

Ontario faces \$100B infrastructure gap

If Ontario were your house, it would be on the verge of falling apart. The roof needs resingling, the electrical system is ailing and the furnace is on its last legs. Forget about the fact the bathroom hasn't been redone since the 1970s.

You've taken loans and are maxing out credit cards to pay for just part of what needs to be done. A Metroland Special Report shows that's the situation for Ontario municipalities as they struggle to fix our crumbling infrastructure — the roads, buildings, water and sewer systems that underpin our daily life.

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Special report

You're getting a lot of new neighbours over the next few years as Ontario grows, but no one is sure how to pay for them.

All those new residents are going to need pipes to bring water to their homes, libraries and community centres in which to spend time and roads on which to drive. There isn't enough money to build it all.

The Greater Golden Horseshoe area's population alone will swell from eight million to 11.5 million by 2031 and the towns, villages and cities surveyed in a Metroland special report estimate they will need tens of billions of dollars they don't have to accommodate that growth.

Some of Ontario's fast-growing towns and cities are even threatening to effectively shut their doors if the province that ordered them to take on new residents can't provide them with more money to undertake desperately needed construction, renewal and repairs.

'We will only proceed if we have the infrastructure coming ... We will draw a line in the sand.'

The government's Places to Grow plan (see sidebar) aims to promote intensification and make sprawl a thing of the past, but all those new residents and employees will still need infrastructure that municipalities say they don't have the ability to provide.

Infrastructure is the underpinning of every Ontario community, the public facilities that form the physical backbone that supports daily life. But there's a gap of about \$100 billion between what's needed and what's available in funds.

The Metroland special report shows communities are already pressed to their limits, with many in debt due to lack of funds for existing infrastructure. Now, they're balking at the new government-imposed pressures of accommodating such ambitious growth.

York Region estimates it will need \$11.1 billion just for infrastructure to serve the 500,000 new residents expected by 2031. More than 80 per cent of the region's budget is earmarked for infrastructure related to growth over the next decade.

It's similar provincewide:



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Many municipal leaders believe a national transit plan is needed to provide regular funding for projects such as the widening of Davis Drive in Newmarket to add rapid transit lanes.

A METROLAND MEDIA SPECIAL REPORT

CONCRETE PROBLEMS

How to fix our crumbling infrastructure

Part 2 in a three-part series.

Part 3 runs June 25.

Go to yorkregion.com to read the entire series now.

► What's crumbling in your neighbourhood? Let us know what you think needs work with a letter to the editor to jmason@yrmg.com

- Halton Region estimates it needs \$8.6 billion to pay for infrastructure related to growth through to 2031. That includes 50 new elementary schools and new community centres, 2,200 kilometres of roads, six police stations and 1,100 hospital beds.

- Peel's capital budget over the next 10 years is just more than \$5 billion.

- Kitchener says it will need nearly \$240 million for growth in the next decade, with only one-third of that total coming from development charges. The rest will have to come from taxes.

- Niagara Falls says it will need more than \$100 million in the next 10 years, with taxpayers on the hook for nearly half.

It isn't just Places to Grow fuelling the concern. Providing the physical premises for

MAKING ROOM FOR NEW RESIDENTS

The province's 2006 growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe was designed to curb sprawl and promote denser, transit-oriented communities.

Municipalities were directed to ensure a minimum of 40 per cent of all new residents settle within already developed boundaries. That still means 60 per cent of development can go on virgin land, but some municipalities set the bar higher, with Markham having an extensive debate about preserving greenspace before settling on a maximum 40 per cent.

The province also identified 25 urban cores with even higher intensification targets for jobs and residents. The centres range from Waterloo to Mil-

ton and Pickering. While many, such as downtown Toronto and Hamilton, are already established, there are others, such as Vaughan and Mississauga, that were blank-slate suburban wastelands now aiming to be suburban mini-downtowns.

The plan dovetailed with other key pieces of legislation, such as the 2005 Greenbelt Act, that redefined the nature of development in southern Ontario.

The plan lays out principles and policy directions for infrastructure, but offers no specific funding mechanisms.

It also cites a report estimating costs of new infrastructure could be reduced by 20 per cent as communities become more compact and efficient.

other provincially mandated programs is an issue.

Schools have their own challenges. All-day kindergarten is still being phased in and is expected to cost about \$1.5 billion a year provincewide.

"We will only proceed if we have the infrastructure coming ... We will draw a line in the sand," said Halton Regional chairperson Gary Carr, adding the province has to decide if it's going to invest in the future or not.

Fairness for Halton, a public campaign launched in 2007, demanded a new deal that would allow the region to develop without overburdening taxpayers. All municipalities want the province to create a new, secure

infrastructure funds program, rather than the piecemeal system in use now.

In fact, a new 10-year Ontario infrastructure plan is set to be released shortly, although Infrastructure Minister Bob Chiarelli declined to give details. He said, however, the government recognizes there are needs to be met in high-growth communities.

When he flies into Toronto from Ottawa at night, Mr. Chiarelli says he can see just how the city has grown into a continuous region, stretching clear to Niagara. Better co-ordination between governments and regional