

Canada's big city mayors want infrastructure spending details from Liberals

Mayors from across the country in Ottawa to meet with PM, cabinet ministers

By Andrew Foote, [CBC News](#) Feb 04, 2016

Several high-profile Canadian mayors are in Ottawa to meet with the prime minister and six cabinet ministers, and one of their big goals is getting more details on the Liberal government's promised infrastructure funding.

During last year's election campaign the Liberals promised to spend \$60 billion on infrastructure over 10 years, a major plank of their platform because of the money involved and the need to go into a deficit to make it happen.

Halifax Mayor Mike Savage says he wants to know when they're getting federal infrastructure money and how they can use it. (CBC)

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Big City Mayors Caucus is meeting to talk about issues such as infrastructure with six federal ministers, including Sohi, in Ottawa Thursday and Friday.

Halifax Mayor Mike Savage said Thursday morning they're excited about infrastructure funding commitments but are looking for some clarity on what cities can expect.

"I think what we need to know is how we can use it, when we can use it, what we can use it for ... we're excited about the potential for infrastructure we just want to know more details about how we can use it," he said.

Nenshi gives his pitch

Infrastructure Minister Amarjeet Sohi said last month in Toronto the first \$10 billion will focus on projects in need of maintenance over the next two years and money will start going out to municipalities after their budget is passed, hopefully before the summer construction season.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Wednesday in Edmonton that Alberta will get \$700 million in infrastructure money "immediately" to help its economy, which has been hit hard by falling oil prices.

Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi said in a speech at Ottawa City Hall that now is the time for the federal government to invest in infrastructure with a list of projects building up, people out of work and falling construction costs.

"If we get a commitment from the federal government we can have help wanted ads in the paper next week to make these things happen," he said in the speech.

"It's time to move forward on the stimulus.

Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi says the federal government should fund "nation-building" projects such as public transit, particularly light rail. (CBC)

Nenshi said he wants "block grants" from the federal government to get the money to municipalities without getting too involved with how to use it.

"That money comes with strict criteria on how you can spend it, stringent report-back procedures, but you municipal leaders understand where the money needs to be spent — so spend it," he said.

"We're not going to let some bureaucrats in Ottawa have to decide on every single roof that needs patching at every single arena across this country."

Long-term ask

Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson said he wants to see more than just a one-time deluge of infrastructure money.

"[What we're asking for is] very much in line with the other mayors... [a] long term, predictable source of funding," he said after the speech.

"[We want money for] public transit, affordable housing and the types of infrastructure that are not particularly sexy but you need to replace that roof, put a new boiler on the community centre."

A representative of a local road and sewer construction group was at Ottawa City Hall to hear the speech and agreed, saying the trouble is getting consistent funding.

"Right now if they want to put a lump amount of money into the economy toward infrastructure to help the economy get moving, it's definitely a bonus," said Ivan Levac, past president of the National Capital Heavy Construction Association.

"Hopefully in the long term we can look to reliable, consistent funding."

Some of the mayors are expected to talk to the media late Thursday afternoon after meeting with Sohi.

They'll hold another news conference with Trudeau Friday morning on Parliament Hill.