

# Closing the Gap

**Week 5 – Summary of Findings and  
Calls to Action**

# Week 5: Summary of Findings and Calls to Action

Over the past five weeks, RMA's *Closing the Gap* campaign has examined the growing rural infrastructure investment gap and its implications for Alberta's long-term prosperity. Each week has highlighted a different dimension of the challenge – from the scale of the deficit and the pressures facing rural municipalities, to the economic importance of rural transportation networks, to the need for resilient, future-ready assets and funding models that reflect rural realities. Together, these findings demonstrate that Alberta's competitiveness depends on strategic, sustained provincial investment in the infrastructure that supports both rural communities and the provincial economy.

This final installment brings the campaign's themes together. It outlines the key insights from the RMA's [Rural Municipal Infrastructure Deficit Project reports](#), summarizes the major issues explored throughout the campaign, and presents RMA's recommendations for Budget 2026 and beyond. It also provides a clear call to action for members and the public, emphasizing the importance of coordinated advocacy and evidence-based messaging as Alberta considers the future of rural infrastructure investment.

## Call to Action: Use the Advocacy Toolkit and Advocate for Investment in Rural Infrastructure

RMA encourages members to begin by reviewing the Rural Municipal Infrastructure Deficit Project reports and findings. These reports outline the full methodologies used, quantify the scale of the rural infrastructure deficit, and paint a stark picture of what the next three to five years will look like without significant reinvestment. The RMIDP findings are not just technical data; they are a roadmap for understanding the urgency of the situation and should guide aspects of provincial policy moving forward.

To support members in advancing the messaging within *Closing the Gap*, RMA has developed an advocacy toolkit designed to help municipalities communicate the findings of the RMIDP in a clear, consistent, and locally relevant way. The toolkit includes guidance for engaging MLAs, industry partners, and community stakeholders, and is intended to make advocacy on this topic accessible, evidence based, and aligned across rural Alberta.

RMA encourages members to use the toolkit to highlight the realities facing their own communities when engaging with provincial leadership. Identify the roads in your municipality that are deteriorating faster than they can be maintained, the bridges nearing the end of their life, the rising costs of deferred maintenance, and importantly, the economic activity at risk without fair and predictable funding. Your local stories, data, and experiences are essential. They give context to the provincial picture and demonstrate the real-world impacts of underinvestment on families, businesses, and industries.

When rural leaders speak with a consistent, evidence-based message, the province is much more receptive to advocacy objectives. The RMIDP reports and the *Closing the Gap* campaign have laid the groundwork; now is the time to amplify it and ensure that local concerns and impacts make their way to the Legislature.

## Closing the Gap: A Summary of Weeks 1-4

### Week 1 – The Rural Infrastructure Funding Gap and Taxpayer Burden

Week 1 established the foundation of the campaign by illustrating the scale of Alberta’s rural infrastructure deficit and the inequities embedded in current funding programs. Rural municipalities collectively manage around 75% of Alberta’s bridges, 135,000 km of roads, and 30% of water and wastewater systems, yet receive only an inequitable fraction of the provincial and federal investment required to maintain them.

For the purposes of both the *Closing the Gap* campaign and the RMIDP reports, an “infrastructure deficit” is defined as the difference between the current observed condition of an asset class and its target state. In other words, the infrastructure deficit is equal to the one-time investment required to bring the infrastructure asset portfolio up to the target condition level that delivers the lowest long-term holding costs.

Rural municipalities are responsible for large, dispersed infrastructure networks, but their primary revenue tool – property taxation – was never structured or intended to sustain economically significant assets at this scale or cost, especially with a non-residential tax base that fluctuates significantly. As a result, rural municipalities spend upwards of 50% of their budgets on transportation infrastructure compared to around 10% for urban municipalities, yet are still falling behind.

The RMIDP made clear that delaying investment increases long-term costs. Deferred maintenance accelerates asset failure, reduces service life, and forces municipalities into reactive spending that is more expensive and less effective. Without adequate investment from other levels of government, rural municipalities will continue to struggle to maintain the infrastructure that supports Alberta’s economy, industries, and communities.

### Week 2 – Rural Infrastructure Is Alberta’s Economic Engine

Week 2 demonstrated that rural infrastructure is not a local issue, but rather a provincial economic imperative. Despite hosting only about 15% of Alberta’s population, the road, bridge, and utility networks managed by rural municipalities support:

- ◆ 41% of Alberta’s investment
- ◆ 28% of Alberta’s GDP
- ◆ Every major resource, agricultural, and manufacturing supply chain

These networks provide crucial access to many of Alberta’s natural resources, and form the first link in the supply chain connecting them to national and worldwide markets. When rural roads and bridges deteriorate, supply chains slow, transportation costs rise, and Alberta becomes less competitive globally. This affects everything from oil and gas operations to agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, tourism, and emerging industries such as data centres.

Provincial investment in rural infrastructure is not about increasing municipal revenue; rather, it is about protecting Alberta’s economic advantage and national and international competitiveness. Strategic reinvestment strengthens supply chains, reduces long-term holding costs, and ensures Alberta remains an attractive destination for investment and diversification. In this context, reinvestment in rural infrastructure is not a municipal funding request; it is a provincial economic strategy.

## Week 3 – Building Resilience for the Future

Week 3 focused on the growing risks associated with aging assets, climate pressures, and escalating construction costs. Rural infrastructure that has stood resiliently for decades is deteriorating due to a combination of age, increased usage, and extreme weather events. The risks associated with this deterioration are becoming more severe and more costly.

Key risks highlighted in Week 3 included:

- ◆ More emergency closures of roads and bridges
- ◆ Significantly higher long-term repair and replacement costs as assets fall further down the deterioration curve and away from an ideal condition rating
- ◆ Reduced reliability of trade corridors, affecting industries and supply chains
- ◆ Increased vulnerability for rural residents, including longer emergency response times and reduced access to essential services

Climate volatility – including more frequent freeze-thaw cycles, extreme precipitation, and drought – is accelerating deterioration and shortening asset lifespans. With that said, resilience is not only about withstanding climate impacts; at the same time, an increasing population, more industrial growth, and increasingly heavy traffic loads are placing additional strain on rural networks.

The RMIDP’s methodology and supporting research made it clear that proactive investment today is significantly more cost-effective than reactive spending tomorrow and truly comes down to ensuring Alberta’s infrastructure remains reliable, safe, and economically productive in the decades ahead. In this sense, resilience is both a fiscal strategy and an economic necessity.

## Week 4 – Aligning Investment with Rural Realities

Week 4 examined the importance of aligning provincial funding programs with the realities of rural service delivery, and for provincial-municipal collaboration in understanding rural infrastructure condition and strategic importance. Rural municipalities maintain large geographic areas with low population density and a primarily non-residential tax base, meaning fewer taxpayers support more kilometres of infrastructure. Heavy industrial traffic has accelerated wear and increased maintenance costs, yet current provincial programs do not account for these realities. As a result, rural municipalities face higher costs with fewer resources, widening the investment gap each year.

Week 4 also emphasized that fair funding is not simply about increasing allocations; it is about aligning provincial investment with the true cost of maintaining the infrastructure that drives Alberta’s economy. Rural municipalities support a significant share of Alberta’s economic activity yet receive what has been found to be a disproportionately small share of provincial and federal infrastructure funding.

To help close the rural municipal infrastructure deficit, RMA has made several recommendations for Budget 2026 and future budget years that form a practical roadmap for stabilizing Alberta’s rural infrastructure network and protecting the province’s economic future.

### **1. Immediate, short-term stabilization increases to existing funding programs**

- ◆ Align LGFF funding with the 10-year historical MSI average, as current funding levels fall approximately 15% to 20% below the historical average
- ◆ Strengthen the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program to support timely bridge rehabilitation and replacement
- ◆ Provide targeted investment for high-risk rural infrastructure assets identified by rural municipalities, provincial ministries, and industry

## **2. Collaboration on fair and sustainable funding models**

- ◆ Revise funding formulas to reflect rural cost drivers, such as remote construction locations, lack of a local workforce, longer overall asset lengths, and higher maintenance costs
- ◆ Establish rural-specific funding streams that are intended to support economically significant rural infrastructure assets
- ◆ Index funding to inflation and escalating construction costs, as these have become significant issues in recent years

## **3. Long-term commitments and a provincial condition assessment strategy**

- ◆ Co-develop a long-term, evidence-based funding model that provides investment in rural infrastructure resilience on a scale that matches that infrastructure's contributions to local and provincial economic development
- ◆ Integrate municipal asset management data into provincial funding and planning methodologies
- ◆ Develop a prioritization matrix that prioritizes investments in high-risk, high-value rural infrastructure

## **4. Asset Management Support**

- ◆ Expand municipal asset management capacity to enable its integration into provincial funding and planning policies
- ◆ Support data collection, evaluation, and training at the municipal level to better understand and manage municipally-held infrastructure assets
- ◆ Ground provincial investment decisions in high-quality information collected by the municipalities closest to the issues

## Why this Matters Now

Alberta's economic engine runs on rural infrastructure. Every major industry such as oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, tourism, and even emerging sectors such as data centres or nuclear developments will depend on the reliability of rural roads, bridges, and utilities. When these assets deteriorate, the impacts ripple far beyond municipal boundaries and pressures compound quickly, affecting everything from commodity prices to investment decisions, and of course provincial and municipal budgets.

Without strategic reinvestment, the consequences are immediate and far-reaching. Supply chains will slow, forcing producers and haulers to reroute or delay shipments. Industrial costs will rise as companies face longer travel times, heavier equipment wear, and reduced access to job sites. From a social perspective, emergency responses become less reliable, particularly in remote areas where a single bridge or road closure can add critical minutes to response times.

A key takeaway from the RMIDP reports is that no matter who pays for the infrastructure – the province, the federal government, or local taxpayers – the cost of continued underinvestment and inaction is always higher, as when assets deteriorate and get further away from the target condition rating for that asset, the costs to maintain, repair, or replace the asset increase significantly. Deferred maintenance accelerates asset failure, shortens service life, and forces municipalities into reactive, crisis-driven spending that is more expensive and less effective. Acting now is not only fiscally responsible – it is essential to protecting Alberta's long-term economic capacity.

Budget 2026 is a pivotal moment. Alberta can continue reacting to infrastructure needs – responding to emergency closures, escalating repair costs, and mounting economic pressures – or it can invest strategically in the infrastructure that supports the province's prosperity. The choice is between a cycle of reactive spending and a long-term, evidence-based approach that strengthens Alberta's economic backbone. The *Closing the Gap* campaign has made the stakes clear: the cost of inaction is rising, and the opportunity for meaningful, future-ready investment is now.