

PIRNETNEWS

Building and growing for a better tomorrow

March 2007

Volume 3 No. 2

From the Minister

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Minister's message



The opening months of 2007 have been a busy time here at the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

My “ReBuilding Ontario” tour started in Sudbury and North Bay in late January, and continued on to communities around the province through February, visiting Port Hope, Belleville, Kingston, Sarnia, Windsor and Hamilton. It has been great to see how excited Ontarians are to be working with us and our partners to rebuild our province’s vital public infrastructure. And I’ve received some very important feedback on how we can continue towards our goal of making Ontario the best possible place to live for generations to come.

As well, PIR has been busy with two important projects that will help Ontarians in small urban and rural communities meet the challenges of strengthening public infrastructure: The Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (COMRIF) agreement ([click here](#)) and the Rural Infrastructure Investment Initiative (RIII). There have also been some important developments with our partners at the Greater Toronto Transit Authority, including some significant appointments that will strengthen the GTTA as we work together to enhance transit in Ontario’s most populous area. You can read about all three of these topics in this issue of PIR NetNews.

One of the great things about the McGuinty government’s commitment to protecting the environment is that it is a team effort – all areas of government are doing their part And PIR is no exception. For example, early February saw the launch of a very important program for all Ontarians. Working in conjunction with the Ministry of the Environment, the LCBO and The Beer Store, our ministry launched “Bag it back” – a comprehensive deposit return program that will strengthen our province’s recycling system while helping us ensure a cleaner, greener environment. For some highlights of the “Bag it back” launch, click [here](#).

February also marked the occasion of another very important environmental initiative: the dedication of 1,500 acres of ecologically significant land for the expansion of [Rouge Park in Markham](#), a parcel of

land that will be preserved as part of Ontario's 1.8-million acre Greenbelt. Environmental preservation and enhancement is a key part of our ministry's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, and announcements like the Rouge Park dedication will allow Ontarians to enjoy our valuable greenspaces for many generations to come.

Both the dedication of the new land at Rouge Park, and the "Bag it back" launch emphasize an important aspect of our work here at PIR. We often speak of the vital importance of rebuilding our province's hospitals, schools, roads and many other pieces of our valuable public infrastructure. But at the same time, we need to keep in mind that a big part of this process involves preserving and enhancing Ontario's environment for now – and for the long run.

After all, we owe it to Ontarians to continually refine our world-class recycling system, and to expand our parks and natural areas so that everyone in our province can become true stewards of our own environment.

David Caplan
Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal

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‘Bag it back’ encourages Ontarians to return empty containers to The Beer Store for a refund, which means less waste going to landfill. By enhancing the Blue Box program’s effectiveness, deposit return will help increase Ontario’s waste diversion rate.

“I am really proud that Ontario is the first jurisdiction in North America to have both a widespread, comprehensive Blue Box program and a deposit return program,” said Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal David Caplan. “We know that through the ‘Bag it back’ program, we will have more glass containers recycled into higher-end uses, including new glass bottles, fibreglass and polar fleece. It is a win for municipalities, a win for the environment and a win for Ontarians.”

The LCBO, The Beer Store, Vincor Canada (operator of The Wine Rack), Andrew Peller Ltd. (Vineyards Estate Wines), and other beverage alcohol retailers in Ontario are all participating in the ‘Bag it back’ program, which is supported by the LCBO-led public education campaign, with print, online, TV and radio advertisements, a website (bagitback.ca) and a toll free information line (1-877-7RETURN).

As part of the program, Ontario consumers will pay a deposit when they purchase beverage alcohol – including wine, spirits and beer. They can then return empty containers to The Beer Store for a full refund. The Beer Store already operates one of the most successful container return programs in the world.

For photographs of the event, click [here](#).

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The Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund agreement – known as COMRIF -- targets the infrastructure needs of small urban centres and rural municipalities with populations of less than 250,000.

On January 10, 2007, the federal and provincial governments jointly announced the third round of COMRIF's funding.

This funding represents \$93 million in 72 communities across the province, which, when combined with municipal investments, provides a total of almost \$140 million to public infrastructure improvements in these communities.

“COMRIF has made a significant contribution to Ontario's small town and rural infrastructure and we are looking forward to partnerships in the development of future rounds,” said Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, David Caplan. “Our government is moving forward in providing a solid foundation for local infrastructure improvements and economic growth in communities across Ontario.”

The five key funding priorities through all three COMRIF application intakes included safe drinking water, wastewater, significant improvements to local roads and bridges and waste management.

The five-year partnership between the Canadian and Ontario governments will see each government investing up to \$298 million to improve public infrastructure in rural and small urban communities. With municipal investments, the program is expected to stimulate up to \$900 million in capital investments.

Through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, municipal leaders have been involved in the design of the COMRIF initiative from the beginning.

For more information on COMRIF, and details on specific municipal investments under Intake Three,

visit: <http://www.comrif.ca/>

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MacIsaac and Fenn bring vision to Greater Toronto Transportation Authority



Former Burlington mayor Rob MacIsaac was named the first chair of the new Greater Toronto Transportation Authority in October 2006, and has wasted no time in setting forward a strong vision for transit in the GTA and Hamilton since then.

“I intend to be bold in proposing a world-class transportation system,” says MacIsaac, pointing out that the new body will for the first time strive to create a seamless transit system running from Oshawa to Hamilton. This area contains two-thirds of Ontario’s population and many of them are currently “wasting endless hours commuting.”

During his three terms as Burlington mayor, MacIsaac modernized the city’s waterfront and worked with McMaster University to bring a post-secondary presence to Burlington. While accomplishing this, he found time to work with the Central Ontario Smart Growth Panel, chair the Greenbelt Task Force and establish a Mayor’s Transit Caucus with four other regional mayors.

“The GTTA is really an extension of the work I began as mayor,” says MacIsaac. “We need to rethink service delivery in terms of a regional city, or the Greater Toronto Area as a city of cities.” He points out that the old pattern of commuting in and out of Toronto has already been replaced by a pattern of people commuting in all directions to a variety of communities.

The GTTA’s senior management ranks received another boost in early February, when Michael Fenn was announced as the Authority’s new CEO. Fenn brings almost 20 years of experience in Ontario public service to the position, including Deputy Minister positions at both the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Ministry of Community Safety. He has also served as the city manager for Burlington and the chief administrative officer of the regional municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth.

“Michael is known for customer focus and innovation in the public service sector,” said MacIsaac. “His

expertise in transportation, public transit and municipal finance will be essential as we develop a long-range transportation plan and investment strategy for the GTA and Hamilton.”

MacIsaac feels the GTTA has some urgent issues to deal with. Highway congestion is already hurting Ontario’s economy and auto emissions are predicted to increase by 42 per cent in the next two decades with consequent health costs. The solution to both problems is to reduce the overwhelming dominance of car travel.

“The GTTA is not about forcing people out their cars,” says MacIsaac. “It is about making transit competitive with the automobile. If it is convenient, comfortable and fast, then people will choose transit over cars. Transit is important, but a lot of different tools are required, including some more roads.”

On a practical level, the GTTA’s first task will be the development of an integrated long-range transportation plan. “The plan will be developed in consultation with the broadest possible range of stakeholders,” says MacIsaac. “Once the GTTA’s Board is fully constituted we will seek input directly from a cross-section of stakeholders, including students, seniors, persons with disabilities, and representatives of labour organizations and industry.”

The GTTA’s work will be guided by the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, released in June 2006. The Plan provides the government’s vision for building stronger, more prosperous communities by better managing growth in this fast growing region. The plan sets out the policies that will help guide the GTTA’s planning and development of an integrated transportation system. The aim is to ensure coordination and consistency among land use and transportation planning, and to co-ordinate investment by all levels of government and other transportation stakeholders.

MacIsaac has a reputation as a consensus-builder who encourages respectful dialogue. He looks forward to meeting with the GTTA’s first board in March. Its members have been nominated by the six municipal and regional councils, including Hamilton, and will include both politicians and informed citizens.

“I’m confident the board will take a broad view of regional transportation and will work in good faith to accomplish together what each could not accomplish working alone.”

Once the board is established, a series of advisory committees will be set up to involve stakeholders, especially business and environmental leaders, in GTTA policy making. “Ideally, the plan will have such broad support that no one will be able to ignore its merits. The way you do that is to bring stakeholders in.”

“My philosophy in public policy is to pay attention to the environment, the economy and people as the three pillars,” says MacIsaac. “We need a plan that will build a cleaner environment and better economy without the millstone of a dysfunctional transit system. I’d like (the GTTA) to have a brand that stands for quality and convenience in public transportation.”

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Minister of Government Services Gerry Phillips made the announcement, noting that the new land brings the McGuinty government's total contribution to Rouge Park to 5,500 acres (22.3 square kilometres), and makes the park one of the largest natural preserves in an urban area in North America.

"Ontarians want to know their communities will be healthy and clean — that local natural areas will be protected and accessible," said Phillips. "By expanding greenspace and preserving natural areas, we're creating a legacy for families to enjoy for years to come."

Rouge Park is part of the provincial Greenbelt, 1.8 million acres of permanently protected greenspace in Ontario.

"I am thrilled at the dedication of this land to expand the park," said Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti. "Rouge Park is an important part of Markham's natural heritage."

Last summer, the McGuinty government also announced that it was protecting 500 acres of ecologically significant land in the Town of Markham with the new Bob Hunter Memorial Park, part of the Rouge Park family.

"Rouge Park is a reservoir of biodiversity in Ontario's Greenbelt, and this substantial addition of land helps us protect large natural areas for healthier animal and plant communities," observed Gord Weeden, Chair of the Rouge Park Alliance, the park's board of directors. "The continuous show of support from the Ontario Government has helped us build the unique and important park you see

today.”

Phillips also thanked the Rouge Park Alliance in his remarks for the group's efforts in working to ensure that people in Markham and the surrounding area will be able to enjoy the park for hiking and camping, as well as its beach and spectacular views, well into the future.

“Protecting greenspace in Ontario gives families more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors,” said Phillips. “And it also ensures that our children and our grandchildren have a healthy, vibrant and beautiful natural environment for generations to come.”

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