

May 14, 2020

Honourable Justin Trudeau  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

**RE: REVISED Canada's Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan**

Dear Right Honourable Prime Minister,

The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) is the voice of the engineering profession in Ontario. We represent Ontario's 85,000 professional engineers and 250,000 engineering graduates. The engineering profession's commitment to safeguarding the public interest has always been extremely important, and in these uncertain times, there is no exception.

Engineers generate wealth for the entire country, through the development and commercialization of new technologies and by designing innovative and sustainable solutions for the benefit of all. Engineers also ensure safety and stability, by designing resilient infrastructure and reliable energy and water systems that Canadians rely on daily. Engineers create opportunities and hope. During this pandemic, engineers have led the redesign of manufacturing processes to create much needed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and ventilators. Engineers use 3D printers to create tens of thousands of face shields and frames for our front-line workers. They are in the med-tech industry working diligently to bio-engineer new medications and a new vaccine to combat COVID-19. In times of crisis, you will always find engineers working tirelessly, in the background, without much accolade, diligently supporting the communities they serve.

Unfortunately, the engineering community has been severely impacted by this pandemic, as thousands of engineering jobs are directly linked to the infrastructure, manufacturing, technology and research and innovation sectors. Key activities such as the development of technical designs, studies, planning, operations management, and construction have ceased. This has not only affected engineers and engineering graduates but the entire Canadian economy.

Engineering knowledge and talent is beyond capable of leading Canada's industries into the future and will play an important role in the immediate, short- and long-term economic recovery of our provinces and country. As such, the federal government must now support the engineering community in rebuilding the engine that drives Canada, and the rest of the country.

Canada's historic funding allocations to Ontario and strategic planning unfortunately fell short of serving the province's needs during this crisis, and we would like to assist in re-introducing resiliency and value in Canada's workforce and systems. To ensure preparedness for future events and build an economy that is strong and benefits all people, it is imperative that new funding allocations provide a sustainable benefit for diverse, future generations by ensuring a targeted focus on **building sustainability, investing in talent development and retention, and fostering innovation.**

We would like to commend the Government of Canada for its leadership to date in addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and taking an inter-ministerial and inter-provincial approach to provide solutions for businesses and individuals alike.

**OSPE would like to provide you and Cabinet with specific recommendations for consideration as part of the government's post COVID-19 economic recovery plan.**

The engineering community believes that Canada's economic recovery plan will be better suited to deliver tangible results if it is considered from a three-phase approach:

- **Phase 1:** Immediate and urgent measures needed today to create the conditions to re-open the economy, looking at strategic multi-sectoral economic levers.
- **Phase 2:** Short-term investments required to sustain the initial economic growth in Phase 1. These measures should support technologies that drive efficiencies and reflect the work force reality post COVID-19.
- **Phase 3:** Additional medium and long-term supports that create a prosperous transition to a knowledge-based, innovative economy that engineers are key in helping create and sustain.

OSPE would like to present the following recommendations, pertaining to **Phase 1**:

### **Immediate and Urgent Actions**

**OSPE believes that the government must prioritize certain actions that will enable the most prosperous recovery for Canada. COVID-19 has taught everyone the great importance of building a resilient economy that is better prepared to withstand unknown threats of this magnitude.**

A resilient economy can be supported by:

- Leveraging Canada's existing assets
- Building the assets that both businesses and workers of the future need to succeed
- Strengthening Canada's competitive advantage

These urgent actions should seek to build a sustainable, resilient, and innovative Canada, where its talent is properly developed and nourished.

#### **1. Work with the provinces and municipalities to prioritize investment in sustainable infrastructure, including pre-design and design activities.**

OSPE believes that proper, smart, and prioritized investment in sustainable infrastructure will help alleviate the economic burden the entire country is facing, while decreasing unemployment rates in several critical sectors of the economy.

The government should prioritize the delivery of federal funds to infrastructure projects that are “**shovel-worthy**” and which have already undergone regulated municipal asset management plans. By immediately utilizing these plans to select projects for investment, the federal government can work with the provinces to reduce application timelines and ensure a speedy and safe recovery. These projects will provide a positive return on investment. It is also imperative that infrastructure is built while still supporting a diverse, and inclusive workforce. Sustainable infrastructure must properly involve all Canadians, including women, Indigenous Peoples and other equity seeking groups.

The federal government should also invest in predesign and design activities. As a precursor to development and construction, design plays a critical role in preparing projects for permit and construction. These activities employ thousands of individuals, including engineers. Activities like these are essential for steady recovery, since they are needed to move projects forward, and can still be carried out respecting social distancing practices.

#### **2. Work with the Ontario Government to upgrade and modernize the digital infrastructure that will ensure businesses and workers succeed.**

COVID-19 has showed all of us that technology and high capacity infrastructure is no longer a luxury, but a necessity for both businesses and consumers to engage in today's economy. Unfortunately, access to high-speed internet is inconsistent or not available to many Canadians. In rural areas, CRTC data suggest as few as 40.8 per cent of Canadian households have access to high-speed broadband. This has made working remotely challenging to certain businesses and individuals, having an impact on economic productivity.

In an environment geared towards e-commerce and online learning solutions, we commend the government for prioritizing access to broadband internet to all Canadians, keeping in mind the need to properly connect remote

and rural communities. Once construction sites open, investment in digital infrastructure will also ensure that certain simple practices and permit issuing is kept online, in order to help maintain physical distancing protocols.

As digital becomes embedded into business models and operations, it is imperative that all of Canada's engineering companies have the capacity to operate in the new ecosystem. There is a clear chasm that exists between organizations and companies in their digital capacity. Funding digitization will enable the government to close some of the gaps that exist and keep business operating and safeguard engineering jobs in the province.

### 3. Support local manufacturing innovation and production

Manufacturing is a cornerstone of our modern economy. Accounting for approximately \$174 billion of our GDP, manufacturing represents more than 10% of Canada's total GDP. As Canada's manufacturing engine, it is imperative that both provincial and federal orders of government work together to support this sector. To date, the Government of Ontario has launched a procurement tool that will remove barriers and leverage Ontario's manufacturing capacity in the fight against COVID-19.

The federal and provincial governments should refocus investment in "Made-In Canada-" solutions and products. This could be achieved by working across orders of government to identify nationally strategic products and services and establish a minimum level of domestic production of these. Items such as medical supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE), food, energy, and other essentials should be included.

The uptake of technology and digitization will improve the sectors ability to be able to switch production to respond to consumer demand more quickly, not only in times of crisis but also in response to market shifts. For economic recovery it is critical that engineering expertise be deployed to ensure the safety and optimization of innovative solutions within industrial spaces. The Federal Government should work with the Ontario Government to provide additional advanced manufacturing (AM) focused programs with potential financial incentives for Canadian companies to enhance their competitiveness both domestically and internationally. Supporting businesses in improving current manufacturing processes and methods, developing, and implementing digital technologies and focusing on developing more sustainable and energy-efficient products, will help create resiliency in this sector and improve Canada's export potential.

OSPE believes that these recommendations are essential for the economic recovery of our province. We look forward to working with the government to further develop these recommendations. If you have any additional questions please contact Stuart Atkinson, OSPE Policy and Government Relations Lead at [satkinson@ospe.on.ca](mailto:satkinson@ospe.on.ca) or 416-223-9961 ext. 225.

Sincerely,



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#### CC:

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