

# Forget boundaries, construction group urges

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It's time for a repositioning of Manitoba's role in the global trade network, the province's construction advocates say.

Manitoba Heavy Construction Association president Chris Lorenc sat down with Premier Heather Stefanson on Tuesday morning, surrounded by politicians and industry, for a budget debriefing event.

"We're in the heart of the continent. We're in the heart of the country," Lorenc later told the *Free Press*. "We need to be mindful that that's what the world sees. Forget the... provincial boundaries.



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Manitoba Heavy Construction Association president Chris Lorenc hopes CentrePort will soon be a top pick for business site selectors to recommend clients invest in “because of its proximity to rail, air and marine.”

“We are a global trading bloc. Let’s enhance our capacity to participate.”

The province unveiled a \$4.1 billion, five-year infrastructure plan last month. The strategy allocates more than \$2.5 billion to Manitoba highways, including the twinning of a nearly 20-kilometre stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway east of Winnipeg.

Stefanson did not provide a construction date for the expansion. She’s spoken to Ontario Premier Doug Ford about the matter, she said.

“I would like to see it happen as quickly as possible,” she added. “There’s a lot of different phases and steps to take.”

It's time premiers across Canada get on the same page regarding infrastructure development, Stefanson said.

She is chairwoman of the Council of the Federation, which comprises premiers from each province and territory. Manitoba is hosting the group's meeting in July.

"I would really like to see (infrastructure development) as one of the most important issues that we (premiers) can discuss," Stefanson told the crowd Tuesday.

Having a strong trade corridor is "critical" for the country's future, she later told reporters.

The Canada West Foundation issued a report on a national trade infrastructure plan in May.

International surveys have shown a decline in confidence of Canada's trade infrastructure's reliability and competitiveness at home and abroad for more than a decade, the report states.

Manitoba needs to look at its key trade corridors — those extending to Ontario, Saskatchewan, the North and the United States, along with the Perimeter Highway, Lorenc said.

Manitoba is home to CentrePort Canada, the country's largest trimodal inland port. Ottawa announced \$18 million for the site's new rail park last month.



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The 665-acre rail park will connect businesses to Canadian Pacific Railway's main line northwest of Winnipeg.

Phase 1 — the first of three phases — will cost about \$100 million to develop.

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Spending on Manitoba's infrastructure network will produce job growth in "sectors we're not even imagining," Lorenc said, adding the province holds a bounty of critical minerals.

In a speech, Stefanson emphasized the importance of growing the economy and infrastructure as a key part of that growth.

Manitoba's infrastructure strategy includes 525 highway projects spanning 1,862 kilometres of upgrades, including three new interchanges along the Perimeter Highway — at McGillivray Boulevard, St. Mary's Road and St. Anne's Road.

The plan outlines six major highway twinning projects, 97 projects to upgrade bridges and other structures and 214 water-related initiatives, including dam rehabilitations and pump station replacements.

More than \$75 million is set for northern airport infrastructure.

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