

Canadian Society for
Civil Engineering



Société canadienne
de génie civil



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Welcome

August should be a quiet month with vacations and time to enjoy the summer. It has been that, however, a significant opportunity presented itself to give CSCE a high level of exposure that was not difficult to accept. Read on.

What happened? What is happening? What is going to happen?

I had a chat with Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario earlier this month. CSCE was invited to participate in a national conversation event called “Building Canada Up Summit”. Premier Wynne chairs the Infrastructure Sub-Group of the Council of the Federation and on their behalf agreed to review the importance of investments in public infrastructure, hence, the summit. During the evening reception, 5 minutes with the Premier offered an interesting perspective of the new majority leader of the Province. She is a very personable individual and certainly expressed an interest in CSCE. I watched as she worked the room before I had a chance to speak with her. Having had a father who was a municipal and federal politician I have had “close encounters” in the past with other senior politicians including the Prime Minister at the time. I have to say my encounter with Premier Wynne made me feel she was not only speaking but listening as well. I hope this is true because following the summit I sent a note on behalf of CSCE to her office not only thanking her for the opportunity to participate in the conversation but to personally offer CSCE’s position on leadership in sustainable infrastructure. I of course let her know that 40% of our individual members are below the age of 35, of which 25% are women, emphasizing the importance of this representation to the Society.

I was pleased CSCE was asked to the summit – thanks to the quick thinking and influence of one of our past presidents, Cathy Lynn Borbely. Thank you Cathy Lynn! Your efforts afforded the CSCE a great opportunity to express our perspective on a very important issue and one that I feel will be heard by the

Premiers and government leaders of the Provinces and Territories as they discuss the issues of the day at their next Council of the Federation meetings.

Oh, you might wonder what we talked about. I let her lead the subject matter of our chat. I was asked two questions on the spot – one about youth and one about women in engineering. She was genuinely interested in the extent to which both groups were engaged in the Society and in engineering in general. She noted nothing was wrong with my gray hair, but she wanted to know that younger engineers and women engineers were active and engaged in the Society, that we were not a just an “old boy’s club”.

The summit itself was a full day of interesting commentary and discussion about government and private sector funding of public infrastructure projects. A few pertinent comments are highlighted.

“Cities are the engines of global economy” – President / CEO of Siemens Canada

”We need to reduce our carbon footprint and deal with the impacts of climate change with our infrastructure” – Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario

“Infrastructure is the key to developing stranded resources in the Arctic and the activities must follow the principles of respect, recognition and responsibility” – Hon. Bob McLeod, Premier of Northwest Territories

“There is an opportunity to develop Private Public Partnerships for private investment in smaller municipal projects, we just need to work on processes that are simpler for these projects” – Geoff Smith, President / CEO of Ellis Don.

There was a lot of conversation about infrastructure issues and funding during the day that affirms the importance of the Society’s interest and strategic direction on leadership in sustainable infrastructure. The comment from the leader of the Northwest Territories struck a chord with me given our interest in establishing a policy around the need for sustainable development in the north.

While at the summit, the Infrastructure Report Card partners had a moment to share a photo opportunity. Pictured with me are (left to right) Brad Woodside of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Mayor of the City of Fredericton, Darwin Durnie of the Canadian Public Works Association and Michael Atkinson of the Canadian Construction Association.



With the summit now past I am preparing for a few more opportunities to give CSCE some exposure and in particular verbalize CSCE's position on a number of our core leadership issues. At the end of September I have been invited to the Transportation Association of Canada Chief Engineers meeting in Montreal to present to this esteemed group. Once again we will be talking about the Canadian Infrastructure Report Card and Sustainability Rating System for infrastructure. EIC is also coming up in September so while the kids are all going back to school, I will be back on the road.

Did you know?

Wikipedia identifies social sustainability as the least defined and the least understood of the different ways of approaching sustainable development. In a recent presentation I offered the following descriptions for sustainability (environmental, social and financial) in the context of sustainable infrastructure. If anyone has any comments or other definitions, especially for social sustainability, I would like some feedback to share with others who engage in this discussion. Sustainability for me relates to a balance between two positions, so the definitions are structured accordingly.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Cost of infrastructure to deliver acceptable levels of service = available revenues based on taxpayers affordability and willingness to pay

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Desired lifestyle (levels of service) = acceptable lifestyle (levels of service)

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Earth's bio-capacity = human's biological demand (energy, resources) to meet desired human development index

I like to use these in concert with each other in an attempt to link the global sustainability issues with local issues related to infrastructure. I am always trying to find the global / local link premised on the adage "think globally, act locally".

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