

Canadian Society for  
Civil Engineering



Société canadienne  
de génie civil



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## Welcome

This letter was to have been written a few weeks ago. I am falling behind! The only offering I have (that is code for “excuse”) is the extraordinarily busy schedule of late. In early October I had the privilege of representing the CSCE at ASCE’s Annual Conference in Panama City, Panama. A highlight was a tour of the \$5 billion construction site of the third lock system being added to the canal. I was expecting to focus this e-Letter on the Panama experience. But, before I had a chance to put that story to print I find myself in Long Beach, California representing CSCE at the first International Sustainable Infrastructure Conference hosted by ASCE. Now waiting at the Los Angeles airport for a flight home I need to figure out just how to convey the amazing and strategically important things that have happened in Long Beach for CSCE.

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

Representing CSCE and Canada at these international activities is a rare opportunity. The benefits of CSCE’s presence at these events certainly go beyond the “ceremonial” aspects of such exchanges.

In Panama I met with some of ASCE’s senior staff to discuss potential areas of collaboration. Having met the President of ASCE, Randy Over, when he attended our Annual Conference in Halifax, I now had the opportunity to respond in kind in Panama and watch him hand over the reins to Bob Stevens. I met with Mr.

Stevens a number of times in Panama, including at a special international dinner he hosted for some 8 or 9 Presidents of other civil engineering societies from countries around the world. In other meetings with Bob during their Annual Conference we agreed to explore opportunities for collaboration including furthering contacts initiated in Halifax between the ASCE's Sustainability Committee and CSCE's Sustainability and Infrastructure Renewal Committees.

I have come to know Michael Sanio, a displaced Canadian and currently ASCE's Director, Sustainability and International Alliances. Michael has become a friend. In Panama and again most recently in Long Beach we discussed a potential activity for developing a joint statement at next year's Triennial Conference in London that can be used to strengthen our individual advocacy positions on sustainability in our respective countries. Bob Stevens and I discussed some other potential collaborative activities. One of these could be with CSCE's current efforts to establish a sustainability rating system for infrastructure, something ASCE has done in the United States.

Speaking of sustainability rating systems for infrastructure, the Long Beach Conference brought representatives from around the world to share their insights and challenges in advancing sustainability for infrastructure. We shared lessons learned, new analytical tools, challenges, next steps and so much more. This was the "choir" when it came to these issues. I had the privilege to share a Canadian perspective on this and CSCE's vision. It is rare to receive applause in the middle of a speech but I can tell you the resounding response to our focus on "growing with youth" and linking this with "leadership in sustainable infrastructure" affirmed CSCE is on the right track with our vision. I was taken aback by the response of the more than 300 delegates, and more so in the personal follow-up responses during the rest of the conference. I would add that my message of "Develop a plan...take action!" with a sub-title of "be seen and be heard" seemed to resonate with everyone who came and spoke to me throughout the conference. I was invigorated and challenged to work even harder on our mission.

Part of my presentation identified CSCE's "leadership" in developing collaborations with other national organizations in Canada for efforts such as the Infrastructure Report Card and the sustainable rating system. The Canadians attending this conference, about a dozen I learned, came up to me individually offering their time and desire to help with these processes or any other involvement with CSCE. I think I have the core of a working committee to take the sustainability rating system concept to the next level with the Canadian contingent at the conference. This was a significant take away from this conference for CSCE.

I would be remiss if I did not mention some of the amazing content material at the conference including developments in analytical tools created, case studies demonstrating sustainable infrastructure and climate change resilience. In particular, the conversations around social sustainability were intriguing. These seemed to be the start of engineers learning how to converse on the subject – a challenge for all of us based on what we heard.

I am left with a view of "so much to do" by CSCE. I do not want to get ahead of myself but I will confess an impatience to get going. We need to continue to

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strengthen our foundation if we are going to succeed in getting more done. For this reason I am anticipating our upcoming Board meeting / workshop at the end of this month. Our planned focus on the Administrative Committees this year is extremely important as part of the goal of tuning up our engine.

Another confession...at one point I thought the complexity of CSCE's organizational structure was a weakness and potentially needed to be simplified. I now believe I was wrong! I see the strength of our organizational structure. It is only a matter of making all the parts not only work but work together. Once this gets traction we will achieve "amazing" things.

### **Did You Know?**

I could not close this letter without some information about one of the seven (7) wonders of the modern world. My Panama experience left an indelible memory and also what it means for a project to be sustainable.

- The canal was completed by the Americans over a construction period of 10 years (1904 – 1914)
- The French made an attempt to construct the canal over a 25 year period (1879 – 1904)
- A total of 188 million cubic metres were excavated in the American construction era. Together with some 60 million cubic metres by the French, the total excavation is some 248 million cubic metres
- Over the 35 year effort to construct the canal a total of \$639 million had been spent
- Estimates vary but landslides and disease resulted in the death of more than 25,000 workers. Hospital records identified 5,609 died during the American construction era with the remainder from the French construction era.
- Theodore Roosevelt has been credited with the canal construction, even though he left the office of President of United States in 1909. This credit is based on his swift actions and moral courage to change his own mind and strong recommendations to construct a sea level system and ultimately opt for the lock system design concept.

Roosevelt's own words engraved on a plaque in the Canal Administration Building are a good place to finish.

*"It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat"*

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