
Government Continues Commitment to Infrastructure Investment – 2023-24 Budget

Ontario's Minister of Finance, Peter Bethlenfalvy, rose in the legislature on the afternoon of March 23rd to present his government's roadmap for the fiscal 2023-24. (The government's fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31.) "Building A Strong Ontario" is the largest spending plan ever in the province's history. Still, it is a reasonable balance of smart investments to support economic growth and job creation with social spending.

Here are some high-level economic and fiscal highlights:

- Ontario's GDP grew by 3.7% in 2022 and is projected to grow by only 0.2% in 2023, 1.3% in 2024, 2.5% in 2025 and 2.6% in 2026
- The province's Debt to GDP ratio for 2022-23 is projected to be 36.9%, the lowest level since 2011-12
- The deficit for 2022-23 is projected to be \$2.2 B, (\$17.7 B lower than forecast in the budget for this fiscal year) and \$1.3 B for 2023-24; a surplus of \$200M is projected for 2024-25
- Revenues for 2023-24 are forecast at \$204.4 B
- The budget includes significant contingency funds, in excess of \$1B, provide flexibility in uncertain times

Here are highlights of specific interest to the construction industry:

The budget includes infrastructure spending of more than \$184 billion over 10 years including:

- \$27.9 billion to support the planning and construction of highway expansion and rehabilitation projects such as Highway 413, a new 400-series highway and transportation corridor across Halton, Peel and York regions, the Bradford Bypass, a new four-lane freeway connecting Highway 400 in the County of Simcoe and Highway 404 in York Region, and the new Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph.
- \$70.5 billion for transit over the next 10 years, including continuing to transform the GO Transit rail network into a modern, reliable and fully integrated rapid transit network; and the largest subway expansion in Canadian history that includes the Ontario Line, the Scarborough Subway Extension, the Yonge North Subway Extension and the Eglinton Crosstown West Extension.
- Over \$48 billion in hospital infrastructure over the next 10 years, including support for more than 50 hospital projects that would add 3,000 new beds over 10 years.

- \$15 billion in capital grants over 10 years to expand and renew schools and to help create 86,000 new childcare spaces by December 2026.
- Supporting a full continuum of care for first responders experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress Injury and other concurrent mental health disorders at Runnymede Healthcare Centre’s First Responders Wellness and Rehabilitation Centre by advancing the dual-site project towards construction in Toronto and Peel, with an additional investment of \$9.6 million to accelerate the project’s development towards its next round of approval.
- Providing \$224 million in 2023–24 for a new capital stream of the Skills Development Fund to leverage private-sector expertise and expand training centres, including union training halls, to provide more accessible, flexible training opportunities for workers.
- Enhancing the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program with an additional \$25 million over three years to attract more skilled workers, including in-demand professionals in the skilled trades, to the province.
- Expanding access to dual credit opportunities in healthcare-related courses for an additional 1,400 secondary students with an additional investment of \$3.3 million over the next three years.
- Helping close to 27,000 students earn credits towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma and a postsecondary degree, diploma, certificate or Certificate of Apprenticeship simultaneously through dual credit opportunities.
- Expanding the Ontario Bridge Training Program with an additional \$3 million in 2023–24 to help internationally trained immigrants find employment in their fields and get faster access to training and supports towards a licence or certificate.

For the full story, click on the following links:

- 2023 Ontario Budget: *Building A Strong Ontario* <https://budget.ontario.ca/2023/index.html>
- Budget Document: <https://budget.ontario.ca/2023/pdf/2023-ontario-budget-en.pdf>
- News Release: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002856/building-a-strong-ontario>
- Highlights: <https://budget.ontario.ca/2023/highlights.html>
- Backgrounder: Economic and Fiscal Overview: <https://budget.ontario.ca/2023/eco-fiscal.html>