



INFRASTRUCTURE UNIT

What has the Infrastructure Unit worked on over the last quarter?

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Infrastructure Unit is continuing our advocacy work towards a reformed Operations & Maintenance (O&M) Policy for First Nations. The Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) O&M Policy for funded assets on First Nations is an out-dated policy and does not adequately address asset repair and maintenance costs. Funding levels need to be increased and should also include the additional assets that First Nations need to protect and service the well-being of their members. The AFN Infrastructure Unit delivered a report of our findings to ISC, called *Operations and Maintenance Engagement Sessions – June 2020*. This report, along with more engaged discussions with ISC and industry experts, will form the fundamental changes needed to improve funding for First Nations assets. The AFN remains steadfast to see these changes implemented.

In addition, the AFN Infrastructure Unit has delivered a report and findings on Asset Management to ISC entitled *The Assembly of First Nations Asset Management Planning Pilot Summary Report – June 2020*. This report studied First Nations across all regions investigating the impact of severe O&M under funding and how Asset Management could assist in decision-making surrounding First Nations infrastructure. The study found that removal of funding “information silos” is essential to the success of First Nations adopting asset management approaches. Asset management relies on holistic financial planning and produces both long- and short-term financial forecasts based on both the capital and Operations & Maintenance needs for each asset. There also needs to be long-term funding commitment guaranties through a totally reformed O&M Policy, so that the First Nations can be proactive in the management of all their assets. The adoption of asset management planning will require First Nations’ leadership, staff, and community members to undergo training and awareness through an industry-led training program.

Are there recent current events or government action affecting the Infrastructure Unit or its priorities?

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the need for reliable critical infrastructure has become obvious across the country: infrastructure to deliver power, high-speed broadband, clean drinking water, and safe wastewater operations as well as dependable transportation networks such as roads, bridges, ferry service to connect us all. Now that many cracks in the physical infrastructure and supporting systems have been made obvious through the pressure of COVID-19, Canada and all First Nations must emerge with a plan for the future. The *Build Back Better* initiative is a chance to embrace the opportunity to think beyond our current barriers.

Under the leadership of National Chief Perry Bellegarde and the AFN file holder, Manitoba Regional Chief Kevin Hart, the AFN has continued to advocate for much needed infrastructure investment in our communities. First Nations must have the resources to prepare and plan for what their future will look like, and access to Infrastructure Stimulus funding that will be available to all Canadians. Infrastructure

*The AFN is the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada.
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Stimulus funding announcements are also needed in First Nations. The Infrastructure Unit will continue to seek new capital investment programs in First Nations Infrastructure. This investment is required for First Nations to thrive and prosper as they grow towards 2030.

The ISC Strategic Plan 2020 to 2025 speaks to co-development, engagement and Infrastructure. The current process that ISC presented is based on First Nations Infrastructure Initiative Plan documents. These documents are not proper infrastructure planning tools and most are only future goals without accurate estimates. If used, First Nations Infrastructure will be well short of the need in our communities.

What is the Infrastructure Unit planning for the future?

The AFN Infrastructure Unit advocates for First Nations-led infrastructure solution, providing First Nations the autonomy to retain expertise, assets, and manage their communities as they see fit.

The AFN Infrastructure Unit is focused on renewing the O&M policy, using asset management industry practice to further First Nations in their individual goals for governance and self-sufficiency. Many First Nations feel that ISC needs to play a leadership role in the reconciliation process and strive to repair the damage done to the First Nations and their members by the decades of colonial policies. First Nations should be consulted on all decisions relating to themselves and the members they represent and communication between ISC and First Nations communities needs to be improved, specifically in regard to information regarding program and funding opportunities. The AFN Infrastructure Unit also advocates for education and training, for both operators and leadership, as part of new O&M policy.

We continue to support regions moving towards an asset management approach for their Nations. In addition, the AFN Infrastructure Unit is committed to working on a National First Nations Infrastructure Modernization Strategy, beginning with a national First Nations infrastructure assessment, developed with First Nations, which would be a first step in addressing the infrastructure gap.

Upcoming Events

- **Fall of 2020** - Input sessions (virtually or smaller in-person) are planned. Due to COVID-19, AFN remains sensitive and aware of our surroundings on the health and safety of our Chiefs and Technicians.