

Roads are Critical to Alberta's Quality of Life

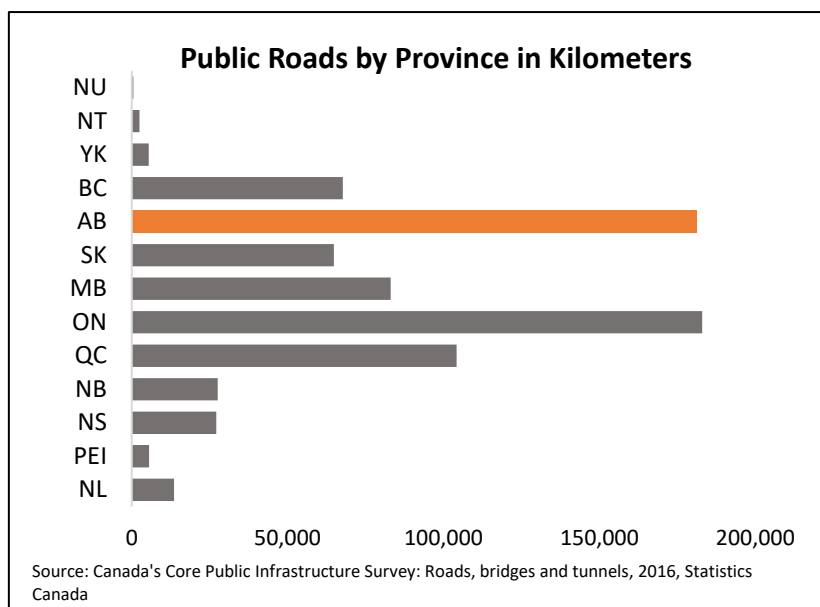
The personal convenience, economic prosperity and social benefits enabled by roads is an essential foundation for a well-functioning and modern society. The Alberta transportation sector contributes \$11.2 billion annually to our economy and employs 130,000 people. Unfortunately, the management of roads as a public good funded through general revenues has left Alberta roads vulnerable to competing interests which has resulted in the deterioration of our roads and highways.

The Alberta Road Builders and Heavy Construction Association is committed to providing principled and compelling solutions to ensure Alberta's road infrastructure supports a vibrant economic climate, and enhances the quality of life of Albertans.

New roads, new tools, and new approach are needed

It is no coincidence that Alberta has, per capita, the highest share of the national road network as well as the highest share of GDP. Roads have been critical to unlocking so much of our economic potential, and every economic sector has benefitted from investments in transportation infrastructure.

Despite this fundamental importance to our lives and livelihoods, the investment of funds and focus from the provincial government has not been adequately sustained in the last decade. We must get away from the year-to-year politicized approach for determine which roads are built. The status quo approach for planning, building, maintaining, and funding our road network is no longer acceptable.



Alberta needs a long-term comprehensive plan for our road network, with stable and predictable funding that will enable us to build and maintain it efficiently. This plan needs to begin with a vision for the economic and social goals we want to achieve, bring in all stakeholders and best practices from other jurisdictions in developing effective strategies, and then make the plan public and commit to it beyond any one or four-year political cycles.

The transportation department has always done long-term planning, but the results can no longer be so conditional on political exigencies and budgetary fluctuations. The political leadership at the Legislature needs to set the strategic direction, determine the funding model, put an effective longer-term tendering process in place, and then let the department and private sector manage the execution of it.

\$7 BILLION

is the replacement value of Alberta's provincial highway network

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The funding model needs to be truly predictable, so that municipalities and the private sector can maximize the savings that come from being able to confidently and efficiently plan longer-term. Departments within the provincial government must collaborate with each other, municipalities, and private sector partners to ensure our investments enhance the long-term resiliency of our network as well, whether it be in terms of economic uncertainty, natural disasters, or climate change.

The plan must be multi-modal; Alberta's air and rail resources in particular must be integrated into it. It must also be a plan that makes Alberta adaptable to emerging technologies. To some extent Alberta is already a leader in welcoming innovation like Artificial Intelligence (AI)-assisted driving – we need to ensure our regulatory environment makes Alberta an even more desirable jurisdiction for developing and implementing transportation technologies.

Finally, we must be open to innovation and adopt the most effective means to build and maintain our road network. Public-private partnerships are a way for government to partner with the private sector to share the risks and rewards of providing public infrastructure. Alberta should adopt public-private partnership to increase efficiency, encourage innovation and leverage the expertise of the private sector to deliver on public roads while freeing up funds for other priorities.

Recommendations:

The ARHCA is advocating the following recommendations for the Alberta government.

1. Commit to and share publicly a long-term vision and strategy for the sustainability and future of Alberta's road network.
2. Provide long term, stable and predictable funding to manage and maintain Alberta's road infrastructure.
3. Ensure an integrated and multi-modal approach to transportation infrastructure policy and planning.
4. Create a policy and regulatory environment conducive to technological advances in the transportation sector.
5. Encourage greater collaboration between the public and private sector to better use available expertise for the best outcome in managing and maintaining Alberta's road infrastructure.