

# Choosing growth should be a natural choice

CHRISTY CUNNINGHAM COMMENTARY



Highway 1 is reduced to one lane for bridge and deck work in this file photo. Commentator Christy Cunningham writes growing the economy is essential to making further investments in community and social infrastructure viable and sustainable in the long term. PHOTO: BRUNSWICK NEWS ARCHIVES

In anticipation of the upcoming provincial election this September, the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies of New Brunswick (ACECNB) is aligned with the priorities created by an alliance of organizations. This includes the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, Le Conseil Economique du Nouveau-Brunswick, Fredericton Chamber of Commerce, New Brunswick Business Council, Saint John Region Chamber of

Commerce and the Greater Moncton Chamber of Commerce.

In strategically aligning our priorities for the upcoming provincial election, five key areas of commitment have been identified in which we all agree, this article touches on the several sections of the platform where engineering expertise plays a significant role.

For New Brunswick to be able to stand the test of time no matter what comes it way – the province needs to be resilient. We believe there are several key areas all political parties need to address to ensure our province can weather any storm.

One of which is responsible resource development, including forestry, mining and natural gas development which can be accomplished by applying “made in NB solutions,” drawn from the experience gained worldwide through successful practices incorporated in other jurisdictions. A robust natural resources industry would not only have a positive economic impact on the people of New Brunswick, it would also create new employment opportunities while maintaining existing jobs in the province.

New Brunswick consulting engineering firms have the experience and expertise to deliver these projects in a socially, environmentally and economically responsible manner, as we have with many other significant projects throughout New Brunswick's history – safety, security, reliability is our primary focus in every project our engineering firms undertake.

That's why ACEC-NB has been supporting the approval of resource projects such as the Energy East Pipeline and shale gas development and associated infrastructure based on good science and sound engineering.

In support of natural resource and infrastructure projects, it is also critical we use procurement best practices to ensure we achieve quality, innovation and long-term savings.

Supporting New Brunswick's infrastructure (e.g., bridges, schools, roads, highways) represents a significant investment of tax dollars. Upfront procurement decisions have a significant impact not only on the cost and quality of design and construction phases, but on operations and maintenance of infrastructure assets.

Engineering and other professional services typically account for only six to-18 per cent of capital costs on infrastructure projects and one to two per cent of total costs over the life-cycle of infrastructure assets. Yet these services dramatically impact all aspects of the financial and operational success of infrastructure for decades.

Finally, any government should see value through long-term infrastructure planning.

ACEC-NB believes infrastructure is a core business of government and an investment in our social, economic and environmental quality of life. Such investments are not costs to be minimized. They connect communities, enable commerce and protect the environment.

At ACEC-NB, we choose growth. We are asking our candidates to consider the five key areas of concern and that they give priority to natural resources development and core infrastructure that grows the economy, creates jobs and expands the tax base.

Growing the economy is essential to making further investments in community and social infrastructure viable and sustainable in the long term. We suggest a 10-year plan which will de-politicize infrastructure planning and create stability.

**Christy Cunningham** is the executive director of the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies of New Brunswick, representing the consulting engineering industry that provide professional engineering services, to both the public and the private sector in New Brunswick.