

**Chairman's Report to the  
56th Annual General Meeting of the  
Western Canada Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association  
February 24, 1999  
Ranchos Las Palmas, California**

**Introduction** (Attachment "1")

It is my great pleasure to present a report to the delegates of the 56th Annual General Meeting of the Western Canada Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association (WCR&HCA) on the activities of the Board of Directors for the period 1998/99.

The WCR&HCA, founded back in 1943, has a well established history of speaking out on national policy matters related to infrastructure. In fact that is our primary mandate (Attachment "1"). Over the years of its activity, the Association has evolved into a credible proponent of infrastructure policy nationally and regionally.

The report and attachments, were provided earlier to delegates and I propose only to highlight the Board's activities this past year.

**Activities**

**National Infrastructure Policy** (Attachment "2")

The basis of the Board's activities is founded upon a policy adopted by the WCR&HCA and contained in a brief entitled "*National Infrastructure Policy (NIP) - A Sustained Commitment,*" (Attachment "2"). The positions there expressed have received wide national, regional and local support from coast to coast including the Roadbuilder & Heavy Construction Council, TRIP/Canada, CRCI, Yellowhead Highway Association, and the CCA Board of Directors to name a few.

Its principle recommendation to all governments, is that to address Canada's growing transportation related infrastructure deficit, the federal government must as a matter of good governance, and prudent economic policy, adopt a *National Infrastructure Policy (NIP)* targeting three program areas:

- a.) ***National Infrastructure Program (NIP)*** with proposed annual tri-government level cost-shared investments totalling \$1.8 billion to rehabilitate core municipal infrastructure;
- b.) ***National Highways Program (NHP)*** with annual 50/50 cost-shared investments totalling \$1.6 billion to address national highways system improvements; and

c.) ***Strategic Infrastructure Investments (SII)*** to create new areas of economic activity funded as a component of each of the first two programs.

As in previous years, your Board has monitored and encouraged support at local, provincial and federal levels for the funding of a national infrastructure policy. We have tailored our message to the audience, without deviating from the primary Association policy position.

The WCR&HCA view continues to be that a National Policy will open the door to tremendous economic opportunities. Efficient infrastructure systems will attract new business and investment and streamline the flow of goods to national and international markets.

In addition to the economic benefits of such a policy, there are clear social benefits. We can achieve national unity through a common objective: leaving a legacy to future generations, of a productive country rebuilt and ready to face the challenges and opportunities of the new millennium.

**Meeting With Transport Minister Collenette** (Attachments "3," "4" & "5")

On Monday March 2, 1998 the WCR&HCA met in Winnipeg with the Hon. David Collenette Federal Transport Minister. During the meeting, the NIP brief was presented urging the Minister to support funding for a national infrastructure policy encompassing municipal infrastructure, national highway and strategic infrastructure investments.

It was suggested to the Minister that in the absence of political consensus, the federal government should launch the policy and challenge provincial governments to participate or explain to their constituencies their absence, much like the experience with the Canada Infrastructure Works Program (CIWP).

The Minister accepted our invitation to meet with key stakeholders to discuss steps which could be pursued to support adoption of a National Highways Program (NHP). After exchanging a series of letters, a meeting was arranged and held in Ottawa with Minister Collenette on August 6, 1998, (Attachment "3").

It was and continues to be the unanimous view of the WCR&HCA Board, that The Road & Infrastructure Program of Canada (TRIP/Canada) and the Coalition to Renew Canada's Infrastructure (CRCI) must play lead roles in lobbying on behalf of the industry nationally for a National Infrastructure Policy (NIP). Accordingly TRIP/Canada and CRCI were partners in the meeting with Minister Collenette.

We set out our meeting objectives and had access to the Minister's briefing notes (thanks to some skillful work in Ottawa) in preparation for the meeting with us (Attachment "4"). The meeting purpose was twofold: the first was to determine the minister's views and support for, a national highways program; the second, was to offer the assistance of industry in garnering necessary public and political support.

We thought the meeting was reasonably successful. Minister Collenette indicated support for national highways funding over a ten (10) to fifteen (15) year period. He also agreed on the necessity to make public a discussion paper reflecting federal views respecting a national highways program. The minister indicated that we could expect this to occur at the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) conference to be held in Regina Saskatchewan in September 1998. To our great disappointment, Minister Collenette tabled no such document at the TAC meeting (Attachment "5").

**Fall '98 NIP Lobby Effort** (Attachments "6," "7" & "8")

TRIP/Canada urged in the summer of 1998, that all roadbuilder and heavy construction associations participate in concerted lobby efforts in support for a NIP from their federal ministers and members of parliament.

I am very happy to report that the four association members of the WCR&HCA carried out this effort in stellar fashion. Every federal minister and most government members of parliament in western Canada were visited by representatives of our association(s) and presented with the same messages. In addition, the WCR&HCA sent letters on September 16, 1998 to all federal ministers in western Canada soliciting their individual support for a national highways program (Attachment "6").

As a result of a meeting held on October 15, 1998 with the Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Attachment "7"), a presentation of the industry NIP position was made to the House Standing Committee on Finance on October 21, 1998. It also led to a presentation of the NIP brief in Ottawa on November 18, 1998 to a number parliamentarians. TRIP/Canada, CRCI, CCA and a number of other associations were lobby partners in the meeting. The members of parliament with whom we met included:

Joe Fontana, MP, Chair National Liberal Caucus  
 Ray Bonnin, MP, Chair Standing Committee on Transportation  
 Bryon Wilfert, MP, Chair Liberal Caucus, Municipal Affairs  
 Roy Cullen, MP, Chair Ontario Liberal Caucus  
 Lou Sekora, MP, Chair BC Liberal Caucus

It was agreed at that meeting as follows, namely that:

1. the national profile of the importance of infrastructure to the economic health of Canada had to be raised through a sustained effort;
2. a national stakeholder conference in Ottawa should be convened for the purposes of pursuing serious and results oriented discussions related to the vision, financing and implementation of a national infrastructure policy;
3. the participants at the conference should include the broad industry and government representation; and
4. such a conference would be organized and coordinated jointly through the offices of Mr. Joe Fontana Chair of the National Liberal Caucus and Mr. Jim Facette President/Secretary of the Coalition to Renew Canada's Infrastructure (CRCI), (Attachment "8").

The CRCI and TRIP/Canada are currently in the process of discussions with Joe Fontana related to the conference. Separate meetings were also held in Ottawa with Shaughnessy Cohen (since deceased), and Roger Galloway, both Liberal MPs. In addition, the WCR&HCA NIP brief was presented in Ottawa to the Association of Consulting Engineers of Canada (ACEC) on December 4, 1998.

#### **NHP Update Reports** (Attachment "9")

In 1992, the Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation completed the National Highway Policy (NHP) Study. The study proposed that 25,000 kilometers of highways across Canada be designated a National Highway System. NHP Study Update Reports released December, 1998, by the Council suggest that Canada's national highway system now needs an investment of \$17.4 billion to bring it up to an acceptable standard.

I would expect that the WCR&HCA and its member associations will in 1999 pursue further discussions with the federal and provincial governments related to supporting a NHP based upon very supportive information contained in the "*Condition & Investment Needs Update Report*," (Attachment "9").

### **TRIP/Canada**

It is important to remind ourselves that the birth of The Road & Information Program of Canada (TRIP/Canada) to operate on a national level in 1983 was the result of a WCR&HCA initiative. The name change in late 1997 to The Road & Infrastructure Program of Canada (TRIP/Canada) to better reflect the broader industry mandate, was also initiated by the WCR&HCA.

We must remember the enormous contributions that TRIP/Canada has made to the cause of pursuing a national highways and national infrastructure program. TRIP/Canada continues to be an important lobby instrument in Ottawa which acts on the industry behalf. It is key therefore, that we support TRIP/Canada financially and in our efforts on regional, provincial and local levels.

### **Big Cities Mayors Conference**

Winnipeg's Mayor has invited participation at the Big Cities Mayors Conference to be held in Saskatoon on April 30 and May 1, 1999. A presentation reflecting a broad national coalition will be organized to present to the conference our NIP position and seek the Mayors' public endorsement of it. This is an important part of building broader public and political support for a NIP. This also follows the advice of members of parliament with whom we met. They all suggested that bringing the Mayors of the larger Canadian cities on side was an important objective in the lobby process.

### **Conclusion**

The WCR&HCA plays an important role in the development of national policy:

- we interface closely with TRIP/Canada, and the Roadbuilder & Heavy Construction Council of the CCA, where a past chair of the WCR&HCA chairs not only the TRIP/Canada Management Committee but the Roadbuilder Council as well;
- our views are well represented on the CCA Board of Directors. Tom Brown (Alberta) and Barry Brown (Manitoba) both past WCR&HCA Chairs serve on the CCA Executive Committee. Wayne Jorgenson (Saskatchewan) and John Kewley (British Columbia) current WCR&HCA Board members serve on the CCA Board of Directors;
- our constant contact with TRIP/Canada, the CCA and the CRCI, ensures that the views of the WCR&HCA are considered when policy and strategy decisions are made;
- as of September 1998, the WCR&HCA has a seat on the Board of Directors of the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC);
- we are key players in the development of national policy around which lobby strategies are developed as witnessed by our paper on national infrastructure policy.

What are the prospects for announcements by Ottawa? Recent comments by Minister Collenette are very encouraging. He has stated his support for a long term highways funding program (Attachment "10"). As of the date of writing this report, it would appear however, that Canada will have to wait until budget year 2000 for the federal government to announce anything substantial. There is broad support from MPs to extend the CIWP and therefore some funds may be allocated to extend that program to the end of 1999. The 1999 federal budget however, will likely concentrate on health care, tax relief and some payment towards the national debt.

The efforts to lobby for a National Infrastructure Policy (NIP) must however, continue unabated. With the current economic expansion producing greater tax revenues, a balanced federal budget and projected surpluses, continued infrastructure investments within existing fiscal frameworks are less of a challenge to finance. In short, a National Infrastructure Policy (NIP) can operate within the current fiscal frameworks of

governments. A NIP will only happen however, with our continued efforts at the national, provincial and local levels.

In closing, may I add on a financial note, that the WCR&HCA is in a sound financial position with sufficient resources to carry on its lobby activities on behalf of the broad heavy construction industry.

The above highlights the activities of your volunteer WCR&HCA Board of Directors. On your and my behalf, I want to express my thanks to all Board members, member associations and their respective chief operating officers for the support that has been given to the WCR&HCA. Without their involvement none of what I have reported upon could have been accomplished.

I also wish to express the WCR&HCA's very sincere thanks to all of the sponsors and contributors to the 1999 WCR&HCA convention, whose generosity allows this function and the ongoing activities on behalf of industry to take place. When making your purchase decisions in construction season 1999, please keep in mind those who support us, and support them in return.

And finally, I wish to thank you for the opportunity of serving as your Chairman. It has been my privilege to serve you, the members.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brent Wiltzen", with a horizontal line drawn through the signature.

Brent Wiltzen  
Chairman, WCR&HCA

February 24, 1999