.

Closing the Gap is intended to increase government, stakeholder and public understanding of the importance of rural infrastructure and propose an approach by which the Government of Alberta, RMA and municipalities can work together in the coming years to implement the RMIDP recommendations and ultimately "close the gap" related to rural municipal infrastructure.

This toolkit equips RMA members with the information, messaging, and customizable materials needed to participate in RMA's *Closing the Gap* campaign by bringing their own voice to advocate to the Government of Alberta for a long-term provincial-municipal partnership related to managing and investing in rural municipal infrastructure.

It is designed to help RMA member municipalities communicate the local importance of a strategic partnership clearly and consistently, engage MLAs, residents, and industry partners, integrate similar and consistent local data into broader campaign messaging, and support RMA's campaign by aligning local action with advocacy objectives.

Key Messages for Rural Municipalities

There are several core messages related to the rural infrastructure deficit that RMA suggests all rural municipalities utilize as a foundation for local advocacy to ensure consistency across Alberta.

The Issue

- ◆ Rural municipalities maintain the majority of Alberta's roads, bridges, and utility systems. These assets support residents and enable the industries that drive Alberta's economy to thrive via connections to rural areas where natural resources are located in abundance.
- ◆ The causes and impacts of the rural municipal infrastructure deficit, as well as solutions, are complex. Addressing the issue requires long-term collaboration between the Government of Alberta, RMA, and rural municipalities.
- ◆ Stagnant or decreasing provincial infrastructure funding, especially in the context of escalating construction costs, inflationary pressures, and downloaded services, is accelerating rural municipal infrastructure asset deterioration and placing a large burden on the rural municipal tax base.
- ◆ The rural infrastructure deficit – or the difference between the target value of the infrastructure assets and the value of the assets in their current condition – exceeded \$17 billion in 2023 and is projected to surpass \$25 billion by 2025 without intervention.

Why It Matters

- ◆ Rural infrastructure underpins Alberta's supply chains, resource industries, and economic corridors. Every industry from agriculture to forestry to oil and gas and mining is reliant on the rural road and bridge networks managed and maintained by rural municipalities, many of whom have limited tax bases and whose infrastructure funding from the province is insufficient to keep up with yearly maintenance and renewal.
- ◆ Deferring essential work on aging infrastructure assets saves money in the short term and balances tight budgets, but increases long-term holding costs, maintenance and renewal costs and reduces reliability, which threatens the ability of industry to utilize these infrastructure networks when seeking resources or getting their goods to market as well as community safety and connectivity.
- ◆ Solutions to reduce the infrastructure deficit must move beyond funding. Given the strategic importance of rural infrastructure to both local and provincewide economic development, improved data access and usage and more proactive decision-making around infrastructure investment and maintenance are crucial to building a resilient system for the long-term.
- ◆ Stable, predictable funding increases to offset inflation and increased construction costs will be essential for the long-term maintenance and renewal.

What RMA Is Advocating For

1. A partnership approach to “closing the gap”

A strong rural infrastructure network is critical to local and provincial economic development. Both the Government of Alberta and municipalities bring distinct skills, perspectives, and responsibilities to the table in relation to supporting rural municipal infrastructure. Working together on a strategy that balances local knowledge with provincial capacity is crucial to supporting rural infrastructure today and in the future.

2. Collaborative development of fair and predictable funding approaches

Codevelop funding principles, allocation approaches, and decision-making frameworks that reflect rural cost drivers.

3. Short-term stabilization funding through increases to existing programs

Immediate, stopgap increases to LGFF and STIP to stabilize critical rural roads and bridges.

4. Long-term funding reform, provincewide condition assessment strategy, and asset management support

A standardized condition assessment framework, risk based prioritization matrix, and innovation funding, accompanied by resources to strengthen municipalities' asset management capacity.

Guidance on Tone and Delivery of Advocacy Messaging

RMA suggests that when members advocate through written, verbal, or other means, they strive to ensure that their language and tone is:

- ◆ **Optimistic** – framing this issue as an opportunity for the province to stimulate the economy and invest in long-term economic growth and prosperity is more likely to result in successes than framing it as a crisis that needs billions in immediate funding.
- ◆ **Collaborative** – “closing the gap” requires effort and partnership between both levels of government. Municipalities have local knowledge and direct responsibility for management of assets, while the Government of Alberta has technical knowledge, financial capacity, and the strategic oversight experience to ensure decisions are made strategically on a provincewide basis.
- ◆ **Evidence based** – rural municipalities know the condition of their infrastructure networks, the financial pressures of maintaining the network, and the local risks posed by continuing the status quo. Sharing this local information with MLAs, ministers, local stakeholders, and the public is crucial to establishing the need for a partnership.
- ◆ **Focused on solutions** – While the infrastructure deficit is daunting, RMA sees a path forward. Emphasizing some or all of the recommendations in the RMIDP project, as well as local ideas to address the most urgent assets, will be a valuable approach to spurring action at the provincial level.

Suggested Engagement Tactics for Members

RMA encourages members to reach out and connect with your local MLA to ensure that all members of the legislative assembly and cabinet have a strong understanding of the nature and scale of the deteriorating condition and underinvestment in Alberta's rural infrastructure. While RMA is undertaking this work at a provincial level, telling the story locally is likely to resonate with government decision-makers, MLAs, and media.

Suggested engagement tactics include:

Seek a meeting with your local MLA: using the key messages to guide the conversation and local data (section 5) to back up arguments, Come prepared with local data on infrastructure assets (conditions, closures, upcoming annual costs), budget items (infrastructure line items, annual budgets, annual provincial funding, budget pressures), and other related information.

Refer your MLA to RMA's 2024 RMIDP reports and *Closing the Gap* campaign. Emphasize that addressing the rural infrastructure deficit requires not only increased and predictable funding, but a stronger provincial-municipal partnership focused on long-term planning, asset management, shared

responsibility, and coordinated investment in high-risk, high value infrastructure assets. Ask your MLA to support RMA's Budget 2026 recommendations to ensure that local industries and the province's economic growth at large can continue to rely on rural road, bridge, and utility infrastructure.

Use Council Meetings to Build Awareness: Present the RMA RMIDP Reports, the *Closing the Gap* campaign content, and member-specific data to councils and administrations. All rural municipal elected officials and administrators should have a strong understanding of the scale and nature of this issue.

Communicate with Residents: Rural Albertans are the primary users of rural transportation infrastructure and know all too well the issues with deteriorating asset conditions and incomplete maintenance and renewal activities. Utilize municipal newsletters, social media, or engagements to ensure that ratepayers have a strong understanding of your municipality's infrastructure responsibilities, the risks of underfunding, and the role they can play in advocating for government action. Some specific means to raising public awareness include:

- ◆ Add a short campaign blurb to your website.
- ◆ Share weekly social media posts from the toolkit.
- ◆ Include a paragraph in your municipal newsletter.

Engage with Local Industries (Agriculture, Forestry, Oil and Gas, etc.): Strong rural infrastructure increases productivity, reduces risk, and supports long-term competitiveness for many industrial users. Because industry depends on reliable rural roads, bridges, and utilities, local employers are natural partners in advocating for long term solutions. Their voices can help demonstrate the connection between industry and infrastructure and that addressing the rural infrastructure deficit requires not only funding, but a stronger provincial-municipal-industrial partnership.

- ◆ Invite local industries into the advocacy effort by sharing the Closing the Gap campaign, RMA's 2024 RMIDP reports, and some municipality-specific infrastructure data with them. The intent is to help industry understand the scale of the infrastructure deficit and how it affects their operations, and to encourage them to join municipalities in advocating for long-term, strategic investment.
- ◆ Encourage prominent local industry partners to provide letters of support, quotes for municipal advocacy materials, or to join municipal elected officials when meeting with MLAs.
- ◆ Industry participation can highlight the economic consequences of deteriorating infrastructure, such as load restrictions, closures, delays, or increased operating costs, and reinforce that rural infrastructure investment is essential to Alberta's economic resilience.

Media Engagement: Engaging local media helps raise public awareness, demonstrate the real-world impacts of the rural infrastructure funding deficit, and build broader support for provincial action. Local stories and examples are especially effective in showing that this issue affects both communities and the industries that drive Alberta's economy.

- ◆ Issue a local news release, highlighting the local impacts of the rural infrastructure funding deficit and sharing local examples of deteriorating infrastructure with accompanying financial information showing chronic underfunding. Bridges or roads that need repairs or that will be closed indefinitely are strong examples.
- ◆ Offer your Reeve/Mayor for interviews to discuss the local impacts of underinvestment in rural transportation infrastructure.

Member Specific Data

When engaging with provincial elected officials or speaking publicly on this issue, clear quantitative data and strong qualitative examples are essential to demonstrate the local impacts of the infrastructure funding deficit. RMA recommends that municipalities collect and reference the following high-level information during advocacy efforts to help ensure a consistent, credible message is provided across all rural municipalities.

Municipal Financial Information

Annual Municipal Capital
Budget:

Annual Municipal
Operating Budget:

Annual provincial STIP
funding received:

Annual provincial LGFF
funding received:

Major cost pressures
(materials, labour,
inflation, downloaded
services):

Examples of deferred
projects due to budget
constraints:

Estimated funding gap
(municipal estimate of
unmet needs, if known):

Impact of current
funding levels on tax
rates or reserves:

Rural Roads

Total kilometres of roads:

Known problem areas:

Major road projects required in the next 1-5 years:

Examples of roads affecting industry or emergency response:

Estimated cost pressures or future investments needed:

Rural Bridges

Total number of bridges:

Total number of culverts:

Bridges under load restriction or closure:

Bridges nearing end of life (if known):

Major bridge projects in the next 1-5 years:

Examples of bridge impacts on industries and residents:

Rural Water and Wastewater Utilities

Systems requiring upgrades or renewals:

Capacity or regulatory challenges:

Major utility projects required in the next 1-5 years:

Examples of service risks or constraints:

Local Economic Impacts

Examples of delays, failures, or closures related to infrastructure:

Key local industries affected by the closure of roads and bridges:

Potential economic risks (job loss, tax revenue, etc.)

Impacts on supply chains (hauling costs, supply chains, workforce mobility)

Community impacts (emergency response, school buses, health care access)

Local Advocacy Priorities

Immediate needs related to rural road, bridge, and utility infrastructure:

Long-term needs related to rural road, bridge, and utility infrastructure:

How RMA's Budget 2026
Asks and Closing the Gap
campaign
recommendations would
assist your municipality:

Opportunities for
provincial-municipal
partnership beyond
funding
