National report card shows need for long-term funding plan for roads and water systems

September 12, 2012— Edmonton was among the 120 municipalities whose roads and drainage systems were assessed and included in a Canadian Infrastructure Report Card (www.canadainfrastructure.ca) that concludes infrastructure across the country is at risk if a long-term national funding plan is not developed.

Although the report card doesn’t rate individual municipalities, it says more than half of municipal roads are in very bad condition, one in four roads is over capacity, and one in four wastewater treatment plants needs to be upgraded or replaced to meet new federal standards. At the same time, when all municipalities were aggregated together, the national findings show fair to very good ratings.

The City of Edmonton is a member of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), which was one of four organizations that created the report card. The other organizations are the Canadian Construction Association, the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering and the Canadian Public Works Association.

“In 2014, $2 billion in federal funding for municipal infrastructure will run out,” said Karen Leibovici, Councillor for the City of Edmonton and FCM President. “The new long-term federal plan must be designed to help communities like Edmonton meet challenges while creating jobs, building a strong economy, and maintaining a high quality of life for all Canadians.”

Edmonton conditions
The national assessment of all infrastructure rated roads as in “Fair” condition, wastewater systems in “Good” condition and storm water systems in “Very Good” condition.

An assessment of current conditions in these three asset types managed by the City of Edmonton are the same locally as the national overview. However, this assessment is an aggregate of all infrastructure in the city, including almost 5,600 km of sewers, 136,000 manholes and catchbasins, 343,000 sewer connections, 77 pumpwells, 162 storm ponds and lakes, and 11,400 lane-kilometres of roads (including bridges, arterial, collectors, residential, and industrial roads).

“Edmonton's overall positive rating is due in large part to past decisions based on a good infrastructure maintenance strategy, but that was at the expense of not funding new infrastructure to support our growing city,” said Lorna Rosen, CFO for the City. “Our infrastructure will continue to age and deteriorate, and growth pressures will also continue.”

The City of Edmonton recognized the need for reinvestment and maintenance of its infrastructure and has made it a priority over the last 10 years. Edmonton has just completed $3.6 billion in capital spending over three years, and is now implementing a three-year capital budget of $2.8 billion for renewal and new development.

“Investments from provincial and federal governments have been beneficial in recent years, but they must continue to ensure the condition of our infrastructure does not slip and to increase capacity and functionality in our growing city,” said Rosen.

Planning for the future
The City of Edmonton was one of the first Canadian cities to develop an Infrastructure Strategy to assess conditions and develop long-term management plans. Edmonton’s approach has been studied by many jurisdictions across North America and around the world.

The City of Edmonton was also one of Canada’s first municipalities to plan long-term maintenance and replacement programs with innovative funding models such as Neighbourhood Renewal Funding Program. This program dedicates a portion of taxes to maintenance work that
extends the life of infrastructure or replacement at the most appropriate time, in the most cost-effective way.

“Even with the fair to very good overall rating, we recognize that certain areas of our infrastructure continue to need work to improve condition and avoid failure,” said Brice Stephenson, Branch Manager of Transportation Operations. “Although Edmonton rates much better than some municipalities thanks to our Council’s decisions on programs like Neighbourhood Renewal, the rating averages the condition for all our roads and bridges across our big city. The amount of new neighbourhoods we have skews the results because they have new roads in great shape, but we certainly have other areas where we need to improve condition and add new infrastructure.”

Chris Ward, Branch Manager for Drainage Services agrees: “Edmonton has taken a proactive approach to sewer rehabilitation since 1980, and the coordinated approach of the Drainage Neighbourhood Renewal Program with other business areas of the City helps enhance the efficiency of the existing sewers.”

“At the same time, we still have a lot of work ahead to reduce the risk of failures in our aging system, and ramp up our capacity and functionality to serve an ever-growing city that is also experiencing the increased frequency of extreme weather events.”

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