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MEDIA RELEASE

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Federal infrastructure program misses the mark

Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association President Allan Earle is concerned that new federal infrastructure initiatives will not get money flowing to municipalities in time for the next construction season.

Speaking prior to SUMA's annual convention in Saskatoon, Earle said, "The new federal infrastructure program is being touted as a short-term economic stimulus, yet these requirements will not get money flowing into municipalities this year, or possibly even next year. If every city, town and village in Canada has to submit an application to Ottawa to receive infrastructure money, the result will be a cumbersome and slow-moving program. What municipalities need is an infrastructure program that gets money flowing quickly." He added that SUMA would like to see this funding distributed on a per capita basis, and that Saskatchewan's municipalities are standing prepared with a list of shovel-ready projects.

Earle urged the federal government to reconsider the application-based approach for municipalities to access new infrastructure dollars. "We have seen this before. The Building Canada Fund requires municipalities to submit applications for every project, and three years later, we haven't seen any money," Earle said.

SUMA is also extremely disappointed with the cost-sharing requirement associated with this funding, which will make it difficult for most municipalities to qualify for federal dollars. "We are prepared to be a partner in stimulating the economy, but it's not realistic for municipalities to fund these additional projects," said Earle. He added that municipalities aren't in a position to make any further investments in infrastructure at this time. "Municipalities are cash-strapped. Many have reached the limits of their borrowing capacity," Earle said.

The SUMA Board of Directors will table a resolution at SUMA's Convention this week that will urge the federal government to reconsider the criteria for infrastructure programs. Earle said that SUMA would welcome the opportunity to meet with Saskatchewan's 13 government MPs to discuss means of accelerating this program.

"In order to provide an economic stimulus now, the money must flow now. It's that simple," said Earle.

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