




Fulfilling a **VISION**

**Ontario's Ministry of Transportation leverages
partnership opportunities** BY BARBARA BILLITZER

Photography by Robert Taylor, Taylor Studios, Kingston, Ontario



For transportation agencies around the globe, overseeing a complex array of infrastructure projects requires specialized skills and training. Yet, with shrinking budgets and various travel constraints, gaining access to cost-effective education can be a challenge for any organization.

In 2009, IRWA began offering agency agreements as a way to facilitate membership and training opportunities for organizations with a large staff that share similar educational requirements. The U.S. Federal Highway Administration had enjoyed such an agreement with IRWA for several years, and the Association recognized that expanding the program would enable more professionals to take advantage of the program's membership and training opportunities. To date, IRWA has secured agreements with a diverse range of agencies, utilities and quasi-governmental entities across the United States.

In 2014, IRWA's Vice President of Field Operations Daniel Stekol began meeting with IRWA's Canadian Chapters to discuss the benefits available to agencies throughout Canada's many provinces. The opportunity to establish an agency agreement was brought to the attention of the Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO) property staff in Kingston, Ontario. Several MTO professionals were already actively involved in leadership roles with Chapter 63 in Ottawa. After hearing Daniel speak about the agency agreement in late 2014, the group decided to pursue a joint partnership.

According to Daniel, who heads up the program, "Agency agreements are one of the most mutually-beneficial programs we offer, and the interest in them continues to gain traction. If an agency has at

least 20 employees and commits to their participation in two or more IRWA courses, the arrangement offers significant cost savings. Once the agency establishes their internal training goals, IRWA works closely with them to ensure their objectives are met."

In addition to a reduced membership rate, agencies can work with IRWA to develop tailor-made courses that are structured to meet the specific needs of their employees. This is especially valuable when multiple employees require the same type of training. Even the training materials can be crafted to meet the agency's unique requirements. Courses can also be held on site, alleviating the need for travel and minimizing time away from the office.

An Evolving Relationship

The potential for an agency agreement evolved shortly after Daniel met Chapter 63 President Nancy Sinclair, SR/WA in Ottawa. As MTO's Head, Property Section Eastern Region, Nancy showed a great deal of interest in the advantages an IRWA agency agreement could provide her organization. She introduced Daniel to several other MTO staff involved in the chapter, including Professional Development Chair John Adams, SR/WA, and Education Chair Steve Biro, SR/WA, to discuss the opportunities for specialized training. Given that MTO spans across multiple regions in Ontario, Nancy recommended bringing in representation from Chapter 29 in Toronto. Robert Piper, SR/WA, who serves as MTO's Head Office Team Lead, Property became engaged in the discussions and took on an active role in bringing the agency agreement to fruition.

In March 2015, MTO signed a formalized agency agreement, and there are currently 25 employees participating in the program. Upon signing the agreement, Nancy said, "By establishing an agency agreement

MTO staff from left, John Adams, SR/WA, Tom Telford, SR/WA, Nancy Sinclair, SR/WA, Charlene Leslie, SR/WA, Debbie Givens, Chad Bradshaw, Anthony Manti, SR/WA, Steve Biro, SR/WA and Robert Piper, SR/WA.

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— Robert Piper, SR/WA
MTO Head Office Team Lead, Property

with IRWA, MTO is communicating to its staff and stakeholders that we recognize property acquisition and land management as a specialized profession and that we are committed to further developing our professionalism through continuous learning. It will also facilitate greater awareness of IRWA training opportunities within the organization and ensure that the ministry maximizes the value of investments in training.”

A Regional Strategy

With more than 3,800 employees, MTO is the provincial ministry of the government that is responsible for transportation infrastructure and related law in Ontario. The ministry, which celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2016, traces its roots back to the 1890s, when the province began training provincial road building instructors. Today, Ontario’s transportation network is considered one of the most complex in North America.

The responsibility for property acquisition and land management resides within MTO’s Provincial Highways Management Division. There are five regional offices across the province, including London, Thunder Bay, North Bay, Toronto and Kingston. The regional offices acquire property to support the construction of critical highway rehabilitation and expansion projects across Ontario. The ministry’s head office in the city of St. Catharines is responsible for developing and updating policies that guide land acquisition and management. It also reviews high value property appraisals and manages the arbitration process when compensation settlements have not been reached at the regional level.

“The ministry seeks to negotiate property settlements that allow construction projects to proceed as scheduled, while ensuring value for money and protecting the rights and interests of landowners,” Nancy explained. “Property appraisal and



negotiation activities are carried out directly by ministry staff and through the management of private realty professionals. The majority of property acquisitions result from amicable agreements with property owners, however at times, it is necessary to expropriate the lands in order to meet construction timelines.”

As part of their property acquisition role, the regional offices provide conveyance services to transfer property ownership, including title searches, legal documentation and registering title. The staff is also tasked with administering all notifications and registrations required to comply with the regulations of Ontario’s Expropriation Act. Regional offices are also responsible for the interim management of property required for future construction, as well as surplus property. These land management services include sales, leases, demolitions, tax administration and property maintenance.

Prioritizing the Projects

Every year, the ministry examines Ontario’s highway programs and prioritizes projects based on the needs and requirements of the entire

provincial highway network, including economic benefit and long-term growth needs. The ministry prioritizes its expansion projects taking into consideration such factors as changes in travel time, improvements in safety, economic development, availability of alternate routes, economic benefit and connectivity to transportation modes for moving goods. Integrating provincial and municipal planning and policy priorities, MTO also focuses on facilitating the use of transit.

According to Rob, “We look at new approaches to planning and investing in our transportation infrastructure so that we can stretch taxpayer dollars and maximize value in addressing Ontario’s transportation, economic, social and environmental objectives. We also partner with the private sector for the construction and maintenance of our highways, work with the federal government to develop long-term plans

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MTO Head, Property Section Eastern Region

for public infrastructure and use value engineering to enhance our highway projects. There is also an emphasis to apply innovative ideas generated within the ministry to save costs and deliver our highway projects better, safer and faster.”

The ministry annually obtains funding to deliver its highway program from the province’s Consolidated Revenue Fund through the annual business planning process, whereby ministries submit business case rationales for capital infrastructure projects and operational/maintenance budgets to the government’s central agencies. The ministry may also obtain funding for construction projects through federally sponsored programs such as the Building Canada Fund. Qualified projects are eligible for 50 percent of the project value under this program.

Role of Continuing Education

Nancy believes that continuing education is a very important part of the ministry’s efforts to maintain and further develop a workforce that has the knowledge, skills and capacity to support delivery of the provincial highway construction program. “Property acquisition for large highway infrastructure projects is a unique undertaking. The process is guided by legislation, and it often requires considerable knowledge and experience in appraising and negotiating partial takings, and identifying any impacts to remaining lands,” she said.



MTO's

Five Key Priorities

The ministry focuses its efforts on five key priorities:

1 Increase Transit Ridership

By working with partners to make transit an attractive and affordable alternative to the automobile, the ministry is building infrastructure, expanding services, promoting integration and reducing congestion.

2 Promote a Multimodal Transportation Network

To support the efficient movement of people and goods, the ministry works with partners, including the federal government, to optimize the use of all modes of transportation and support the province's economic and climate change objectives.

3 Promote Road Safety

In order to remain among the safest jurisdictions in North America, MTO uses education, legislation, regulation and highway design to keep the province safe and efficient.

4 Improve Ontario's Infrastructure

Through strategic investments throughout the province, the ministry is focused on improving its highways, bridges and borders.

5 Integrate the Principle of Sustainability

By building awareness and implementing a sustainability strategy, the ministry ensures that sustainability plays a vital role in the ministry's decision-making, programs, policies and operations.

The acquisition of property for future highway corridors is a complex activity that demands significant technical expertise, and continuing education is essential. It has become a high priority for the ministry staff to have access to the training they need to serve the interests of the government, property owners and members of the public.

Rob believes that by becoming an IRWA agency member, the ministry demonstrates that it values the services provided by the Association and that it has an interest in not only increasing its participation in educational events, but also in having greater influence on the type and location of IRWA course offerings. "While our property staff are not required to have specific designations, those striving to obtain designations or certifications are provided with opportunities to attend courses," he said.

A Long-Term Commitment

"The 2014 Ontario Budget signaled a long-term commitment to build and renew the province's infrastructure," said Nancy. "As a result, the ministry will be expected to deliver some of the largest highway construction programs in the province's history over the next several years. Timely property acquisition is critical to meeting these expectations."

While MTO policies, programs and services help to keep Ontario's transportation network safe and reliable, the ministry focuses on issues like growing traffic congestion, increased urbanization and climate change, all of which put pressure on the province's transportation system, as well as

the environment. Given the breadth and scope of MTO's mandate, the ministry has a unique opportunity to make a positive difference in Ontario's economic, social and environmental sustainability.

"MTO has a long and strong tradition of making significant contributions to the quality of life in Ontario. We want to build on this history in shaping the future of our ministry and our province – a future that is sustainable," Nancy said. "We are pleased to have become IRWA's first agency partner in Canada, and we plan to maximize the unique training opportunities that this agreement provides." ✪

Barbara is the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Right of Way Magazine.



For more information about IRWA's Agency Agreement program, please contact Daniel Stekol at stekol@irwaonline.org.