



Manitoba Infrastructure Photo

Manitoba Infrastructure can help drive provincial prosperity

By Chris Lorenc

There's a palpable sense of hope spreading across Manitoba as the spread of COVID-19 abates, due to the hard work of citizens and the arrival of vaccines.

Repairing the damage done to many facets of our society, including small businesses, will require an economic revival.

However, sky-rocketing public-debt levels demand shaping a more resilient economy, one capable of producing the sustained growth in government revenues necessary to both pay down deficits and flow adequate funding to our world-class social programs.

In Manitoba, that revenue generation relies heavily on trade. Some 53% of Manitoba's GDP, or about \$37 billion worth of business, is generated from trade-related activities, sustaining roughly 240,000 direct and indirect jobs. Canada's economy is also dependent on international trade. Exports directly and indirectly accounted for some 3 million jobs, or 17% of all employment. Canada's trade-to-GDP ratio was just shy of 65% in 2019.

So, clearly, it is trade that holds the best hope for our provincial and



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national economic revival.

That reality demands a whole-of-government approach. Let's start by asking not just where the public dollars for broad infrastructure investment are being used, but why.

There is an intrinsic connection between trade, infrastructure and prosperity. That is recognized by global 'confidence' indices that assess and rank countries' infrastructure investments, including transportation-asset condition, especially relating to

Trade matters to Manitoba

- Trade accounts for 53% of Manitoba's \$64-billion GDP, supporting some 240,000 jobs
- MB trade stats show our top 3 exports are: wheat - \$1b; pork - \$900m; canola - \$860m
- Our top 3 export markets are: USA - \$9b; China - \$1.4b; Japan - \$815m. Exports get on their way, and imports ultimately arrive, by truck
- Our transportation infrastructure is key to growing our trade profile. Manitoba's highways and bridges need \$9 billion in investment to bring them to good condition

"There is the infrastructure we want like parks and hockey rinks, the infrastructure we need like schools and hospitals and then there is the infrastructure that pays for these things and that is trade infrastructure."
- Perrin Beatty, President, Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Infrastructure that Matters Most, June 2016

trade gateways and corridors.

Manitoba's economic revival needs the support of a robust provincial trade policy framework that organizes infrastructure investment around 'ROI to GDP' as a core principle to attract investor

interest. The policy must recognize the full potential of the Manitoba Infrastructure department.

Manitoba Infrastructure's value to the economy should be harnessed, and positioned to do much more than managing transportation assets and an annual capital program.

Its mandate should be re-imagined and re-purposed to identify and lead investments that help elevate our provincial global-trade profile. Recognizing the pent-up potential in Manitoba's trade advantage as a geographic hub connected to all four points of the globe by air, land and marine ports, MI's new mandate should task it to:

- identify trade gateways and corridors as key assets for strengthening existing markets and developing new trade partners
- prioritize the infrastructure projects with the greatest ROI to GDP
- ensure an efficient, province-wide system of highways designed to carry heavy trucks and high traffic volumes to support Manitoba's producers and encourage value-added enterprise
- promote a culture of regional

economic development with coordinated regional funding that incents infrastructure investment decisions among proximal municipalities. Canada's other major cities have been attracting investor and site-locator interest for years; it's time our Capital Region, situated strategically to CentrePort got in the game

- ensure existing highways are well-maintained, for the efficient movement of people to jobs and goods to market.

Economies across the globe are on the cusp of reopening.

We can build a more resilient economy, by strengthening ties with existing trade partners and building new relationships in emerging global markets.

Adopting a robust provincial trade policy framework would send a clear signal to the world that Manitoba sees clearly its potential and is ready to invest in a strategy to become a regional trade superpower.

As a keystone province we are geographically positioned for success. Expanding our global trade profile ensures that our economy and social welfare programs don't just benefit, but thrive.

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