



**Labourers' International Union of North America
(LiUNA)
Ontario Provincial District Council**

Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Economic and Fiscal Update Act

Municipalities, Construction, and Building

July 22, 2020

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Introduction:

The Labourer's International Union of North America (LiUNA) has over half a million members in North America with more than 130,000 here in Canada. In collaboration with government and employers, LiUNA fights for worker safety, innovative skills training, and best in class wages and benefits. In Ontario, LiUNA has a long and storied history striving to improve conditions for our members and ensure they have meaningful, safe, and well-paid employment. Our approach is always positive, proactive, and progressive. We believe in working collaboratively with government and employers for our mutual benefit.

From hospitals to highways, our members play a large role in major public and private sector construction projects. LiUNA members are committed to building a better province for all Ontarians. We have anchored construction of the watermain, transit systems, and housing developments that form the backbone of the province. We are proud of the work our members do, and the value we provide to Ontario.

Construction Safety:

LiUNA's core mandate is to protect the health and safety of our members and ensure that they return home safely at the end of their workday. It is a mandate which we take seriously. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we answered the government's call for assistance in building essential infrastructure such as hospitals. Our members overwhelmingly supported these projects – we understood their importance to our community. We worked with government and public health officials to create COVID-relevant safety protocols which reflected the needs and challenges faced on jobsites. We ensured these policies could be quickly implemented for the safety of our workers and the communities we serve.

We understand that the government had, and continues to face, a very challenging task to balance their ongoing infrastructure needs with the safety of workers, and the community at large. LiUNA continues to prioritize the health and safety of our members and their communities. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, we felt that the government responsibly met the safety needs of the construction industry. Their collaborative approach to implementing safety measures ensured that the voices of our workers were heard.

The added inspectors and increased inspections by the Ministry of Labour helped inspire confidence in our members that their jobsites were safe and adhering to proper guidelines. The Premier's message that he would shut down unsafe workplaces resonated with our members and gave them faith that the government was on their side. We will continue to protect our members, and applaud the government's commitment to keeping Ontario working in a responsible way.



Reopening Ontario's Economy Through Meaningful Employment

We find hope in Ontario's move towards Stage 3 of the government's reopening plan. Nevertheless, it is critical that we remain vigilant about health and safety procedures in the coming weeks – complacency is not an option. We must also find safe ways to return to building up our communities, homes and infrastructure. Our neighbourhoods depend on it.

LiUNA's members are eager to return to full-time, meaningful work. We take pride in the work that we do. Our organization has adjusted procedures, including at our construction skills training and on-site huddles, to educate our members on the protocols needed to work safely in this new environment. LiUNA believes that this government is highly focused on job creation, and eager to assist Ontarians in returning to full-time, stable employment in the wake of adversity.

The government's recent legislation such as the *Building Transit Faster Act* and the *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act* will reduce obstacles which would otherwise hinder the province's economic recovery. They demonstrate the Ontario government's commitment to returning our province to our role as Canada's economic powerhouse. Most importantly, they will help Ontarians put food on the table in an honest and meaningful way.

The streamlining of the environmental assessment and expropriation processes – as outlined in the two bills previously mentioned – will maintain a fair procedure, without unduly impeding necessary projects. Major infrastructure projects alter the layouts of their surroundings – it is inevitable but required for safety. What is important is that fair compensation is awarded to those affected by these changes. Environmental concerns must be properly addressed through evidence-based decisions. These concerns, however, must be addressed in a reasonable and timely manner so as not to delay projects – and ultimately, to reduce costs to the taxpayer.

The province's commitment to transit-oriented community building is a forward-thinking proposition. Ontario's four priority transit projects will build up strong neighbourhoods, enhance accessibility, and enable residents to easily access affordable public transit for work, family, and fun.

The *Building Transit Faster Act* is a key example of government legislation which supports the necessary investment in public transit. The bill enables the government to finish what they started – projects which this growing region needs – in a fair and responsible manner. Transit users do not want more delays, they want a reliable transit system. The Act will help to deliver that.



There will always be critics – naysayers who don't like the plan, the investment, or changes to their neighbourhoods. The vast majority of users, however, just want it built. The steps outlined in the Bill help us to start projects sooner, finish them faster, and deliver enhanced capacity to the GTA's overburdened transit system. Efficient and accessible public transit makes life convenient for its riders, which include many of our members. The four major GTA transit projects offer choice to thousands of Ontario families about when and how to get around. For commuters, it means more time spent with family, and less time travelling. These projects were undoubtedly needed to accommodate growing ridership, but they are now critical from an economic rebuilding perspective.

LiUNA's Role in Rebuilding the Economy

As Ontarians, we understand the need for infrastructure construction to continue at a reasonable pace. Projects in healthcare and transit infrastructure, for example, have proven themselves to be critical to keeping our province moving. As labourers who proudly build these projects, we are eager for work to begin.

Like many workers across the province, our members have been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Jobsite closures have led to struggling families – those projects are an important source of income for our members.

LiUNA believes that government investment in transit, healthcare, and utility infrastructure offers multiple benefits as we seek ways to rebuild our economy. The projects will offer stable work to thousands of labourers and secondary industries in the GTHA and around the province. Additionally, the recovery effort will produce the much-needed infrastructure to support our growing community for years to come.

Legislative and regulatory changes are needed to bring this goal to life – and the government has demonstrated a commitment to doing so.

The solution would serve more than just LiUNA and our members. This would serve the hundreds of thousands of construction employees working around the province and their families. The primary and secondary jobs created through construction and major infrastructure projects will have a meaningful and measurable impact on the lives of Ontarians. It will support the countless small businesses which will benefit from transit access. This investment in rebuilding the province will create the jobs we need today, while providing the modern infrastructure we need for tomorrow.