

AMCTO BACKGROUNDER

A LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE ON THE 2015 FEDERAL MANDATE LETTERS



Last week Prime Minister Justin Trudeau released the mandate letters that he sent to each of his cabinet ministers following their swearing in at the beginning of November. This backgrounder explains the context of those letters, and outlines some of their most relevant aspects for local governments in Ontario.

CONTEXT

Mandate letters are the instructions that Prime Ministers and Premiers provide to their cabinet ministers and parliamentary secretaries outlining the priorities of their government. They provide a view of the governments policy goals and unique insight into how it plans to fulfill its mandate. Historically these documents were kept secret, and provided only to the Minister, her or his staff, and senior public servants. Following her election in 2014, however, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne became the first Prime Minister or Premier to publicly release her government's mandate letters.

While many of the specific commitments that are outlined in the federal mandate letters, released last week by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, were articulated in the Liberal party platform, the expectations outlined in the letters for professional conduct and ethical behaviour have garnered significant attention. Each letter contains a set of general guidance for Ministers, and contains specific expectations for how the government will operate. In particular, cabinet ministers in the new government are instructed to operate with “new leadership and a new tone.” To fulfill this promise, new ministers will be required to improve the government's relationship with Indigenous communities, and provincial, territorial, and municipal governments. Ministers will be held accountable to a “different style of leadership,” which includes engaging with MPs from other parties and the opposition, and working with ordinary Canadians, Parliamentary Committees, civil society, business, organized labour, the broader public sector, and the not-for-profit and charitable sectors. Notably, the mandate letters also include a reminder that the success of the government in many ways hinges on its ability to work with and consider the professional, non-partisan advice of public servants.

PRIORITIES

Below are some of the highlights from the federal mandate letters that are relevant to local governments, and the Minister(s) tasked with ensuring their success.

Infrastructure

- Develop a 10-year plan to deliver new funding to provinces, territories, and municipalities, for increased investments in infrastructure. This will include long-term predictable funding to support existing infrastructure programs, increase data collection capacity, and promote asset management. —**Minister of Infrastructure and Communities**
- Work with provincial, territorial and municipal governments to develop and implement an infrastructure strategy that will ensure significant investments in public transit and green infrastructure. —**Minister of Infrastructure and Communities | Minister of Transportation**

- Deliver a newly-focused *Building Canada Fund*, which will make greater investments in Canada's roads, bridges, transportation corridors, ports, and border gateways. —**Minister of Communities and Infrastructure | Minister of Transportation**
- Ensure that any unspent infrastructure funds are automatically transferred to municipalities through a temporary top-up of the Gas Tax Fund. —**Minister of Finance | Minister of Infrastructure and Communities**
- Create a *Canada Infrastructure Bank* to provide low-cost financing (including loan guarantees) for new municipal projects in priority investment areas. This should include preparing for the launch of a new *Canadian Green Bond*. —**Minister of Finance | Minister of Infrastructure and Communities**
- Review existing measures to protect Canadians and critical infrastructure from cyber-threats. —**Minister of Infrastructure and Communities | Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness**
- Increase high-speed broadband coverage and encourage a competitive environment in the telecommunications sector. —**Minister of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development**

Disaster and Emergency Management

- Restore funding for their Heavy Urban Search and Research (HUSAR) teams.—**Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness**
- Work with provinces, territories, municipalities, and Indigenous peoples to develop a comprehensive plan for better preparing for and responding to weather-related emergencies and natural disasters. —**Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness**

Poverty Reduction

- Develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy that aligns with and supports existing provincial and municipal strategies. —**Minister of Families, Children and Social Development | Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour**
- Provide communities the money they need for Housing First initiatives that help homeless Canadians find stable housing. —**Minister of Families, Children and Social Development**

Emergency Services

- Enhance compensation benefits for public safety officers who are permanently disabled or killed in the line of duty, including firefighters, police officers and paramedics. —**Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness**
- Develop a coordinated action plan for post-traumatic stress disorder, paying particular attention to public safety officers. —**Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness | Minister of Health**

Energy

- Work closely with provinces and territories to develop a Canadian Energy Strategy. —**Minister of Natural Resources**

Trade

- Implement the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and consult on potential involvement in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). —**Minister of International Trade**

- Implement and expand Canada's free trade agreements, including the implementation of agreements with Israel, Chile and Ukraine. —**Minister of International Trade**

Economic Development

- Develop a new Canadian Free Trade and Export Strategy to support Canadian businesses exporting to international markets, and help Canadian communities attract foreign direct investment. —**Minister of International Trade**
- Create a strengthened *Investment in Canada Office* to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments and provide a one-window shop for those looking to invest in Canada. —**Minister of International Trade**
- Work with provinces, territories and municipalities to ensure that strategies are aligned to strengthen the “Canadian brand” and reduce the administrative burden for foreign investors. —**Minister of International Trade**
- Engage provincial, territorial and municipal governments to create as much alignment and support as possible for small and medium enterprises. —**Minister of Small Business and Tourism**

Environment

- Work with provinces, territories, municipalities and other willing partners to develop a plan to fight climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. —**Minister of the Environment | Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food**
- In partnership with provinces and territories establish national emissions-reduction targets. —**Minister of Environment and Climate Change**
- Work with other orders of government to protect Canada's freshwater. —**Minister of Environment and Climate Change**

Accessibility

- Work with partners, including provinces, territories and municipalities, to ensure the passage of a Canadians with Disabilities Act. —**Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities | Minister of Families, Children and Social Development**

Licensing and Municipal Law Enforcement

- Create a federal-provincial-territorial process that will lead to the legalization and regulation of marijuana. —**Minister of Health | Minister of Justice and Attorney General | Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness**

Housing

- Conduct an inventory of all available federal lands and buildings that could be repurposed for affordable housing. —**Minister of Public Services and Procurement | Minister of Infrastructure and Communities | Minister of Families, Children and Social Development**
- Create a housing strategy to reestablish the federal government's role in supporting affordable housing. —**Minister of Families, Children and Social Development | Minister of Infrastructure and Communities**
- Prioritize infrastructure investments in affordable housing and seniors' housing. —**Minister of Families, Children and Social Development**

- Provide support to municipalities to maintain rent-gear-to-income subsidies in co-ops. —**Minister of Families, Children and Social Development**
- Encourage the construction of new affordable rental housing by removing all GST on new capital investments in affordable rental housing. —**Minister of Families, Children and Social Development | Minister of Finance**
- Ensure that the new *Canada Infrastructure Bank* provides financing to support the construction of new, affordable rental housing. —**Minister of Families, Children and Social Development | Minister of Finance**

Intergovernmental Relations

- Undertake a review of Canada Post to make sure that it provides the high-quality service that Canadians expect.¹ —**Minister of Public Services and Procurement**

Open Government/ Evidence-Based Decision-Making

- Restore the long-term census and reinforce the importance of Statistics Canada. —**Minister of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development**
- Improve the quality of publicly available data in Canada, including an Open Data initiative that would make more government controlled data available to the public. —**Minister of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development**

Arts, Culture and Tourism

- Make significant new investments in cultural infrastructure. —**Minister of Canadian Heritage | Minister of Infrastructure and Communities**
- Work with provincial, territorial and municipal counterparts to promote Canadian tourism and strengthen the Canadian brand abroad for tourists. —**Minister of Small Business and Tourism**

¹Canada Post has been embroiled in a dispute with a number of municipalities over its decision to end home delivery in approximately 1,000,000 homes across the country in favour of community mailboxes. However, shortly after the 2015 federal election brought a new Liberal government to power, Canada Post announced a temporary moratorium on its decision to end home delivery, saying that it would consult with the new government, which had a pledge to restore home delivery services as a central plank of its platform.