

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Skills training, infrastructure investment make 2008 Budget good for construction**

**Toronto, March 25, 2008** – The Council of Ontario Construction Associations (COCA) welcomed the McGuinty government's first budget of its second mandate this afternoon. With a projected surplus of \$600 million, the budget is the government's third consecutive balanced budget. At its core is a \$1.5 billion *Skills to Jobs Action Plan* and an additional \$1 billion in new funds for municipal core infrastructure investment.

The objective of the plan is to train unemployed workers for new careers in growth sectors, expand and increase the number of apprenticeships, build more infrastructure for the growing number of college and university spaces and to help students with the cost of their education. A primary plank of the new skills component of the plan is the \$355 million *Second Career Strategy*, assisting 20,000 unemployed workers receive long-term training to launch them into new well-paying jobs.

Also significant is the commitment to expand apprenticeship training. The government has allocated \$75 million over the next three years, increasing to \$50 million annually by 2011-12. Going beyond existing programs, the new funding will support classroom training, expand pre-apprenticeship programs that prepare young people for training and increase program completions. The objective of this investment is to expand the number of apprentices in Ontario to 32,500, a 25% increase. Supporting this initiative is another \$45 million over three years for the *Apprenticeship Enhancement Fund* to buy state-of-the-art equipment essential for technical training.

As had been previously announced, the government has also dedicated \$1 billion in new funds to address the province's municipal core infrastructure deficit. The investments include \$400 million for roads and bridges outside of Toronto, \$497 million of public transit projects in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton areas; and, \$100 million for much needed capital improvements to social housing stock. The funding is expected to translate in to 10,000 additional construction jobs.

The multi-year investment in skills training and apprenticeship clearly demonstrates the government's recognition of the significance the growing skilled trades shortage represents to the province's future economic prosperity. The \$1 billion commitment of new funds for infrastructure also represents a significant step, attacking head-on the existing \$18 billion required to refurbish existing stocks. The construction industry looks forward to working with the province to establish permanent, stable infrastructure funding; in particular to facilitate much needed comprehensive reforms to ensure sustainable municipal water systems.

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