

**March 29, 2026****Municipal Standards Harmonization Office (MSHO)****Subject: MEA Comments to Ontario Regulatory Registry 26-MTO003**

We are writing to respond to Ontario Regulatory Registry 26-MTO003 - Harmonization of Municipal Road Construction Standards.

Municipal engineers play a vital role in planning, maintaining, renewing, and constructing municipal infrastructure. Their expertise spans all aspects of municipal infrastructure services - from design and construction to project management and leadership – ensuring the successful delivery of both small and large-scale capital infrastructure projects.

Through its membership, MEA provides specialized knowledge in all areas of municipal engineering in Ontario. In partnership with the Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO), MEA co-manages the Ontario Provincial Standards & Specifications (Municipal) and delivers training on Ontario Provincial Standards.

While we support the intent of the regulation to promote consistency, quality, and efficiency across municipal road construction projects, we recommend that additional consideration be given to the time and administrative burden associated with preparing, reviewing, and obtaining exemptions, as well as the cumulative impacts on project delivery arising from project-by-project assessments.

Exemption requests that require detailed technical justification across multiple evaluation criteria can take a considerable amount of time to prepare, particularly for complex or large-scale projects. This work frequently requires the involvement of senior engineering, technical, legal, and procurement resources, diverting limited capacity away from active project delivery. The time required to assemble a complete exemption request should therefore be recognized as a potential schedule, cost, and resourcing risk in its own right.

Equally important is the duration and predictability of the Minister's review and response timelines. When exemptions are assessed on a project-by-project basis without defined service standards or response timelines, projects may experience material delays while awaiting decisions. These delays can produce cascading impacts, including missed construction windows, contractor demobilization and remobilization costs, loss of price certainty, and increased exposure to supply-chain volatility. For time-sensitive or critical

infrastructure projects, even relatively short delays in regulatory decision-making can result in disproportionate impacts to project schedules and budgets.

To better reflect these realities, we recommend that the exemption framework explicitly consider additional criteria, including:

- Administrative and decision-cycle timelines, including the anticipated time required for review and approval and the impact of uncertainty on project planning and procurement;
- Cumulative impacts across multiple projects, particularly where similar exemption requests are repeatedly submitted for comparable project types or conditions;
- Schedule dependency and critical path impacts, including whether delays in exemption approval would directly affect construction sequencing, seasonal work constraints, or contractual obligations; and
- Consistency and precedent considerations, whereby prior approvals for similar circumstances could support streamlined or standardized decision-making, rather than requiring repetitive project-level analysis.

Incorporating these considerations would help ensure that the exemption process supports timely and efficient project delivery while still meeting regulatory objectives. Clear expectations regarding submission requirements and response timelines, as well as opportunities for programmatic or category-based exemptions where appropriate, would significantly reduce risk to project schedules and budgets without compromising safety, performance, or sustainability outcomes.

Looking ahead, and assuming the Ministry is able to successfully deliver the current list of harmonized standards within the proposed timeframe, we agree that the remaining OPSS.MUNI standards should be prioritized for future harmonization based on where the greatest time, cost, and administrative efficiencies can be achieved. In our view, this would include:

- Standards with the highest frequency of use across municipalities, where harmonization would reduce repetitive project-specific reviews, municipal deviations, and contract amendments;
- Standards that routinely generate exemptions, interpretations, or disputes, indicating inconsistency or misalignment that drives additional design effort, approval cycles, or delays;
- Standards that significantly affect project schedules or cost certainty, including those related to materials, construction methods, or inspection requirements that influence procurement and delivery timelines;



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- Standards that overlap or interact closely with those already harmonized, where alignment would enhance system coherence and reduce unintended conflicts or inefficiencies; and
- Standards that affect regional or multi-jurisdictional projects, where inconsistent requirements currently increase coordination challenges and administrative complexity.

A transparent, phased approach, supported by demonstrated progress on the initially harmonized standards, would help ensure that future harmonization efforts are achievable and deliver tangible benefits. Clearly articulating how the Ministry will complete the current scope, and how lessons learned will inform the prioritization of remaining standards, will be essential to achieving intended efficiency gains without overextending implementation capacity.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important initiative. We would welcome continued engagement as the regulation is refined and implemented.

Sincerely,

Penelope Palmer, P. Eng.,
MEA President 2025 – 2026
(Manager, Strategic Initiatives
Strategic Capital Coordination Office
City of Toronto)

March 29, 2026

Municipal Standards Harmonization Office (MSHO)

Subject: Harmonization of Municipal Road Construction Standards and Associated Governance Model

On behalf of the Municipal Engineers Association (MEA) and our municipal members, we acknowledge the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario's (MTO) ongoing efforts to maintain and modernize the Ontario Provincial Standard Specifications (OPSS). As partners and co-stewards of the OPSS, the MEA recognizes the importance of ensuring these standards remain current, effective, and responsive to the evolving needs of infrastructure delivery across Ontario.

The Municipal Engineers Association (MEA) is a non-profit organization representing more than 1,300 professional engineers working across 110+ Ontario municipalities, along with engineers from provincial agencies, conservation authorities, and consulting firms serving smaller municipalities. With a history spanning over 60 years, MEA was formed through the amalgamation of the City Engineers Association and the County Engineers Association. The association supports excellence in municipal engineering, recognizing the critical role municipal engineers play in planning, delivering, maintaining, and renewing infrastructure. The MEA provides specialized expertise across all areas of municipal engineering and, in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO), co-manages the Ontario Provincial Standards & Specifications (Municipal) and delivers related training across the province.

The long-standing success and credibility of the OPSS has been built on a collaborative partnership between the MTO and the MEA, grounded in co-stewardship, shared accountability, and balanced provincial and municipal technical expertise. The recent unilateral actions by the Ministry are inconsistent with the principles of partnership, and collaboration that have historically underpinned the success of the OPSS. Successful change and adoption cannot be achieved without first defining the problem, evaluating solutions and their consequences, and engaging partners through meaningful consultation.

The MEA has significant concerns regarding both the process and substance of the proposed harmonization of standards, including the lack of meaningful engagement with MEA and other municipal stakeholders, and the absence of a clear, shared understanding of the issues driving these proposed changes. These concerns are material and must be addressed if the changes are to be successfully implemented, broadly adopted, and supported over the long term.

Problem Definition, Need for Evidence and Supporting Data

At present, it is unclear what problems or deficiencies the MTO perceives to exist within the current OPSS framework. The MEA and its members are not aware of systemic failures or performance issues that would warrant the breadth, scale, or urgency of the changes being proposed. It is also unclear how these changes are expected to lead to reduced costs, improved efficiency, or better outcomes.

The MEA respectfully requests that the MTO clearly identify the concerns with the current framework, and share any analysis, metrics, benchmarking, or other evidence used to justify the anticipated benefits of the proposed modernization. Municipalities are concerned that the proposed changes will likely increase administrative burden, project complexity, and overall costs rather than achieve the intended efficiencies.

There are legitimate questions being raised about how a one-size-fits-all approach can successfully address the diversity of municipal conditions and requirements across Ontario. There is also apprehension that additional approval steps, reporting requirements, and governance layers will likely introduce project delays, uncertainty, and higher delivery costs without demonstrated public or operational benefit.

Clarification on the Modernized Governance Framework

The MEA respectfully requests clarification on how the proposed governance framework differs in a meaningful way from the current model. Municipal and industry engagement, along with technical input into standards development and review, already occurs through established existing technical committees, working groups, and consultation processes.

To build understanding and confidence, MTO must clearly articulate the added value of the proposed approach, including:

- What new roles, authorities, or decision-making structures would be introduced;
- What changes are anticipated in how standards are prioritized, approved, or updated; and
- How the proposed model will measurably improve efficiency, cost-efficiency, transparency, or consistency compared to the existing framework.

Annual Reporting, Exemptions and Compliance

The MEA understands the proposed framework would require mandatory annual reporting to the MTO including the introduction of a new approval process for exemptions. There are significant concerns related to the administrative burden these processes will put on municipalities, which will in turn affect their ability to deliver

projects and programs successfully in any given budget cycle. The administrative effort this approval process creates, without understanding the process, review requirements or timelines, is not demonstrative of an overall benefit. Clarity on these matters is essential. An opaque or slow exemption process introduces material risk to project delivery, schedules, costs, and contractual certainty.

Further clarification on annual reporting collection is essential to understanding the purpose and anticipated outcomes. Specifically, the MEA is requesting more information on the following:

- The specific purpose of the reporting;
- How the data will be used to inform decisions or policy;
- How reporting will account for local context and project complexity; and
- Will the reporting be the basis to track compliance.

Further clarification on the exemption process is perhaps even more essential, as it presents an even greater risk to successful project delivery if the process is overly burdensome, lengthy and lacks defined service standards. Expectations and timelines will need to be factored when municipalities are building programs for infrastructure renewal and rehabilitation. Even at these early stages, municipalities are flagging risks with their ability to deliver Council approved commitments if the exemption process is not clearly defined, and is not well supported. It is imperative that the MTO clarify the following:

- How exemptions will be reviewed and approved;
- Who will sit on the review panel and how municipal representation will be ensured;
- What service standards or timelines will apply to exemption decisions;
- Would an Ontario municipality continue to be recognized as a sponsor for new or revised standards when requests originate from a non-member; and
- What penalties or consequences are contemplated for non-compliance.

A one-size-fits-all approach does not reflect the realities of infrastructure delivery across Ontario. Municipalities operate under widely differing conditions, including climate, geography, asset profiles, operational constraints, material and labour market availability. Effective standards must allow flexibility to account for these differences if they are to be practical, efficient, and consistently applied province-wide.

In this context, the MEA and several municipalities have raised the need for blanket or standing exemptions in certain circumstances where efficiency can be demonstrably improved without compromising safety or performance. Requiring repeated case-by-case exemption requests for well-understood, low-risk municipal practices is viewed as inefficient and counterproductive. A model that combines clear standards

with appropriate flexibility and blanket approvals would better reflect local conditions and established municipal engineering practices while maintaining safety and performance.

Broader Impacts Across the Infrastructure Delivery Sector

While municipalities are directly affected, it is important to underscore that these proposed changes have far reaching implications beyond municipal owners alone. Designers, consulting engineers, contractors, suppliers, and other industry partners will also be impacted through changes to standards, approvals, contract administration, project schedules, and risk allocation. Successful modernization must therefore consider the full infrastructure delivery ecosystem, not solely municipal compliance obligations.

Partnership, Co-Stewardship, and Governance

The absence of the MEA from MTO's proposed development, roll-out and implementation of a standardized OPSS has raised concerns that the framework will shift toward a centralized, MTO-led model and will no longer function as a true partnership or co-stewardship.

The MEA requires clarity on how our role as co-steward will be explicitly protected and embedded within the proposed governance structure. Without a clearly defined, formalized role in decision-making and oversight, municipal confidence in the governance framework will be significantly undermined.

Further, the MEA seeks immediate clarification on the future role of the existing MTO/MEA specialty committees. These committees provide critical technical review, municipal insight, and issue resolution. It is uncertain whether they will be replaced, duplicated, or marginalized under the new framework, and how authority and accountability will be allocated going forward.

Path Forward and MEA's Ongoing Role

In the spirit of collaboration, the MEA offers the following constructive proposal to support a more effective and broadly supported outcome:

- Pause implementation to allow time for a shared understanding of the issues MTO is seeking to address and to explore whether alternative, more effective solutions exist;
- Pursue targeted harmonization, recognizing that some alignment is beneficial while preserving local flexibility. This should include the use of standardized

requirements where appropriate, complemented by blanket or standing approvals to reduce repetitive exemption requests;

- Map proposed review, approval, and reporting processes in detail and work collaboratively to identify and address pressure points before implementation;
- Establish a provincial working group, with representation from MEA members, MTO staff, and subject matter experts across Ontario, to identify priorities, risks, and opportunities from multiple perspectives;
- Engage consultants and contractors to understand how proposed changes will affect design, construction, procurement, and risk allocation and
- Ensure the process is not rushed, recognizing that thoughtful, inclusive development is essential to achieving sustainable and credible outcomes.

The MEA remains committed to the success of OPSS and to working collaboratively with MTO. However, meaningful partnership requires transparency and evidence-based decision-making, appropriate inclusion in governance, and genuine shared stewardship aligned with municipal realities.

Should the MEA continue to be excluded from the governance model or from substantive decision-making related to OPSS, the MEA will need to re-evaluate its role, partnership, and level of support for the framework moving forward. Our strong preference is to address these issues proactively through dialogue, collaboration, and shared clarity around roles and objectives. Providing the requested data, clarifying governance roles, addressing exemption and compliance concerns, and slowing implementation to allow proper consultation are necessary first steps.

The MEA welcomes the opportunity for prompt discussion and looks forward to working collaboratively to ensure any changes to OPSS strengthen—rather than undermine—the confidence, effectiveness, and partnership that have long defined its success.

Sincerely,

Penelope Palmer, P. Eng.,
MEA President 2025 – 2026
(Manager, Strategic Initiatives
Strategic Capital Coordination Office
City of Toronto)

BRIEFING NOTE
**OPSS Modernization &
Harmonization Concerns**



TO: Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO)

FROM: Municipal Engineers Association (MEA)

DATE: Tuesday, March 31, 2026

PURPOSE

To convey the MEA's significant concerns regarding the process and substance of MTO's proposed harmonization of the Ontario Provincial Standard Specifications (OPSS), and to request meaningful engagement before implementation proceeds.

BACKGROUND

The OPSS has long been grounded in a collaborative co-stewardship model between MTO and the MEA. Recent unilateral actions by MTO, without prior consultation with municipal stakeholders, are inconsistent with that partnership and risk undermining confidence in the framework. Successful change cannot be achieved without first defining the problem, evaluating solutions, and engaging partners through meaningful consultation.

KEY CONCERNS

1 LACK OF PROBLEM DEFINITION & EVIDENCE

The MEA is unaware of systemic failures in the current OPSS framework justifying the scale or urgency of proposed changes. MTO has not shared analysis, metrics, or benchmarking to support anticipated benefits. Municipalities expect the changes will increase, not reduce, administrative burden and project costs.

2 GOVERNANCE CLARITY & CO-STEWARDSHIP

It is unclear how the proposed model meaningfully differs from the current one, or how the MEA's co-stewardship role will be formally protected. The future of existing MTO/MEA technical committees, which provide critical municipal insight and issue resolution, remains uncertain.

3 EXEMPTIONS & ANNUAL REPORTING

Mandatory reporting and a new exemption approval process introduce material risk to project delivery. Without defined timelines and service standards, municipalities cannot reliably plan Council-approved programs. Blanket exemptions should be available for well-understood, low-risk practices.

4 ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL LIMITATIONS

Ontario municipalities operate under widely varying conditions including climate, geography, asset profiles, and labour markets. Effective standards must allow appropriate local flexibility to be practical and consistently applied province-wide. A uniform approach risks being neither efficient nor effective.

REQUESTED ACTIONS

- ▶ **Pause implementation** to allow shared problem definition and evaluation of alternatives before proceeding.
- ▶ **Share supporting evidence** including analysis, metrics, and benchmarking used to justify the proposed changes.
- ▶ **Clarify the governance model** and formally embed the MEA's co-stewardship role within the new structure.
- ▶ **Define the exemption process** including review timelines, panel composition, and measurable service standards.
- ▶ **Establish a joint provincial working group** with municipal, MTO, consultant, and contractor representation.

CONCLUSION

The MEA remains committed to the OPSS and to working collaboratively with MTO. Should the MEA continue to be excluded from substantive governance decisions, it will need to re-evaluate its role and level of support for the framework. Transparent, evidence-based, and inclusive engagement is essential to any modernization that strengthens, rather than undermines, the credibility and effectiveness of the OPSS.