



# Recovery and Resilience; Rebuilding BC

---

*ICBA's 25 Point  
Economic Recovery Plan*

## About ICBA

By way of background, ICBA has been the leading voice of British Columbia's construction industry for 45 years, representing nearly 3,000 members and clients who collectively employ more than 100,000 people. ICBA advocates for its members in support of a vibrant construction industry, responsible resource development, and a growing economy for the benefit of all British Columbians.

On behalf of our broad membership, ICBA undertakes public policy development both provincially and federally; sponsors apprenticeship and professional training; and provides individual group and retirement benefits programs. Members are non-union or non-affiliated union contractors and, taken together, these two segments of BC's construction sector employment account for nearly 85 percent of the 250,000 men and women who work in construction in British Columbia.

## Context for ICBA's 25 Point Economic Recovery Plan

2020 has been a challenging year for British Columbians in unprecedented ways. As our province entered a new decade, the 'normal' course of life changed dramatically with the onset of COVID-19. The economic fallout from COVID-19 is only beginning to be felt with general unemployment rates near record levels and youth unemployment rates at truly staggering heights. Recent estimates suggest BC's economy will contract by almost 8 percent this year. To put this in context, this contraction is much deeper than the 2008/09 financial crisis and surpasses what our province experienced in the 1981/82 recession which was deepest economic malaise in our lifetime. The substantive difference with the COVID-19 induced economic downturn is that it is due to a global health pandemic, not the vicissitudes of financial institutions and markets (i.e. 2008/09) or structural change within BC's resource industries (i.e. 1981-82). That said, all was not well going into COVID-19; there were ominous signs that an economic slowdown was on the horizon.

ICBA is appreciative of the cooperative and collaborative approach by government, the official opposition, business and individuals to flatten the COVID-19 pandemic curve. Specifically, we appreciate early efforts by government officials to provide operating guidance with the approval of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) for the construction sector. This guidance, together with the subsequent essential services designation allowed the construction sector to remain safely open during the pandemic and pointed the way for similar guidance for other sectors of the economy. As BC's leading construction association, we are very pleased with the safety record our sector has achieved throughout the recent crisis through highly collaborative efforts. It's worth noting that to date, WSBC has recorded only one instance of a construction worker contracting Covid-19 on a job site. During this unprecedented circumstance, the vigilance, learnings, and overall success maintaining a culture of safety will be critical throughout the recovery period. It will also stand our sector in good stead should there be another COVID-19 'wave'.



[icba.ca/election](https://icba.ca/election)



Management of the pandemic is one thing. Addressing the economic fallout is another. While we can all take pride in the way British Columbia has addressed the pandemic to date, government, business and citizens should be alarmed about the economic fallout from COVID-19, and the likelihood of more harm to come as small, medium and large business confront the harsh reality of deferred government taxes and payments coming due, continued severe cash flow constraints, and the real prospect of further layoffs and/or permanent job losses in many firms. At the same time, government efforts to prop up the economy cannot continue forever.

ICBA is concerned about the lack of a clear economic recovery plan. Going into the COVID-19 emergency period, the NDP government enacted personal and corporate tax increases and regulatory changes that have made BC a high-cost jurisdiction, especially for our all-important trade-exposed resource industries where construction service providers and their employees derive much of their work. With BC businesses and individuals “tapped out” or “taxed out” and Ministry of Finance projections for many years of deficits due to COVID-19, policy makers must now but to do everything within their power to establish the conditions for economic growth.

A robust recovery from the current pandemic will require concerted provincial short-term economic stimulus to provide an “employment bridge” and training for displaced workers and to shore up firms that are teetering on the brink of bankruptcy and/or insolvency. In this regard, efforts should be placed on government stimulus measures that provide the ‘triple word score’ of jobs now for workers, liquidity for communities (to enable the purchase of local goods and services), and productivity enhancements for the long-run through new infrastructure and improved worker skills. At the same time, it’s now time to address the byzantine tax structure and regulatory burden facing most business sectors, particularly land-based resource industries in the Interior and North and the housing and development sector in Metro Vancouver and regional centers. The next provincial government should also provide any necessary assistance to small and medium sized businesses so they can get back on their feet.

ICBA’s 25-point plan, “**Recovery and Resilience: Rebuilding BC**”, is focused on practical, pragmatic measures the next provincial government must take to get people safely back to work, while laying the foundation now for a robust economic recovery and shared prosperity.

**Recovery and Resilience: Rebuilding BC** is focused on six broad themes with concrete actions to get BC’s economy moving again:

- COVID-19 – Safe Communities, Safe Workplaces
- Review BC’s Tax and Regulatory Burden
- Responsible Resource Development for Economic Recovery and Growth
- Infrastructure
- Skills Development and Training
- Housing



[icba.ca/election](https://icba.ca/election)



## The 25 Point Plan

ICBA's plan for economic recovery is based on our work with members and extensive representations to government over the past three years. Our focus is on the economy and the practical, pragmatic measures the next provincial government must take to build a resilient recovery; one which provides for the needs of workers and families, revenue for government programs, and shared prosperity for all British Columbians.

### 1) COVID-19 -- Safe Communities, Safe Workplaces

More than any other action, the provincial government must ensure safe communities and safe workplaces. While this is always imperative, the unprecedented crisis and challenges presented by COVID-19 requires extra focus and diligence. To accomplish this:

- Continue successful COVID-19 protocols to ensure businesses can continue to safely operate.
- As needed, assist with the procurement of personal protective equipment for the duration of COVID-19.

### 2) Review BC's Tax and Regulatory Burden

Over the last three years, approximately 20 new tax measures have been implemented by the NDP government and numerous new regulatory requirements have been added to the books. The magnitude of the tax and regulatory burden has become crushing and unsustainable for many small and medium sized businesses. This was the case before the onset of COVID-19; with the ongoing pandemic, and the prospect of second and subsequent 'waves', the next provincial government must act without delay to fix this situation. To accomplish this:

- Undertake a third-party review to modernize BC's tax system
- Undertake a thorough review of BC regulations, with highest priority given to areas which will help expedite BC's economic recovery.
- Restore balance to and ensure the future financial stability of WorkSafe BC.

### 3) Responsible Resource Development and Economic Recovery and Growth

There is significant private sector capital available globally that is looking for a 'home'. That is the good news. The bad news is that it will not find a 'home' in British Columbia unless the provincial government fashions a 'hosting environment' which is attractive to capital investment. Over a number of years, British Columbia has taken its privileged economic position – largely the result of abundant natural resources – for granted. Government needs to take drastic action to restore our resource industries to economic health. To accomplish this:



[icba.ca/election](http://icba.ca/election)



- Review regulations affecting natural resource and infrastructure projects to speed up approvals and permitting timelines, especially the Environmental Assessment Act.
- Ensure Indigenous Nations are true partners in economic development on the land base by provide capacity funding and sharing “best practice” Impact Benefit Agreement models.
- Work with Indigenous communities and LNG proponents to build-out BC’s LNG and value-added natural gas opportunity for the economic benefit of all British Columbians and to assist with global climate action.
- Review and reduce the regulatory and administrative burden for BC’s hard-hit forest sector.
- Invest more in silviculture and reforestation to replenish BC’s commercial timber stock.

#### 4) Infrastructure

Senior governments should pursue larger nation-building projects, particularly those in British Columbia focused on the Pacific Gateway (ports, roads, rail, and YVR airport bottlenecks) that facilitate BC’s lynch-pin role in long-term, two-way trade with the Asia Pacific and eastern Canadian and US markets. At the same time smaller projects should be prioritized to get people back to work. To accomplish this:

- Immediately repeal the union-only Community Benefits Agreement policy and restore fairness to tendering and government procurement.
- Focus immediately on stimulus spending for projects in the \$5 to \$50 Million range to provide jobs now for workers throughout the province.
- Undertake substantial infrastructure spending focused on growth enabling Gateway projects; Skytrain infrastructure improvements (e.g. extension to Langley and planning for North Shore); Highway improvements (e.g. Massey Tunnel replacement; Highway 1 four-laning Langley to Abbotsford and Kamloops to the Alberta border; Highway 97 Cariboo Connector additional four-laning, and safety and technical improvements to the Pine Pass; Taylor Bridge replacement; and Highway 3 and Highway 16 safety and technical improvements.
- Partner wherever possible with the federal government to leverage infrastructure spending.
- Extend broadband and wireless infrastructure throughout BC.

#### 5) Skills Development and Worker Training

The provincial government has a significant role to play in providing the “soft infrastructure” for our economy; that is, skills development and worker training. Ensuring training is provided in a fair and efficient manner so that displaced workers are “skilled up” for available jobs is critical. It is also important that every effort is taken to provide today’s workforce with *relevant* skills



[icba.ca/election](http://icba.ca/election)



required now with a clear line-of-sight to the future. This is best accomplished through multiple pathways providing choice for students to learn in-school, on-site, and on-line. COVID-19 has proven that flexible program delivery is essential and must become the new normal. To accomplish this:

- Undertake apprenticeship training as and where needed throughout BC.
- Broaden credential recognition and support multiple pathways for apprenticeship training and skills acquisition.
- Transition displaced workers into trades and apprenticeship training.
- Work with the entire construction sector to provide opportunities for more women and Indigenous participation in the workforce.
- Continue to advance, wherever practicable, on-line and distributed methods of apprenticeship and technical training within and for the construction sector.

## 6) Housing

Housing affordability in Metro Vancouver and regional centers remains an acute problem. Little has been done over the past three years to address these challenges especially for young British Columbians seeking affordable rental options or to purchase their first home. While record low interest rates provide some relief, the next provincial government must take a more hands-on approach to addressing this significant and growing problem. To accomplish this:

- Reduce delays and remove hurdles within municipalities to dramatically increase affordable housing and rental stock throughout BC, especially in Metro Vancouver.
- Use provincial and municipal land to enable non-market and cooperative housing to be built.
- Work with local governments to reduce taxes and fees on new housing projects.
- Provide incentives through grants or the tax system for the private sector to build affordable market and rental housing.
- Ensure that Metro Vancouver's Regional Growth Strategy is aligned with the broader provincial interest in ensuring the region grows sustainably to accommodate one million additional residents expected by 2040.

## Moving Forward

All British Columbians have a role to play in supporting our province's economic recovery. Once underway, we must all do our part to ensure the recovery is resilient. This requires that we work together to ensure elected representatives understand the importance of balanced public policy measures.

While COVID-19 may be with us for some time to come, policy makers must provide the basis for well-paid family supporting jobs and revenue for the health, education and social programs that we all cherish. ICBA's plan -- ***"Recovery and Resilience: Rebuilding BC"*** -- provides practical, pragmatic measures to accomplish our collective goal of creating shared prosperity for all British Columbians.



[icba.ca/election](http://icba.ca/election)

