

Quick, Clean and Green

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02/04/2009 8:00 AM

Smart spending needed on sustainable water infrastructure

In the Federal budget announced last week, the government committed \$4 billion to infrastructure spending. However, there is a risk this funding will focus on 'shovel-ready' projects and be spent on unnecessary initiatives. To qualify as wise investment of taxpayer money, spending not only needs to be deployed quickly, but must benefit the long-term interests of Canadians.

There is a risk that in the rush to get shovels in the ground, unwise investments will leave behind undesirable legacies of unnecessary infrastructure—damaging the environment and saddling Canadians with new debt. As Avery Shenfeld, senior economist at CIBC World Markets recently said, “we don’t want to have a program of digging holes and filling them in again. We want to make sure that the assets that are left behind are ones that Canadians need.”

Smart spending on sustainable water infrastructure can create thousands of green jobs, reduce our \$31-billion water infrastructure deficit and conserve Canada’s water. These investments can be deployed quickly with lasting economic and environmental benefits.

While other countries are ahead of Canada in terms of sustainable infrastructure, some Canadian municipalities are recognizing the far-reaching benefits. For example, by investing in water conservation in the mid-'90s, the Capital Regional District has been able to defer the cost of a \$150-million water treatment plant originally projected for 2013 until 2050 or beyond. In Ontario, the region of Peel plans to defer \$112 million in new water-supply infrastructure through a 12-year water-efficiency plan costing a mere \$33 million. Further, a recent study shows that by increasing water efficiency by 20 percent, the province of Ontario could save enough electricity to power 95 percent of all homes in Toronto each year.

The benefits of spending on sustainable water infrastructure are laid out in a new proposal by a unique partnership of professional water associations and water experts. The report, *Clean Water, Green Jobs: A Stimulus Package for Sustainable Water Infrastructure Investments*, was submitted to the Canadian federal government late last year in anticipation of the January 2009 budget.

The report’s authors highlight the need to repair and upgrade existing built water infrastructure, much of which is at least 50 years old and close to cracking and crumbling. Addressing this existing infrastructure deficit would

support construction work for thousands of Canadians. Moreover, the report demonstrates how wise investments in green infrastructure and water efficiency can avoid the need to build unnecessary and unsustainable new pipelines, pumps and treatment plants in the future, thereby saving money and avoiding further infrastructure debt. There is also the added benefit of reducing water pollution to help ensure cleaner water for all Canadians.

Similarly, these investments would provide thousands of additional green jobs in important local service sectors such as plumbing, landscaping, engineering, building and design. In economic advice submitted to President Obama's transition team, the Alliance for Water Efficiency illustrated how investments in water efficiency can be deployed much more rapidly than traditional infrastructure projects and yield 15,000 to 22,000 new jobs for each \$1.2 billion spent. Their report states: "Water/energy efficiency programs require much less time to plan and deploy than do large infrastructure works. By directing stimulus investment into water/energy efficiency program deployment, the new administration can hit the ground running while it mobilizes resources for larger public works projects."

A further economic benefit of investment in sustainable water infrastructure would be the advancement of innovative water technologies, which would be a huge boon for Canadian businesses looking to establish a foothold in the global water tech market—currently valued at US\$360 billion and forecasted to rise to US\$1.6 trillion in 10 years.

These are hard times for Canadians. They are looking to their governments for leadership in resuscitating the Canadian economy, but they still expect their taxpayer money to be used wisely and produce lasting and positive legacies. Government investment in sustainable water infrastructure can do just that. It can create green jobs quickly, protect our watersheds, and foster new economic opportunities in emerging global markets.

Let's not miss this once-in-a-century opportunity. M

Visit gordonwatergroup.ca to find a copy of Clean Water, Green Jobs.

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