



BUILDING BETTER INFRASTRUCTURE

November 19, 2021

Alberta's
NDP Caucus

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Message from **NDP Infrastructure Critic Thomas Dang**

Albertans use public infrastructure each and every day. When you're driving to work or picking up the kids from practice, you're driving on a public road. When you take the kids to school, they're learning in a school built by public funds. When you need life-saving care, you're receiving it in a hospital built by all Albertans, through their government. And whether you're picking up essential goods like groceries, or clothes at the mall, almost everything we rely on - our supply chain - is delivered on public infrastructure.

Over the last eight years, through the administrations of both Premiers Rachel Notley and Jason Kenney, the Government of Alberta has spent on average over \$7 billion a year on infrastructure. What projects the government prioritizes and builds in your community matters to all Albertans. We need a plan and projects that equip us for generations to come. It is those projects that will help define Alberta's future.

How infrastructure projects are selected, and the considerations that go into those decisions, have evolved over time in Alberta and around the world. Thirty years ago, decision makers gave relatively little attention to how infrastructure would hold up in response to climate change and resulting extreme weather events. Today, ensuring that we build resilient infrastructure isn't just a good idea, it's a necessity. And it's good economics. Consider that the World Economic Forum estimates that every dollar invested to build

resilience into infrastructure generates four dollars of economic value.

Alberta has a long history of entrepreneurship and innovation, and we need to take that same spirit of creativity to how we think about building Alberta's future.

In late October, the UCP government introduced a new piece of legislation, the Infrastructure Accountability Act, that establishes the exclusive criteria to determine which projects move forward.

This proposal is our response to the UCP government's vision. Their proposal is a look in the rear-view mirror. It would lock-in risk and limit our ability to be economically nimble and for our communities to thrive in the coming decades. What's more, the UCP proposal fails to take into account direct input that they heard in consultations with Albertans. As a result, their proposal has big omissions. We can and we must do better.

I would like to thank the Albertans who met with me to discuss this short proposal and look forward to engaging with more of you in the days and weeks to come.

Sincerely,
- Thomas Dang

Response to Government Policy

On October 25, 2021, the UCP government tabled Infrastructure Accountability Act, and as of the release of this proposal, that legislation is currently before the Alberta legislature.

In their own words, the government notes that Alberta will be only the second province to “legislate prioritization criteria for its capital plan decision-making”. In doing so, the government is establishing criteria exclusivity. Simply put, if important criteria aren’t included in this legislation, then those factors can’t be considered by government when prioritizing infrastructure projects. Therefore, getting the criteria right is essential.

The proposed legislation would also require the government develop a 20-year strategic capital plan. With an average capital spend on infrastructure of over \$7 billion a year, we need to think strategically about how we allocate more than \$140 billion dollars. These are generational investments decisions that will shape our collective future.

While the proposed criteria for prioritizing infrastructure projects put forward by the UCP government includes both important and obvious considerations, like improving health and safety or improving the delivery of programs and services, what is not included is a matter of serious concern.

As with many government initiatives, the UCP government did consult with Albertans in the summer of 2021 in advance of introducing this legislation. The government likewise released a What We Heard Document, that catalogues feedback. What is surprising to Albertans is that important feedback was not included.

To put it bluntly: the UCP government listened, and then didn’t act.

Our proposals to improve this legislation, and get the prioritization criteria right, benefited from listening to Albertans and key stakeholders. We can and we must do better.



Proposals

We are putting forward three proposals to improve the project prioritization criteria for public infrastructure projects in Alberta. These proposals are designed with Alberta's future in mind and would ensure that the Government of Alberta is working in partnership to build a stronger province.

NEW CRITERIA

- 1 Alignment with Regional and Municipal Plans
- 2 Furthering Reconciliation with Indigenous People
- 3 GHG Emissions Reductions



NEW CRITERIA 1 ALIGNMENT WITH REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL PLANS

Working with Alberta's municipalities in partnership should be a key priority for the Government of Alberta. Unfortunately, the UCP government chose to exclude consideration of regional and municipal infrastructure plans when determining which projects to prioritize and fund. They made this decision, despite requiring municipalities to develop long term infrastructure plans and submit them to the government of Alberta. This makes no sense. The province should work in partnership with municipalities, not ignore their valuable insights and strategic plans.

Ensuring coordination between the Government of Alberta and municipalities can only lead to positive results: stronger economic growth, more jobs, and a better quality of life for Albertans.

In consultations with Albertans, the Government's What We Heard Document summarizes the importance of partnership. It reads in part:

"Through engagement, we learned that:

- *The criteria used to evaluate capital projects should be clearly defined, consistent, and in alignment with regional and municipal planning."*

Ensuring that regional and municipal plans are criteria that the government must consider when prioritizing projects is self-evident. It is also an important criteria that is included in Ontario's legislation, the only other Canadian province to legislate prioritization criteria for capital plan decision-making.



NEW CRITERIA 2 FURTHERING RECONCILIATION WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Furthering reconciliation with Indigenous people is a collective responsibility for all Albertans and should be a key priority for the Government of Alberta.

During Premier Rachel Notley's term in government, important funding streams like the First Nations Regional Drinking Water Tie-in Program were created, with \$100 million in infrastructure funding to improve drinking water in Indigenous communities. This innovative and collaborative approach saw local water commissions, or the water supply of municipalities, extend their services to First Nations. Ending boil water advisories by bringing clean water to reserve is both a social and economic imperative. This initiative was one small step on the long path towards reconciliation, but it was important. As a province, we should continue with this work, in collaboration and partnership.

Indigenous communities must have a direct voice and be considered in infrastructure priorities that affect their communities and populations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action highlight many important areas where infrastructure will play a vital and supportive role - from appropriate economic and resource investments to educational infrastructure, to environmental protections for communities feeling the effects of climate change, to social investments in appropriate housing and health and wellness infrastructure and in cultural and ceremonial space. These are necessary considerations for Alberta's future.

As the UCP government charts a 20-year strategic capital plan and enshrines in legislation criteria to prioritize infrastructure projects, reconciliation must be a consideration. Alberta's future depends on it.

NEW CRITERIA 3 GHG EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS

The buildings sector is one of largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Alberta. Cities, industry, materials suppliers, and infrastructure planners are looking to innovate and reduce emissions to contribute to a net-zero economy. These efforts are the only way to get to a net-zero future and the province has a role to prioritize projects that result in lower emissions.

It is almost inconceivable that the UCP would establish criteria and develop a strategic capital plan that would take Alberta into the 2040s, while simultaneously enshrining through legislation that emissions reductions cannot be considered as a criteria when selecting infrastructure projects.

Alberta's largest industry has committed to being net carbon neutral by 2050, and they need a partner in the government of Alberta, not a roadblock. ESG leadership is more than a talking point. The province has real leverage and can show leadership through infrastructure investments. One of the first lenses on new investment globally is a net-zero lens. The government has an opportunity with its infrastructure bill to position Alberta as a leader in this area.

The Future Cities Canada report called for increased infrastructure investments that take carbon reduction into account. The Official Opposition could not agree more. Reducing our GHG emissions should be a priority.

We need the Government of Alberta to work in partnership with municipalities, industry, and other stakeholders to address climate change. Ignoring GHG reductions in a \$140 billion, 20-year capital plan is a strategic mistake and does nothing to prepare for Alberta's future.

Next Steps & Conclusion

A CONCLUDING MESSAGE FROM NDP INFRASTRUCTURE CRITIC THOMAS DANG

The UCP government's Infrastructure Accountability Act is currently before the legislature, and as part of our Alberta's Future initiative, we will be bringing these proposals forward to the people's house.

When the legislature resumes sitting, we will offer amendments to expand the project prioritization criteria to include consideration of:

- **Regional and Municipal Plans**
- **Indigenous Reconciliation**
- **Emissions Reductions**

We also want to hear from more Albertans.

Are there other key prioritization criteria that you think should be included?

Are there other changes you'd like to see in this legislation that will chart the infrastructure path for our province for the next 20 years?

We are willing, ready, and eager to listen. Let's work together to build a better province.

Sincerely,
Thomas Dang



Give Us Feedback

WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK

Alberta's Future is an initiative to build a new economy that benefits every person in our province. We want you to share your thoughts and ideas on proposals like this one.

We welcome you to submit your own proposals too!

All of our proposals and those contributed by Albertans like you can be found at **AlbertasFuture.ca**. On that website, you can also register for in-person and online conversations happening right across Alberta.

We are also hosting this conversation on social media, using the hashtag **#ABFuture**

**Engage directly with NDP Leader Rachel Notley
on YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook**



@RachelNotley

