



**From Resilience to Recovery**  
**Building a Stronger & Better BC**  
May 2020

BC Building Trades Submission to  
the Economic Recovery Task Force



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## OVERVIEW

The BC Building Trades welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Premier's Economic Recovery Task Force.

The BC Building Trades is the umbrella organization for 25 local unions that work in British Columbia's building, construction and maintenance industry sectors. There are 40,000 highly skilled, unionized construction workers in B.C. The BC Building Trades has partnerships with over 400 construction contractors.

B.C. is at a crossroads. The impact that COVID-19 has had on our economy is significant, but we have an opportunity to shape the economic recovery so that we can bounce back better, and stronger, than before. As the skilled tradespeople who build and maintain the vital infrastructure British Columbians depend on, we look forward to working with government and industry to rebuild B.C.

The uncertainty created by COVID-19 will have an impact on investment decisions going forward in the construction market. The recovery is going to require both public and private sector investment to ensure high value jobs are available in local communities that create the tax base B.C. needs. Trades training and providing new opportunities for British Columbians who have lost their jobs in this crisis must be at the forefront of the recovery.

## PRINCIPLES

B.C.'s construction industry is in a unique position to quickly refocus and scale up work to support communities across our province. In order to ensure people are at the centre of recovery, stimulus funding should be guided by these key principles.

- 1. The health and safety of workers and the public must be at the forefront of economic recovery.*
- 2. Economic recovery needs to be people-centred. Projects should be evaluated through a people-centred or community lens, based on the value that they add to the labour market and the surrounding community.*
- 3. Public infrastructure projects should be leveraged to encourage and foster private sector investment.*
- 4. Training new workers, particularly those hardest hit in the service industry like women and providing them with the skills they'll need to access good-paying jobs must be part of our strategy.*
- 5. Smart investments should be made in low carbon construction to support B.C. climate targets.*
- 6. Support the development of an LNG export industry that creates lasting economic benefits for communities for the next several decades.*

## ENSURING HEALTH & SAFETY

Construction is one of the most dangerous industries in B.C. This has never been more evident than now, a time when COVID-19 is radically redefining the meaning of a “safe workplace.”

While not all construction sites are the same: (ex: road building, commercial and industrial construction, civil infrastructure), the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the deep sanitation and hygiene issues in residential construction, and some other areas of the industry.

In the early weeks of this public health crisis, countless construction sites operated without handwashing stations. Workers were crowded into small lunchrooms and elevators, and some workers continued to report to work while visibly sick.

Sanitation and hygiene practices only improved after WorkSafeBC launched an aggressive inspection initiative in the construction sector in response to concerns raised by the BC Building Trades.

This pandemic has exposed a culture of non-compliance in parts of our industry. B.C. can only address the systemic regulatory failures in construction by conducting an inquiry into health and safety. This review is vital to improving practices in our industry and protecting B.C. workers through this crisis and into the future.

We must remain vigilant and prevent a backslide on health and safety practices by dedicating WCB enforcement teams to continue to inspect the construction industry and ensure contractors are following PHO guidelines.

These teams should expand their mandate to ensure employers are paying WCB premiums for all workers on site to ensure they are protected in the event of COVID-19 exposure on the job.

## A PEOPLE-CENTRED APPROACH TO INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS

Major infrastructure projects should proceed under Community Benefits Agreements.

These projects ensure that the value of the public's investment dollars are captured by labour market participants through increased opportunity for employment and upskilling through trades training.

Local hire provisions in Community Benefits Agreements also ensure that dollars spent on projects in B.C. stay in B.C.

The economic fallout from COVID-19 has been characterized as a “shecession” due to overwhelming unemployment in the service sector (retail, child care, personal services, hospitality, etc.), where women hold a majority of jobs. By contrast, women represent less than five per cent of workers in the skilled construction trades, effectively shutting them out of opportunities to participate in status quo infrastructure investment.

A Community Benefits Agreement that prioritizes training and hiring women is the only modern, clear pathway women have to leverage family-supporting jobs in construction.

While there are currently three Community Benefits projects proceeding, future projects like the Massey crossing are ideally suited to this framework.

Investing significantly in road building throughout B.C. is critical as the industry is undergoing a contraction throughout the province. This work is shovel-ready and can be done in compliance with Provincial Health Officer recommendations for physical distancing, while creating jobs in rural and remote communities across B.C.

The government should also prioritize and expedite the building of new hospitals through Community Benefits Agreements. The construction of hospitals creates millions of hours of employment for construction workers, as well as provides a needed service to communities.

### **INVESTING IN TRADES TRAINING**

In order to ensure technical training can continue to move apprentices through their apprenticeship and train British Columbians that have been displaced in other industries, additional funding for training providers is urgent.

While many industries are struggling after COVID-19, B.C.'s construction

industry is still predicted to grow and will face a skills training shortage.

Investment in trades training will support workers across B.C. by giving training providers the tools they need to move some training online, while re-engineering training schools to install barriers and proceed with in-class practical instruction while social distancing.

Hand-in-hand with these changes should be a major recruitment and retraining initiative to bring displaced workers, particularly women who have lost their jobs in the service sector, into the construction industry.

### **SUPPORTING LOW CARBON CONSTRUCTION**

B.C. has a tremendous opportunity to support low carbon construction as part of our recovery plan. There are many projects that are currently in the planning stage, or could be executed quickly, that will put British Columbians to work. From retrofits to expanding our electric vehicle infrastructure to dam maintenance and upgrades, the list of possible low carbon projects will bring stimulus to communities across B.C.

#### *A Made-In-BC Retrofit & Abatement Program*

The COVID-19 pandemic provides opportunities for asset owners and managers to take advantage of the slowdown in the economy and take on renovation projects that are not feasible when facilities are in full swing.

The government could begin a program to retrofit empty (or near empty) public buildings from all levels of government across the province. Addressing longstanding issues in insulation, environmental heating and cooling improvements and more energy efficient windows and exterior doors allows for targeted stimulus that is also green in energy.

In addition to a retrofit program, the government should consider a hazardous materials abatement program for empty government buildings. School districts, universities and municipalities have largely identified hazards throughout their building stock.

Most government buildings at the federal, municipal and provincial levels are currently empty. A program addressing hazardous material abatement in public buildings would quickly create a number of skilled jobs and apprenticeship opportunities.

This program could be expanded to the private sector through subsidies to the hotel industry directed at improving the health and safety of hotels, asbestos and lead paint abatement. This would provide a value-add to an industry that has been acutely affected by the crisis.

#### *Expanding B.C.'s Electric Highway Network*

BC Hydro has committed \$20 million to support fast-charging and hydrogen fuelling stations and \$5 million for charging stations at highway rest areas and government buildings. This is a drop in the bucket compared to the infrastructure we need going forward—70% of British Columbians surveyed by

BC Hydro have said that they are hesitant to purchase a new EV because they fear our road network lacks adequate charging stations to take an EV on a road trip.

This work should be done by Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Training Program (EVITP) trained construction electricians with TQ/IP certifications.

#### *Expanding B.C.'s Transportation System*

A significant portion of TransLink's 10-year plan is currently unfunded. There is an opportunity for federal and provincial governments to fund \$6.2 billion in construction projects that would improve mass transit throughout the Lower Mainland. B.C.'s suburbs are growing, and UBC in Vancouver has been notoriously underserved by transit. Expanding the SkyTrain line from Surrey to Langley would cost \$3.1 billion, and extending the Broadway Corridor—which is being built with skilled labour under a Community Benefits Agreement—would cost approximately \$3.2 billion.

#### *Fast-Tracking Hydro Projects*

Major projects that are a part of BC Hydro's capital plan should proceed on an expedited basis. While BC Hydro's demand forecast and revenue have been affected by the pandemic, the planned investments in seismic upgrades and added generating capacity are necessary for both public safety and creating the electrical base for future private development in this province. These projects are critical to the future success of industry in B.C.

BC Hydro has 7 projects valued collectively at \$1.5 billion in its capital plan that would add to the long-term economic health and seismic safety of B.C. These projects are forecast to commence over the next 4 years.

### **BUILDING B.C.'s LNG INDUSTRY**

B.C. has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to foster the development of an LNG industry that will employ British Columbians for decades.

Production of LNG in B.C. has a net positive effect with respect to lowering emissions overall. LNG is the lowest emitting hydrocarbon product and will be necessary to bridge the global energy supply as renewables become increasingly available.

Currently, many high-growth countries in Asia look to thermal coal to power their industry. Switching to LNG ensures that incremental growth in emissions attributed to increased economic activity in Asia is substantially lower than it would be in the absence of LNG.

Furthermore, the development of B.C.'s LNG exporting capacity stands to significantly benefit rural and indigenous communities through the construction period, as well as during production.

LNG projects generally look at a 40-year horizon for calculating demand and are still viable in the long-term. However, volatility in commodity markets and demand fluctuations due to COVID-19 may impact investment decisions in the short to medium term.

B.C. should prioritize outreach to proponents considering investment decisions in B.C.'s LNG industry and foster a positive investment climate while also ensuring that employment potential for local workers is maximized.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Government of British Columbia has an opportunity to maximize the benefits of construction as a key part of its economic recovery strategy. By incorporating a framework that supports training, creates opportunities for local communities and displaced workers and other under-represented groups, B.C. can come back stronger and better.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We welcome this opportunity to make the following recommendations to the Premier's Economic Recovery Task Force.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Conduct an inquiry into health and safety in the construction industry in order to identify and improve the systemic regulatory failures that put workers at risk in B.C.
2. Dedicate WCB enforcement teams to continue to inspect the construction industry and ensure contractors are extending WCB coverage to all workers and following PHO guidelines.
3. Expand the development of major infrastructure projects built under Community Benefits Agreements.
4. Invest in public infrastructure that will foster private sector investment such as road building.
5. Invest in trades training to support an extension to online training.
6. Focus training funding to organizations that have the ability to recruit and train displaced workers from sectors hard hit by the pandemic and give them access to jobs in the construction industry.
7. Support the construction of low carbon projects to create jobs across B.C.
8. Foster the development of B.C.'s LNG industry



# PROJECT INVENTORY

PROJECT	VALUE
SkyTrain expansion from Surrey to Langley	\$3.1 billion
Extending the Broadway corridor	\$3.2 billion
Massey Tunnel Replacement	\$3.5 - \$5 billion
MOTI Roadbuilding projects	\$150 million
Retrofit and Abatement program	\$100 million
Expanding B.C.'s electric highway network	\$20 million
<b>Hydro Projects</b>	
Lajoie Dam Improvements	\$466 million
John Hart Dam Seismic Upgrade	\$412 million
Strathcona Upgrade Discharge	\$228 million
Seven Mile Overhaul Unit 1-3 Turbine	\$154 million
Mica Discharge Facilities and Rehab	\$114 million
Ladore Spillway Seismic Upgrade	\$106 million
Bridge River 1 Unity 1-4 Replacement	\$100 million