April 22, 2020

The Honourable Catherine McKenna, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
180 Kent Street, Suite 1100
Ottawa, ON K1P 0B6

The Honourable Seamus O’Regan, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Natural Resources
580 Booth Street, 21st Floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 0E4

Dear Ministers:

On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of businesses of all sizes in every sector of the economy that we represent, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce is grateful for your government’s continued engagement with the business community as Canada continues to manage the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. I am writing regarding your government’s intention to use infrastructure projects to create jobs and help the Canadian economy recover from this crisis.

We are supportive of pulling forward budgeted infrastructure funds from future years to generate economic activity and create jobs for Canadians. We believe that investments this year and next in the right projects will support immediate economic growth while increasing Canada’s long-term productivity.

The best source for shovel-ready projects that support Canadian competitiveness is your government’s National Trade Corridors Fund (NTCF) administered by Transport Canada. The NTCF was provided $2 billion over 11 years, 1.1 per cent of the funding available under the $180 billion long-term plan. Due to the high demand and relatively low proportion of projects funded, dozens of shovel-worthy projects were unsuccessful in previous calls for proposals. We encourage you to work with Transport Canada and fund projects that have already applied for funding through this program. NTCF projects have the virtue of crowding in funding from the private sector and other levels of government.
In addition to these trade-enabling projects, other shovel ready projects that will have both short and long-term economic benefits include those that improve Canada’s digital infrastructure and strengthen Canada’s energy and supply chain resiliency. Collaborating with Canadian municipalities will also help you identify urgent and deferred maintenance projects that can start in the 2020 construction season.

In identifying projects that will create employment and generate growth this year and next, we urge you to establish strict criteria that will distinguish between shovel ready projects and other strategic investments that are better pursued as part of the long-term infrastructure plan.

Finally, as your government continues to consider economic recovery methods, we urge you to avoid any extraneous regulations on already approved projects. In particular, it is clear that there is a significant potential for the private sector to drive a rapid recovery, but its ability to carry out this role will depend on Canada’s regulatory system playing a supporting role. It is imperative that projects navigating the regulatory system, from environmental assessments to permits, are able to proceed in a timely manner. Our members have significant concerns that as regulators adapt to COVID-19, project proponents may face delays that are no fault of their own. In these cases, we ask that the government make every effort to provide timely responses. In circumstances where this does not take place, the government should take steps to ensure that no project runs down the clock during this period. Achieving this will provide much needed regulatory certainty and ensure Canada’s infrastructure led stimulus is rapid and delivers the employment opportunities that many Canadians are now desperately seeking.

Infrastructure spending will play a crucial role in Canada’s economic recovery. As you develop your plan, I would be happy to support those efforts and invite you and your officials to attend a virtual infrastructure roundtable with our member businesses from across the country at your convenience.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Hon. Perrin Beatty, P.C., O.C.
President and Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Chamber of Commerce