

Ottawa to link gas tax refund to sustainable programs

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Rural communities in the Calgary area had their first chance to have a say in how they'd like to spend their portion of \$5 billion in new infrastructure money promised by the federal government.

Several town mayors, all members of the **Calgary Regional Partnership**, met with John Godfrey, federal minister of state for infrastructure and communities, in Calgary for a couple hours Sunday afternoon.

Godfrey wouldn't say how much of the \$5 billion, to come from a share of federal gas tax revenues and spread over five years, would be allocated to the Calgary region.

He said the allocation should be decided by the time the 2005 federal budget is released next spring.

"What we're looking for is finding (municipal) priorities, provincial priorities and bundling them up and declaring that these are shared national objectives," said Godfrey.

"We view this as a way of doing our bigger policy piece on Kyoto. Making sure we're using more sustainable transportation systems, cleaner water, one of our national objectives over time, and we want to do this all in the context of a 30-year vision of where we want our cities to go. What will a good city look like? What will a good community look like in 30 years?"

Godfrey is criss-crossing the country contacting town mayors and rural community representatives to begin assessing their needs and including them in the process of allocating the money.

"I don't think any of us will be surprised at what the funding formula will become or how it will be controlled because we've been part of setting up the criteria," said Strathmore Mayor Keith Schneider.

Godfrey met with Canada's 10 big city mayors at a two-day summit held in Toronto just over a week ago where the municipalities put forward a request for a share of the gas tax, amounting to \$10 billion over five years, double what the government says it can afford.

Key infrastructure issues that will be looked at include transportation, water and waste management, recycling and transit, but the specifics of what will be funded with the new money will be determined at a later date.

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