

APPENDIX - Proposal for measures to ensure a responsive provincial emergency plan

Background

This document describes a series of measures aimed at supporting Ontarians and the Ontario economy during the current health emergency. These proposals aim to increase the disposable income of Ontarians and the most vulnerable businesses, promote access to quality public services and establish strong starting points for a post-pandemic redesign and rebuilding of an equitable and sustainable Ontario economy. The current situation is an opportunity to support and accelerate implementation of several major policies for which there is a strong social consensus. The David Suzuki Foundation has identified seven areas of intervention for your consideration.

Measures proposed

1) SECURING THE PERSONAL FINANCE OF ONTARIANS

In a time of economic crisis, individual and household finance become the single biggest worry for people stressed at the prospect of being unable to meet the most basic material needs. Being unable to make ends meet can quickly lead to mental health and other general health issues (e.g., malnutrition, illness due to homelessness, etc.) that the public, social and health systems will need to cover. People are the driving force of any economy. The inability of Ontarians to financially contribute in a manner that meets their basic needs would have a long-lasting ripple effect throughout the economy (e.g., unpaid rents, unpaid utilities, etc.). As a priority measure, we therefore call for:

WHAT: Establish a guaranteed basic income framework for all Ontarians.

HOW: Introduce a cost-of-living-adjusted guaranteed basic income framework to support all Ontarians during these uncertain times.

WHY: A guaranteed basic income ensures Ontarians' basic needs — such as food, shelter and utilities — are met regardless of employment status or recent history.

A guaranteed basic income plan offers governments a powerful tool to directly support Ontarians when and how they need it most. In times of emergency, governments can simply top up the guaranteed basic income as needed, rather than having to create new policies or amend existing policies, rules, laws, etc.

Individuals and households with higher, more secure income can repay the guaranteed Basic income through their income taxes.

Any provincial guaranteed basic income plan can be co-established in partnership with the federal government to ensure universality and equity throughout Canada.

2) ECONOMY

Several sectors of the economy require support during this time of crisis. The following proposals are intended to supplement the measures already announced or planned by the government in areas of local purchasing, agriculture, teleworking, the social and circular economy and support for workers in certain economically affected sectors.

Local purchasing and food production

WHAT: Increase purchases of “Made in Ontario” products and services.

HOW:

- Introduce a "Made in Ontario" certification for all local products and services, like the "Foodland Ontario" certification, accompanied by a communication campaign.
- Adopt a local procurement policy for public sector bodies, including from social economy enterprises, replacing the lowest bidder rule with the lowest adjusted price rule, including social and environmental criteria.

WHAT: Support Ontario farmers through a food self-sufficiency initiative that aims to raise the proportion of food from Ontario farms on the plate of Ontarians to more than 50 per cent.

HOW:

- Deploy a promotion campaign in favour of Ontario food.
- Increase purchases of Ontario-produced food by schools, hospitals, departments and agencies.
- Support local food systems, especially public and neighbourhood markets, and link directly to initiatives with farmers.
- Financially support resilient agricultural practices.

WHY: The Ontario agri-food sector is currently severely shaken because of its heavy dependence on international trade. More generally, favouring purchase of local products and services helps to strengthen local businesses and support economic activity throughout Ontario. It also reduces carbon by cutting transportation distance — buying strawberries from Kingsville, for example, rather than Mexico.

Deployment of digital infrastructure, encouragement of telework, support for the social and circular economy and support for affected workers

WHAT: Support digital access to essential services and employment (telework).

HOW:

- Accelerate investments in collective digital infrastructure to provide reliable high-speed internet access to all Ontario by 2022.
- Support and equip employers and service providers (such as health, social and food services), particularly among small and medium enterprises, in deploying measures to encourage telework and online orders, such as through tax credits and dissemination of good practices.

WHY: Remote access and teleworking are measures of social resilience, even in the absence of a pandemic. In remote areas and for older people and those with reduced mobility, digital access is sometimes the only way to obtain certain services. Teleworking can also reduce pressure on transport infrastructure and thus limit the cost for public finances. Telework also leads to a reduction in costs for businesses and workers, while potentially contributing to a better work-family balance. It is important, however, to note that if implemented inappropriately, remote working can contribute to social isolation. The current crisis is providing examples of best teleworking practices, and these should be considered.

WHAT: Support development of a zero-waste, circular and socially responsive economy.

HOW:

- Improve support for social infrastructure as well as innovation and training for social economy enterprises, in particular to bring out innovative circular economy projects.
- Increase support for social economy organizations and enterprises, including public and local markets.

WHY: Zero-waste, circular and social economy projects, such as buying local, reduce the carbon footprint and have the potential to create a virtuous circle from an economic point of view (increase in desirable jobs, development of new markets, etc.).

WHAT: Support affected workers, with a view to a just transition.

HOW: Put in place adequate income support, training and labour-market adjustment programs for workers in the industries most affected, as well as economic restructuring measures for affected communities.

WHY: Many unemployed Ontarians will soon require new training because many will not be able to return to old jobs. The Government of Ontario will have to pay particular attention to any action that is likely to have significant impacts on workers, businesses, Indigenous people and vulnerable populations, with a view toward solidarity, resilience and equity.

3) TRANSPORT

In times of crisis, the quality of transport and supply infrastructure becomes crucial. This is why measures to support and strengthen the infrastructure for transporting people and goods could complement the measures announced or already deployed.

Collective and active transportation

WHAT: Accelerate investments in the development and maintenance of sustainable mobility infrastructure, with high priority given to zero-emissions vehicles.

HOW:

- Accelerate the implementation of non-polluting public transportation infrastructure so that vehicles can be deployed quickly (e.g., electric buses).
- Accelerate investment in development of active transportation infrastructure, including protected bike lanes, bike parking, bike share and wider, safer sidewalks. Lower speed limits on all municipal roads to incentivize cycling and walking.
- Increase support for electrification measures for transport companies, including charging and maintenance facilities.
- Provide municipal transit agencies with emergency funding to help them weather the current dramatic drop in ridership.
- Ensure public transit vehicles are given signal priority and dedicated rights-of-way so that they are not delayed by car traffic, making them more reliable and attractive to riders.

WHY: At the end of the current crisis, our public transportation networks will be more resilient and less dependent on fossil fuel, while favouring purchase of equipment and technologies from Ontario and elsewhere in Canada. Investments in public transportation create three times more jobs and economic spin-offs in Ontario than investments in the road sector.

Freight transport

WHAT: Meaningfully support electrification and intermodality of freight transport.

HOW:

- Support electrification of freight vehicle fleets (all types of vehicle), including charging infrastructure and workforce training.
- Support initiatives for short delivery circuits operating on electricity or based on active transport (e.g., freight bikes).
- Create and deploy an intermodality-oriented freight strategy aimed at reducing empty journeys, optimizing journeys, modal shifting to rail transport and maximizing tonne-km travelled with low or zero emissions.

WHY: These measures would reduce Ontario's energy trade balance and generate electrification spinoffs among medium and heavy vehicles. Development of short oil-free delivery circuits (electric or active transport) is also likely to reduce transport costs and economic losses related to congestion and mitigate the impact of the labour shortage in the trucking industry.

4) COMMUNITIES

The current crisis illustrates the importance of solidarity and resilience of local communities, often at the neighbourhood level. Measures can further strengthen the social fabric at the local level.

WHAT: Support local trade in collaboration with municipalities.

HOW:

- Set up a \$2-billion local trade support fund to be made available to municipalities for commercial and local service offers (tax holiday, hiring subsidy, etc.).
- Quickly set up an action plan to revitalize the hearts of Ontario cities and towns.

WHY: At the core of a municipality and its commercial arteries are its economic and social lungs. They bring together many local shops and services that will need support to recover after the crisis has passed. The municipal level seems best able to determine, in collaboration with associated private and government actors, the range of solutions most suited to each environment.

WHAT: Support municipalities in sustainability actions and resilience-building.

HOW:

- Create a fund for sustainable development and urban planning, endowed by the government with \$200 million per year, in support of municipalities for consolidation of urban environments through low-carbon and resilient development projects.
- The province could bring in a range of revenue tools to assist communities. These include road tolls, parking levies and congestion charges. The province could also allow municipalities to bring in new fees of their own, including a motor vehicle registration levy.

WHY: Various actors agree that priority should be given to consolidation of already urbanized environments to strengthen resilience and promote socially beneficial, more localized economic activity. The idea of a fund for sustainable planning and urban planning is widely supported by stakeholders and experts.

WHAT: Build more than 100,000 social and community housing units to be well established in their neighbourhoods and served by public transport within five years.

WHY: In a context of housing affordability crisis, construction of social and community housing is stagnating due to the absence of a Canada-Ontario agreement on funding. In

urban areas, there is a good opportunity to build affordable housing units near transit. We need to structure public transit projects to promote access to services for as many people as possible, as California does.

WHAT: Launch a vast energy-efficient building renovation project.

HOW:

- Reactivate and improve eco-responsible residential renovation programs.
- Accelerate conversion of residential, commercial and institutional buildings to electricity by setting up incentives, support and regulations.
- Restore heritage buildings.

WHY: Energy efficiency in buildings remains one of the cheapest ways to reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions. In addition, local heritage buildings, which bring pride to many Ontarians, need maintenance work. In several cases, reclassification of these buildings allows more dynamic use for the benefit of the community. According to StatsCan, one of the fastest growing job sectors in Canada encompasses economic areas such as clean energy, sustainable building, clean tech, zero waste, retrofitting, etc. Growth in such sectors can lead the way in a post-crisis economic strategy, leading to significant investment return and returning revenue to the government both as long-term savings and through regular taxation.

5) INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND COMMUNITIES

Indigenous Peoples are also struggling with the pandemic and must be supported. Crisis interventions can become pathways to a longer-term redefining of how the Province of Ontario works with Indigenous Peoples.

WHAT: Establish a concrete “nation-to-nation” partnership proposal for Indigenous Peoples to co-determine investment priorities of any provincial support and recovery plans affecting their communities.

HOW:

Recognize formally the traditional territories of First Nations and work in partnership to establish a long-term and stable nation-to-nation framework that will allow investment opportunities to support Indigenous-led livelihoods.

Modify decision-making structures so that First Nations lead decision-making about land-use decisions and financial opportunities within their traditional territories.

WHY: Indigenous Peoples must be stakeholders in the Ontario economic recovery process. Having them identify investment priorities for the Government of Ontario would be a way of concretizing reconciliation between nations.

6) FINANCING

Financially supporting Ontarians and the Ontario economy during a time of crisis is a critical function of government. Supporting an economic restart will require innovative partnerships among public, financial and private business sectors. Willingness to explore new job-creation pathways that ensure equitable and outcome-focused financial flows is never as high as during times of crisis. Crisis response partnerships can become more permanent when clear value is recognized and actualized for all. With Ontario hosting the biggest banks and financial service companies in Canada, the opportunities are clear.

Innovative financial instruments

WHAT: Green and social bonds can be used to fund large-scale, sustainable infrastructure projects (including wind and solar energy installations) and key social outcome projects (e.g., affordable housing; poverty elimination).

HOW:

- Just as the world came together following the Second World War to establish the World Bank to support poverty-alleviation goals, Ontario can partner with the financial and banking sectors to establish an outcomes-based “resiliency bank.”
- A public-private “resiliency bank” can support proper issuance of innovative financial instruments such as green and social bonds (among other possible instruments) that can mobilize large-scale private capital in ways that ensure support for desired social, resilience and environmental outcomes.
- A public-private “resiliency bank” could establish, collect and manage proceeds of innovative financial service taxes (e.g., currency transaction tax) in a manner that protects the competitiveness of financial institutions while directing capital for specific social, sustainability and future crisis-response needs.

WHY: Diversifying government revenue using innovative fiscal tools will be required to help bring Ontario back in a better, more inclusive and equitable way. Ontario can lead the way in establishing a new relationship with Canada’s financial sector, one that benefits all Ontarians and Canadians.

Triple bottom line and corporate law

WHAT: Embedding triple bottom line outcomes in Ontario corporate law.

HOW:

- Convene an inclusive, multi-sector, participatory forum to identify pathways to innovate Ontario corporate law to capture and lock in the societally beneficial public-private actions being enacted for crisis response.
- Incentivize triple bottom line outcomes through emergency corporate tax reforms that can be made permanent over the longer term.

WHY: In this time of crisis, private companies are stepping up to support a variety of needs in ways not typical of normal times. In other words, companies (medium and large in particular) are much more amenable to aligning their purpose with essential, real value-adding societal needs. This opens a unique opportunity to collaboratively redefine the purpose of business in incremental ways.

7) NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR JOB CREATION

WHAT: Accelerate restoration of natural infrastructure/assets and deploy nature-based solutions (such as green roofs, green parking areas, natural drainage basins) in public, commercial and industrial buildings by providing a fiscal stimulus or direct financial support for technology adoption.

WHAT: Indigenous nature-based employment.

HOW:

- Provide provincial funding on land areas that are not the responsibility of an identifiable company and fund Indigenous leadership and local employment in evidence-based ecological restoration as a means to boost Indigenous jobs.
- Ontario can benefit from the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program's broadening definitions of natural assets as capital assets. This points to high potential for restoration projects to be eligible for ICIP's Green Infrastructure Stream funding.
- To encourage greater uptake, Ontario can work with the Government of Canada to modify eligibility requirements to facilitate investments in natural asset projects and natural asset management.
- Ontario can improve its nature-based infrastructure, long-term carbon offsetting performance and community well-being by co-financing and executing the Government of Canada's commitment to plant two billion trees.
- Tree planting and local ecosystem restoration are excellent ways to create direct and indirect jobs related to the need for related businesses like nurseries, tree maintenance and monitoring to validate carbon offsets.

WHY: Ecosystem restoration projects provide meaningful economic contributions to local economies and to broader regional and national economies. For instance, the U.S. Geological Survey estimates that between 13 and 32 job-years and between \$2.2 and \$3.4 million in total economic output are contributed to the U.S. economy for every \$1 million invested in ecosystem restoration. Nature-based infrastructure is an essential part of climate adaptation in major cities. It creates job opportunities in a growing sector while enhancing resilience and improving key environmental indicators like flood risk and air quality.