

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.