ISSUE IN FOCUS

Major Projects Considerations in Bill C-39
The *Building Canada Strong Act*

October 7, 2026

The federal government introduced Bill C-39 on September 21, 2026 as part of its broader effort to strengthen economic growth, attract investment, improve supply chains, and accelerate major project development. The legislation builds on earlier reforms, including the *Building Canada Act* and the creation of the Major Projects Office.

One Project, One Review

- Bill C-39 coordinates a single federal review process under which all assessments, permits, and consultations proceed concurrently, are assigned to a lead federal regulator, and culminate in a single federal decision within a legislated one-year timeframe.
- For projects subject to the *Impact Assessment Act*, the assessor is the Minister of Environment. Pipelines and energy projects are regulated by the Canada Energy Regulator, and uranium mines and nuclear energy projects are regulated by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.
- A legislated one-year decision timeline would apply from the date a proponent provides a comprehensive application with the required finalized information and studies. Total elapsed time from project inception to decision will depend on the time spent completing baseline studies, technical assessments, and engagement activities.

Indigenous Consultation Reform

- Bill C-39 proposes the creation of a Crown Consultation Hub within the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada to coordinate federal Indigenous consultation activities, improve consistency across departments, and reduce administrative burdens for both Indigenous communities and project proponents.
- The Hub does not alter the Crown's constitutional duty to consult, nor does it create a veto over project decisions. Rather, it changes how consultation is organized within the federal government.
- The reforms place greater emphasis on earlier engagement in the project review process. Indigenous communities and project proponents will be expected to identify and address concerns sooner, reducing the likelihood that major issues emerge later during permitting or regulatory approval stages.

Regions of National Interest

- Bill C-39 expands the "projects of national interest" designation to create a framework for Regions of National Interest, allowing multiple projects within that region to potentially access streamlined approvals without each requiring a separate national-interest designation.
- Before a Region of National Interest can be designated, a regional assessment must be conducted under the *Impact Assessment Act* or equivalent territorial legislation, and Cabinet must consider the findings of that assessment.

Focus on Economic Feasibility

- Bill C-39 would require decision-makers to consider the technical, economic, and practical feasibility prior to imposing conditions on projects to mitigate impacts on fish habitat, species at risk, or navigable waters.
- Through a change of process, not a reduction of standards, Bill C-39 seeks to address these challenges in the *Species at Risk Act*, the *Canadian Navigable Waters Act*, and the *Fisheries Act*.

Impact of the Bill on Major Projects

- Bill C-39 reflects a meaningful shift toward a more efficient project approval system and incorporates several reforms directly aligned with Saskatchewan Chamber recommendations.
    - The commitment to "one project, one review" reflects a long-standing Saskatchewan Chamber recommendation to minimize duplication and accelerate regulatory processes.
    - Businesses need timely decisions rather than lower regulatory standards. The proposal to complete federal assessments and permitting decisions within one year directly addresses concerns about lengthy project reviews.
    - The proposal to create a Crown Consultation Hub to coordinate federal Indigenous consultation activities has the potential to create a more efficient, predictable, and transparent consultation process while maintaining meaningful engagement with Indigenous rights holders.
    - The Saskatchewan Chamber has long argued that some environmental review conditions, while well-intentioned, are imposed without sufficient consideration of engineering realities, implementation challenges, and project costs making them extremely difficult or even impossible to implement in practice. The proposal to consider the technical, economic, and practical feasibility prior to imposing environmental review conditions has the potential to better align economic and environmental concerns.
- If implemented effectively, the legislation could improve Canada's investment climate and accelerate development in key Saskatchewan sectors. However, several concerns remain.
    - The Bill grants ministers expanded authority to amend project conditions when deemed to be in the public interest. This flexibility may help advance priority projects, but it also raises concerns about regulatory certainty and the potential politicization of project approvals.
    - Bill C-39 does not reform federal assessment thresholds, which would allow low-risk, routine expansions, or incremental increases in existing operations to proceed under provincial assessment processes. The legislation may shorten and better coordinate reviews, but it will not reduce the number of projects captured by the federal assessment regime and it will not resolve duplicative processes between federal and provincial reviews.
    - If the Crown Consultation Hub functions as a true coordinator with the authority to align departments, establish clear expectations, and keep consultations on track, it could materially improve the efficiency of federal project reviews. If it becomes simply another layer of administration added to the process, the anticipated gains in timeliness and predictability may be more difficult to achieve.
- Ultimately, the success of Bill C39 will depend on execution, regulatory culture change, and ongoing commitment.