

METROLAND SPECIAL REPORT:

P3s offer solution, generate controversy

If Ontario was your house, it would be on the verge of falling apart. The roof needs reshingling, 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.

**BY DAVID FLEISCHER
AND NICOLE VISSCHEDYK**
Special report

They're known as public-private partnerships, or alternate financing arrangements, or by the acronym P3s.

They have become popular tools in the limited range of options available to governments trying to find money to repair or renew the crumbling roads, public buildings and other infrastructure that underpin our communities.

Residents of many communities will

already be familiar with the concept through the new hospitals, courthouses and other public facilities for which the Crown agency Infrastructure Ontario is responsible. (See fact box.)

A \$335-million courthouse in Durham Region that opened in 2009 was the first project to go through Ontario's new alternate financing program.

Infrastructure Ontario's projects now include hospitals, the eastern extension of Hwy. 407, the modernization of Ontario Provincial Police facilities and highway service centres across the province.

But a move is on to increase access to public-private partnerships as municipalities try to cope with the enormous burden of funding infrastructure, a job that has already put many of them into debt.

York Region, for example, in search of new ways to fund transit, has formally asked Metrolinx (the regional transportation authority) to look at alternate funding sources for municipal transit systems.

The province is scheduled to soon make public its long-term, 10-year plan for infra-

structure funding, and while Infrastructure Minister Bob Chiarelli declined to disclose details, he said one element will be an expanded role for Infrastructure Ontario, which was created six years ago.

P3s are not uniformly popular, generating criticism from opposition politicians and groups such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees, in part because the Canadian approach to most public facilities and services has been to keep the entire process public, or as much of it as possible.

Critics found fuel in an Ontario Auditor General's report that concluded in 2008 that \$200 million could have been saved if the province had done the borrowing itself on the new Brampton Civic Hospital.

But Mark Romoff, chief executive officer of The Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships, disagrees.

"You need to follow the program from beginning to end and you'll see the strong, successful P3 program does deliver value for money," he said.


See page 11.

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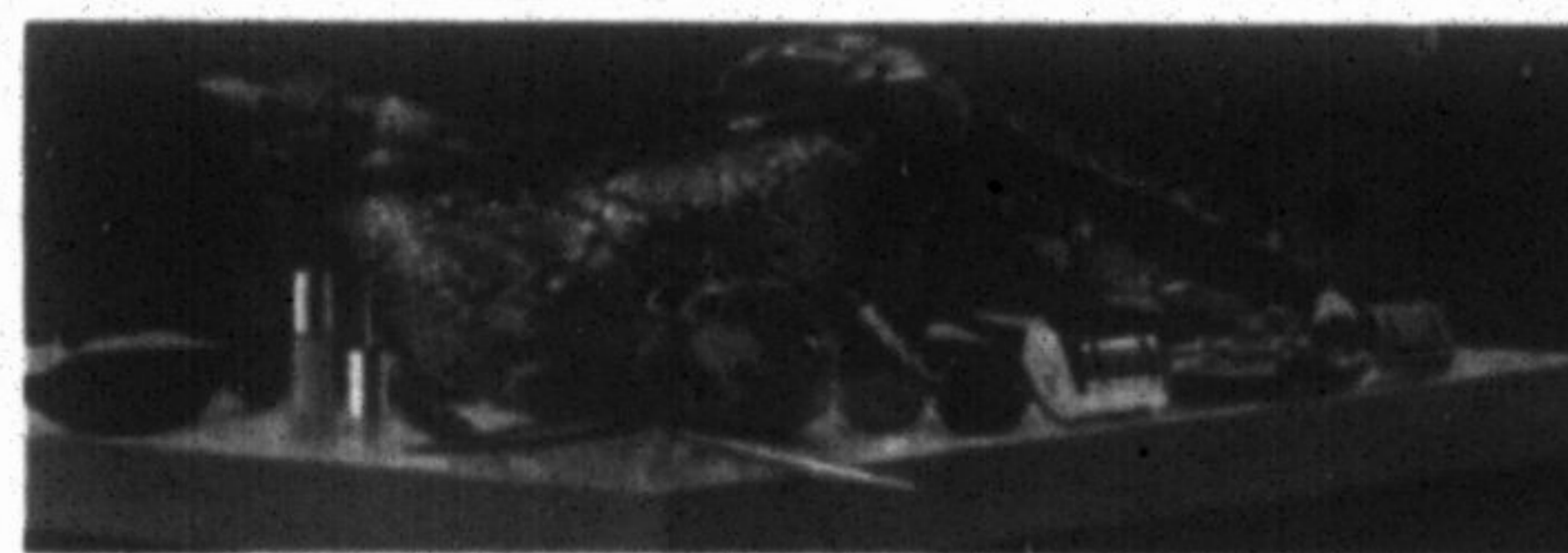
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