



Pre-Budget Submission

Presented to the Standing Committee on Finance of the House of Commons

Background

The Canadian Cable Systems Alliance (CCSA) represents the interests of more than 120 independent communication companies serving Canadians from coast to coast to coast. CCSA's members connect Canadians to information, entertainment and other critical services. They are co-operatives, family businesses, rural companies, First Nations bands and entrepreneurs providing service to Canadians generally outside urban markets across the country and competing with large, vertically integrated companies on choice, technology, service and price. These are companies that invest in their community. They provide jobs and sponsor local events. This is because their relationship to the community isn't just one of business; they know their community and they live there too.

Recommendation: Invest in communications infrastructure as part of the infrastructure program

For years the CCSA has worked to heighten awareness to the fact that many Canadians, outside of the large urban markets, lack affordable access to many of the technological services that urban Canadians take for granted, specifically in regards to broadband and communications infrastructure. The further one travels from large urban centers in Canada, the more costly it is for communities to be connected to the communications infrastructure that powers the 21st century economy. The upcoming infrastructure program to be introduced in this year's budget presents an excellent opportunity to include specific provisions for rural and remote broadband connectivity that will provide the support required by these Canadians. CCSA members are ready to partner in cost-sharing with the federal government on this initiative.

A modern and robust communications infrastructure is a critical support system for the delivery of socio-economic and government services as well as a vital lifeline for modern-day commerce. Affordable access to the world via the Internet adds to quality of life and greater opportunities for citizens in low population density communities. Nonetheless, for these underserved communities, affordable, reliable broadband access at home and via mobile devices is often unavailable. Canada's vast distances mean that connecting millions of rural Canadians to established communications grids is commercially prohibitive. There is a clear market failure for broadband capable of supporting these communities that can only be addressed by direct government action. The upcoming budget and its focus on productivity-enhancing infrastructure could begin to address this failure and in so doing, connect millions of Canadians who currently lack a reliable and affordable connection to the online world. The Federal Government has committed to an agenda that supports both high-speed broadband coverage and investments in infrastructure programs across Canada and now is the time to put those promises into action.

The upcoming budget cycle offers the ideal moment to address the longstanding market failure for Canadians outside urban areas in a meaningful way, and to help connect millions of Canadians in the process. The government's commitment to increased and accelerated infrastructure investment offers the perfect opportunity to include investments in low population density communication infrastructure. This would have an immediate impact, and would exemplify Prime Minister Trudeau's statement that Canada be known not only for its resources, but its resourcefulness.