

EXECUTIVE OBSERVATIONS

WESTAC transportation leaders gathered at the 2019 Spring Member Forum in the spirit of problem-solving to address capacity issues in key rail corridors and the last mile of the West Coast port facilities. There was renewed energy and commitment fuelled by keen awareness of global opportunities. There was confidence that we had the right leaders in the room to make solid progress.

We're still confident. But we need to take action.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

The issue is not just capacity—it's coordination. As you will read, new port infrastructure is being built, and investments to expand road and rail assets are happening. But these improvements are taking place in isolation. To maximize what Canada can offer, we need a vision—a long-term, all-encompassing strategy built on an understanding of projects taking place elsewhere and everywhere.

And we need this yesterday. Capacity has been an issue for a long time now.

WHY THE URGENCY?

The world economy is growing more slowly, yet becoming more volatile. In response, supply chains are reorganizing to mitigate political risks and fight for market share.

Against this competitive backdrop, Canada is lagging. For example, we know service levels deteriorate when container terminals exceed 80% utilization—and last year, Vancouver and Prince Rupert operated at 82.4% of their combined capacity, compromising their ability to respond to surges.

New free-trade deals are boosting demand for commodities. This is good news for Canada, but it further strains our transportation infrastructure. Last year, Canadian railways resorted to rationing the volume of traffic around Vancouver by restricting the movements of some commodities.

REGAINING OUR MOMENTUM

Fourteen years ago, the federal government developed a long-term plan to invest in western transportation infrastructure, then supplemented it with a policy framework to guide future investment. Today, transportation leaders are calling for a renewed strategy and for all three tiers of government to work together to develop and benchmark a rolling plan of actions over a 30-year timeframe.

The 2019 Spring Member Forum ended with a call for a cohesive, coordinated transportation trade corridor plan that would, among other things, build a framework for industry collaboration on operations and planning initiatives.

It's time to act on that call.



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