

Municipal Issues



With 310,000 members working in three dozen industries, Unifor is Canada's largest labour union in the private sector. Unifor advocates on behalf of, and defends, the economic and social rights of working people under the presumption that all Canadians are entitled to an economically secure and dignified existence. More than 6,500 Unifor members are directly employed in public transit, nearly 3,000 work in municipal homes for the aged, nearly 1,000 are in municipal administration and further 1,000 work in various local utility services. Tens of thousands more work in rail, road, air and marine transportation, as well as industries that manufacture transit equipment and in telecommunications.



Unifor priorities

Many issues of concern to Canadian municipalities are also of concern to Unifor. Unifor's leadership and rank-and-file membership have long advocated for affordable housing, public investment in infrastructure—including public transit and high speed rail—telecommunications infrastructure, climate change mitigation strategies and international trade agreements that respect local self-determination and the democratic process.

Unifor recognizes that social and physical infrastructure is a key aspect of Canadian productivity and prosperity. In too many municipalities, infrastructure investment has not kept pace with population growth or with the demands of sustainable development. The \$11.9 billion in new federal monies is divided between public transit (\$3.4 billion), physical infrastructure (\$5 billion) and social infrastructure (\$3.4 billion).

Unifor believes that green infrastructure, clean technology and sustainable development must mean, among others things, *good jobs*. Infrastructure spending in Canada should have as its guiding principles not only the values of efficacy, efficiency and sustainability, but also inclusive community development. This implies that public infrastructure spending should have conditions which ensure domestic procurement, local hiring requirements (especially from disadvantaged groups), apprenticeship training quotas and a broader commitment to union representation and employers who pay a living wage.



Specific issues and policy recommendations

Infrastructure

In light of Unifor's general concerns about Canada's existing infrastructure policy framework, Unifor recommends:

- That the federal government move quickly to establish a timeline for public consultation and delivery of the proposed 10-year federal infrastructure funding plan. In light of negative economic headwinds facing the economy, the timeline for infrastructure spending should be expedited in order to provide much-needed stimulus;

- Ensure that the federal government's new 10-year plan contains important social and economic development tools. The infrastructure and public transit plan should include:
 - Provisions for made-in-Canada materials and inputs (including sustainable building materials) as a job-creation and skills development lever;
 - Local hiring requirements, especially among under-represented groups (such as women, young workers, Aboriginal people and people of colour) and apprenticeship training quotas;
 - Removal of any prerequisite for private sector involvement as a condition of federal funding support;
 - And steps to ensure public transportation is accessible to Canadians with disabilities.
- The federal government should also consult with community agencies, organizers and low-income advocates on the development of a federal affordable housing strategy. Such a strategy must work within a collaborative federal and provincial funding and implementation framework.

Urban Transit

The modernization of Canada's public transit systems can play a key role in improving the quality of Canadian social life and in responding to climate change. Unifor believes that new investments in infrastructure, specifically public transit, should also be tied to broader economic development objectives. Unifor also encourages the development of industrial competencies that foster industrial dynamism and robust exports.

Passenger Rail

Since the late 1980s Via Rail has been chronically underfunded, which has helped create a vicious circle of declining ridership, shrinking revenues and, because the operation is not deemed viable, calls for further funding cuts. Studies show a high-speed system would be economically feasible in Ontario and Quebec. This efficient and environmentally friendly transport option would not only modernize Canada's transportation mix, it would also help Canada meet its climate goals. Unifor recommends:

- Via Rail's funding be restored to pre-1988 levels, with consideration given to high-frequency rail;
- The federal government develop a national rail strategy which would include a publicly owned and operated national high-speed rail line in the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto corridor, and in other high-traffic routes.

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