

From: NSFM Communications <communications@nsfm.ca>

Sent: March 27, 2025 8:03 AM

Subject: NSFM Update on Public Bills Process and Advocacy Efforts

Dear NSFM Members,

As many of you are aware, changes have been made to Bill 24. We want to update you on our ongoing advocacy efforts and the new Public Bills Committee process.

Understanding the New Public Bills Process

The Province has introduced a new Public Bills Committee, replacing the Law Amendments Committee. Under this new committee, presenters can provide input, but amendments will not be made by the committee itself. While voicing concerns remains important, NSFM, with the support of our Board, determined that the most effective advocacy approach was direct engagement with the Province—particularly given concerns about this legislation.

NSFM's Advocacy Efforts

NSFM President Pam Mood and CEO Juanita Spencer met, on several occasions, with the Hon. Fred Tilley, Minister of Public Works, and the Hon. John Lohr, Minister of Municipal Affairs, along with their deputies and provincial staff. These discussions were informed by the concerns raised during the Mayors, Wardens, & CAOs call on February 26.

In collaboration with AMANS, NSFM proposed key amendments to Bill 24, emphasizing:

1. A collaborative approach to decision-making
2. A defined cost-sharing process
3. Clear and reasonable timelines
4. A duty to notify NSFM and impacted municipalities in accordance with these timelines

The Province engaged in multiple discussions and incorporated some of these recommendations. However, the bill in its current form still presents significant concerns.

Key Issues Remaining

While we recognize the intent behind this legislation and appreciate the Province's willingness to make some modifications, the following concerns remain unaddressed:

- **Exemption of the 12-Month Notice Requirement:** The exemption of Section 519 of the Municipal Government Act (MGA) eliminates the requirement for a 12-month notice period for decisions affecting municipalities and limits opportunities for meaningful municipal input.

Although the Province has added language stating that municipalities will not incur costs within the first 12 months and that the Minister will make "reasonable efforts" to consult with NSFM and affected municipalities, we do not believe this goes far enough. Maintaining the 12-month notice requirement is essential for municipal planning, budgeting, and project management. Municipalities must have a seat at the table.

- **Broad Ministerial Authority Over Municipal Expenditures:** The bill grants the Minister authority to order unexpected municipal expenditures "to do anything required by this Act". This broad power could discourage long-term infrastructure investment because municipalities risk being compelled to alter, remove, or demolish assets on short notice.
- **Lack of Clear Timelines:** The bill references actions occurring within a "reasonable period of time," but without clear definitions, there is uncertainty about how municipal and ministerial interpretations of "reasonable" may differ. While we acknowledge the need for ministerial authority to address non-compliance, municipalities that are willing and prepared to collaborate require clearer timelines for implementation.

Progress and Next Steps

A positive outcome of our advocacy is the Province's acceptance of NSFM's proposal that the cost of any work undertaken must be apportioned in a way that is agreeable to both municipalities and the Crown. However, this provision still lacks a defined timeline, which could create undue pressure on municipalities.

Other positive changes found in recent amendments include:

- The inclusion of "ensuring collaboration with partners and municipalities in addressing transportation issues" in the Purpose of the Act
- The Minister will have discretion to decide when debt is to be collected from a municipality and ruled on by a court of jurisdiction
- The inclusion of "other municipalities" in the composition of the Technical Advisory Committee as appointed by the new Advisory Board of Link Nova Scotia

NSFM and its members support the safe, efficient, and coordinated movement of people and goods. Our goal is not to hinder progress but to develop of a fair and predictable road ahead as we accelerate toward the next chapter of regional transportation in Nova Scotia. We also continue to call for the release of the regional transportation plan and continued municipal involvement and collaboration.

We appreciate the Province's openness to discussion and its willingness to incorporate some of our recommendations. However, we recognize that our members may be disappointed by aspects of the bill that remain unchanged. NSFM remains steadfast in advocating on your behalf and ensuring municipal voices are heard. We presented your concerns strongly, and the changes made to the bill reflect that advocacy.

We also extend our thanks to AMANS for its guidance and support throughout this process.

We will keep you informed of any further developments. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please don't hesitate to reach out.



Pam Mood, President

NOVA SCOTIA FEDERATION OF MUNICIPALITIES

t +902.423.8331

info@nsfm.ca

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NSFM is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaw. We are all Treaty people. We also acknowledge the histories, contributions, and legacies of the African Nova Scotian people and communities who have been here for over 400 years.