

Environmental Assessment Process Improvements: A Path Forward

The following improvements to Ontario's environmental assessment process have been announced. The ministry will finalize these changes over the coming months in consultation with EA practitioners, environmental and community groups and the public.

Clearer Roles and Rules

Everyone that uses the EA process needs a clearer understanding of their roles and the rules that apply. The ministry is committed to making EA information more accessible and transparent.

Codes of Practice will provide proponents and the public with ministry expectations on the level of consultation required for EAs, the content of EA documentation and the tools available to resolve issues in the EA process.

It is critical that proponents and people who participate in the EA process understand from the outset what's expected of them, so that they can be better prepared before starting into the process.

The ministry will establish Codes of Practice for key elements of the EA process:

- Terms of reference
- Public consultation
- Mediation
- Preparation of individual EAs
- Class EAs
- Federal-provincial coordination agreement

Thousands of projects go through the Class EA process each year. The ministry is committed to **reviewing Class EAs** by working with proponents to ensure that projects covered by the Class EA process undergo an appropriate level of assessment.

The ministry has initiated this effort by working with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to remove speed-bumps from the EA process. There could be other similar opportunities, but there may also be instances where science dictates that a higher level of review is required.

EA training and education to help proponents and government staff to better navigate the process is a critical element of improving the EA process. Greater transparency must also be brought to the process, by making information on projects available through a **comprehensive EA web site**.

Faster Decisions to Protect the Environment

When it comes to EA improvements, the priority is environmental protection. A slower process does not mean a better process for the environment. A better process gets to a faster “yes” for environmentally sound projects that are necessary and constructive, and to a faster “no” for projects that are not environmentally responsible or viable.

The ministry will also work with other ministries and government agencies to **integrate EA with other planning processes** to assist in minimizing process requirements while maintaining environmental protection. The ministry will also work with its counterparts at the federal level to continue to **co-ordinate federal and provincial EA processes** to reduce overlap.

Decisions made throughout the EA process must be made more efficiently. The ministry is committed to **shorten the government decision making process** by reviewing and amending the Deadlines Regulation (O. Reg. 616/98). The ministry will also provide direction to proponents regarding the submission of and adherence to **workplans and schedules**.

We will develop **protocols** with our ministry and agency partners to ensure a consistent, efficient approach is applied to government reviews.

A **facilitation function** to assist and advise stakeholders on EA matters will be introduced. The facilitator will provide advice and use a range of tools, from mediation to guidance to peer review assistance, to help proponents and community groups better navigate the EA process.

The ministry will also enhance transparency and efficiency by **delegating** the decision making authority for bump-up/elevation request decisions on Class EAs/Electricity Regulation screenings to the Director. This will also help to reduce the time it takes for ministerial decisions to be made.

Sector Specific Enhancements

The ministry is committed to making improvements for the transit, energy and waste sectors.

Transit projects: A shorter process for these environmentally beneficial projects will help get people out of their cars and onto public transit. This is good news for Ontarian’s health and the health of the environment.

The ministry has already begun working with its municipal partners on developing a new process in the Municipal Class EA to include transit projects, and has provided them with the funding necessary to complete the new process.

Energy projects: There is a need to review and amend Electricity Regulation (O. Reg. 116/01) in order to remove duplicative provisions and support renewable energy projects.

Waste projects: To provide greater certainty to both public and private sector proponents of waste projects, the ministry will develop a new comprehensive regulation for waste management projects which will clearly set out the EA process requirements for waste facilities based on the type, size and potential impact of the project.