

Canada proposes reforms to accelerate trade and transport projects

AUTHORS



Claire Seaborn



Dennis E. Mahony



Mark W.S. Bain



Valerie Helbronner



Luigi A. Cusano



Huw Evans



Josh Van Deurzen



Jeremy Barretto



T. Ryan Lax

On May 8, the Carney government issued a [Press Release](#) announcing a series of ambitious reforms to the federal project approvals regime ([which was the subject of a previous bulletin](#)) and to accelerate trade and transport sector projects. The Government of Canada released a discussion paper entitled [Strengthening One Canadian Economy Through Trade and Transportation](#) (the Discussion Paper) and launched a 30-day engagement period that will end on June 6. The proposed reforms build on the *Canada Transportation Act* and *Canada Marine Act*, as well as the [fast-tracking regime adopted last year](#) through the *Building Canada Act*. While the [Major Projects Office](#) was implemented to accelerate a short list of projects of national interest, the proposed reforms in the Discussion Paper apply more broadly to the trade and transport sector.

What you need to know

- **The reforms would allow the Minister of Transport to designate National Trade Corridors:** defined geographic zones covering important routes for moving goods. The National Trade Corridors would be supported by Budget 2025 investments and support Canada's goal of doubling non-US exports over the next 10 years.
- **A new National Corridors Council would be created and port governance frameworks modernized** to improve efficiencies within the National Trade Corridors, foster collaboration amongst the Canadian Port Authorities, and better reflect the realities of modern trade.
- **Transportation sector laws and regulations would be amended to simplify reporting and streamline approvals.** This would include removing duplicate processes under the *Canada Transportation Act*, aligning more quickly with international standards, and simplifying marine liability obligations.

Designating National Trade Corridors

The Discussion Paper proposes to create new authorities allowing the Minister of Transport to designate National Trade Corridors, in order to set clear performance goals and support coordination across different parts of the

transportation system, including ports, railways, airports, trucking, and warehouses.

The concept builds on the National Trade Corridors Fund, which has invested over \$4 billion since 2017 in more than 200 trade and transport projects across the country. [Budget 2025 announced](#) an additional \$5 billion towards a Trade Diversification Corridors Fund and established the \$1 billion Arctic Infrastructure Fund, both of which are intended to improve supply chain efficiency and create new import and export opportunities for Canadian shippers.

A new National Corridor Council

The Discussion Paper proposes the establishment of a new advisory group called the National Corridor Council, comprised primarily of industry leaders, to advise the Minister of Transport on ways to improve efficiencies and achieve performance goals within the designated National Trade Corridors. The Council would prepare a report identifying opportunities which would enable Canada's strategic ports to achieve economies of scale, plan investments, and better meet the demand to support Canada's diversified trade. The Council could also consider amalgamating some key ports and potentially divesting others.

Additionally, Canada's port governance would be subject to additional oversight, including by adopting regulations requiring third-party evaluations of the Canadian Port Authorities, requiring regular updates to land use and business plans, and modifying fee setting processes. The creation of an Indigenous advisory mechanism is also proposed, as well as amendments to the *Canada Marine Act* to directly reference the role of Indigenous Peoples.

Simplifying transport sector laws and regulations

The Discussion Paper proposes several legislative and regulatory changes aimed at easing the administrative burden associated with compliance, including:

- removing duplicate processes under the *Canada Transportation Act*;
- aligning more quickly with international standards;
- transferring minor approvals under the *International Bridge and Tunnels Act* to the Minister of Transport;
- clarifying competition rules in the marine sector, including repealing the *Shipping Conferences Exemption Act*;
- simplifying obligations under the *Marine Liability Act*; and
- enabling fully digital and paperless trade.

Additionally, railway construction rules would be updated: this would include increasing the amount of track that can be built without section 98 approval, and providing that no approval is needed when a project is reviewed under the *Impact Assessment Act*.

What happens next?

The Privy Council Office and Transport Canada are jointly leading engagement on the Discussion Paper, inviting Indigenous Peoples to submit feedback to engagement@pco-bcp.gc.ca and industry stakeholders to submit feedback to TC.engagement.TC@tc.gc.ca by June 6. The Government of Canada is then expected to introduce legislation, consult on regulations, and implement policies.

To discuss these issues, please contact the author(s).

This publication is a general discussion of certain legal and related developments and should not be relied upon as legal advice. If you require legal advice, we would be pleased to discuss the issues in this publication with you, in the context of your particular circumstances.

For permission to republish this or any other publication, contact [Richard Coombs](#).

© 2026 by Torys LLP.

All rights reserved.