Sustainable economic growth expected for Calgary and Edmonton in 2018

ECONOMIC GROWTH IS SET TO BE MODERATE IN 2018 FOR CALGARY AND EDMONTON, a recent Conference Board of Canada report finds. Below is some insight from the Conference Board's recent economic outlook.

Calgary Economic growth in Calgary this year will see an anticipated expansion of 2.5 per cent, according to The Conference Board of Canada’s Metropolitan Outlook: Winter 2018. Higher oil prices fueled a big rebound in Calgary’s economy last year, as real GDP growth surged 6.9 per cent, although the city did not fully recoup the losses experienced after the oil price collapse in 2014. That recovery should be accomplished this year however, as Calgary’s economy is expected to expand by a further 2.5 per cent, stated the Conference Board. Recovery in the energy sector helped output in Calgary’s primary and utilities industry expand to a record 13.5 per cent last year — the sector’s first double-digit gain. This year, output is forecast to expand by a more sustainable 2.6 per cent. The energy sector turnaround has also brought new life into Calgary’s domestic economy: for example, the construction sector is forecast to expand by close to 2 per cent in both 2018 and 2019. Although sky-high vacancy rates will keep the downtown office market subdued, major projects such as the $3.5-billion Skywalk Landing business park and government infrastructure spending should provide a boost to the industry.

Edmonton Economic growth in Edmonton for 2018 is set to be expanded by 2.2 per cent, according to The Conference Board. Edmonton’s economy benefited in 2018 from higher oil prices and stronger investment and drilling plans in the oil patch, but real GDP growth is poised to moderate this year. Following a vigorous advance of 5.2 per cent in 2017, real GDP growth is forecast to cool to 2.2 per cent this year.

Oil prices are expected to continue their gradual rise, helping out the overall growth in the primary and utilities industry this year, down sharply from a 12.2 per cent gain in 2017.

‘Residential construction starts continue to be challenged by high inventories,’ Conference Board of Canada Calgary metropolitan outlook

Meanwhile, residential construction continues to be challenged by high inventories of unsold new homes, rising interest rates, and an expanded federal mortgage stress test. Thus, housing starts are expected to rise only modestly this year. Retail spending bounced back strongly last year too, as local consumers regained their confidence, but more modest gains are in the cards this year. We expect retail output growth to decelerate sharply from 8.9 per cent in 2017 to 2.4 per cent in 2018. Wholesale trade will experience a similar slowdown.

Rising employment helped cut the unemployment rate from a 22-year high of 9.4 per cent in 2016 to 8.7 per cent last year. With employment forecast to rise 2.0 per cent this year, the unemployment rate should edge down further to 8.2 per cent — still high by Calgary’s standards.

Real© Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Growth — Alberta vs Canada

Economic Snapshot

Despite pipeline problems, Alberta’s prospects are positive into 2019

John Clinkard

Fuelled in large part by a (50)% rebound in real oil prices and a consequent increase in energy exploration (rig counts are up by 80%), the Alberta economy expanded by 4% in 2017 after back-to-back declines of -3.9% in 2015 and -3.7% in 2016. Moreover, this strong growth, the highest among the ten provinces, occurred despite the fact that the province’s energy exports were and still are being severely restricted by the previous U.S. administration’s failure to approve the Keystone Pipeline, by the Liberal government’s failure to actively support the Energy East Pipeline, and by the B.C. government’s opposition to the expansion of the Trans Mountain Pipeline.

Alberta’s labour market provides the most compelling evidence of its improved economic health. Over the past twelve months, employment in the province has increased by 45,900 jobs after contracting by 4,800 during the previous 12 months. Since January of last year, 88,000 Albertans have found full-time employment. This gain more than offset a 43,000 drop in part-time hiring and it suggests that employers, most of whom are in the private sector, are more confident about taking on full-time staff. Although there is still plenty of slack in the labour market, the provincial unemployment rate has dropped from a recent high of 9% to 7% in just 13 months and Alberta’s job vacancy rate reached 2% in Q3/2017, its best reading since Q4/2014.

The improvement in labour demand within Alberta appears to have stemmed the outflow of migrants to other provinces. Total net migration to Alberta hit a three-year high in Q3/2017 due to the combination of positive net interprovincial migration and sustained net international migration.

Given the combination of low interest rates, solid job gains and rising consumer confidence, it is not surprising that retail sales staged a significant rebound, +15% y/y in the second half of 2017 after contracting by -4% y/y in the second half of 2016. Alberta’s housing market is also showing signs of renewed strength. Existing home sales in the province are up by 9.4% so far this year following declines of -21.3% in 2015 and -3.8% in 2016. Moreover, this strong rebound in the secondary market has translated into a healthy pace of new construction as the number of non-residential construction permits issued increased by 22% in the first quarter of 2018 compared to the first quarter of 2017.

John Clinkard has over 35 years’ experience as an economist in international, national and regional research and analysis with leading financial institutions and media outlets in Canada.©2018 CanaData. All rights reserved.
Vancouver set to build Canada’s first Passive House fire hall

Jean Sorensen

The City of Vancouver is building Canada’s first fire hall built to Passive House standards.

But, the new $20 million fire hall No. 17, which is also expected to meet both LEED Gold and net zero energy standards, and the city’s continued build-out of Fire Halls is part of a larger vision of transforming the city to a more sustainable, liveable centre.

The new fire hall has been designed with roof top solar panels. Gorka said the city is also targeting that the fire hall generate on site as much energy as it consumes from a grid.”

The roof top solar panels are also expected to offset greenhouse gas emissions from the structure.

While Fire hall No. 17 (at 55th Ave. and Knight Street) is modelled for energy efficiency, Fire hall No. 5 (Champlain Heights) was started several years earlier with construction slated for completion by end of 2018.

Fire hall No. 5 does not share the same strict energy conservation, it demonstrates another reality of city-planned buildings.

The day’s of stand-alone facilities for the city are pretty well over,” Natalka Lubiw, City of Vancouver, said.

“We are trying to be leading edge,” said Natalka Lubiw, the city’s associate director of facilities development.

“We are moving towards net zero emissions (under the city’s building plan by 2030) and showing it can be done in different buildings without sacrificing function,” she said.

Fire hall No. 17 is destined to be an example by using Passive House construction to push forward Vancouver’s vision for all city and non-city buildings to reach its 2030 zero emissions target by using less energy to heat structures.

“It is a LEED Gold building and you can get LEED Gold but not make a dent in green house gases. Passive house design helps us to close that gap,” she said.

“It is super challenging and we are looking forward to seeing it completed,” said project manager Alicia Gorka overseeing the reef hall No. 5, a 4.5 storey building, built to a standard that is expected to reduce energy needs (75 to 90 per cent) compared to traditional buildings.

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“Navdeep Bains said the hubs will pump $50 billion into the Canadian economy over the next 10 years and create “more people and jobs”.

“Passive house design helps us to connect big data with health care, forestry, manufacturing and other sectors,” said Styles.

The physical clusters, called nodes of development, will be close to where the crops that can be processed into other products are located,” Ron Styles, Protein Industries Canada.

The five groups represent consortia of more than 450 businesses, 60 post-secondary institutions and 180 other participants, such as research institutions and non-government organizations, according to a government release prior to the announcement.

“The physical clusters, called nodes of development, will be close to where the crops that can be processed into other products are located,” Ron Styles, Protein Industries Canada.

According to Hans Parmar, a spokesperson for Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, each supercluster will get approximately $125-250 million from the federal government.

“Contributions take a variety of factors into account, including the value of the economic opportunity and level of industry investment committed,” said Parmar. “Program contributions will be matched at least dollar for dollar by industry contributions.”

Most of the details of the initiative remain to be worked out. “Funding amounts will be finalized through the negotiation of contribution agreements,” said Parmar.

Some construction may be eligible for supercluster funding.”

“Depending on the contribution agreement, recipients may be permitted to make payments towards infrastructure costs, including construction, repair and maintenance, that are directly related to eligible activities and program objectives,” said Parmar.

All of the superclusters are still in the early stages of development. The one that is protection for superflying is the prairie-based Protein Industries Canada (PIC).

According to acting president Ron Styles, PIC is a federal non-profit with about 120 “contributors and supporters,” many of whom will become members once a membership program is developed in mid-2018.

Although Styles is located in Regina, PIC’s contributors and supporters are situated across the three prairie provinces.

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See SUPERCLUSTERS, Pg. 7

Feds say high-tech “superclusters” throughout Canada will grow regional economies

Peter Caufield

In its February 2018 budget, the federal government announced 15 superclusters “superclusters” spred evenly across the country. The states will set up hubs of collaboration between researchers and industry that will, the government said, help Canada compete in the 21st century global economy.

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Minister Navdeep Bains said the hubs will pump $50 million into the Canadian economy over the next 10 years and create more than 50,000 middle-class jobs.”

The first wave of announcements came at the end of a national supercluster competition that was launched in May 2017. The winning superclusters include a group based in British Columbia that will create a digital technology supercluster to connect data with health care, forestry, manufacturing and other sectors. The Prairies will be home to a protein industries supercluster that will develop plant proteins.

A group in Ontario will focus on advanced manufacturing and one in Quebec will work on artificial intelligence and robotics.

An ocean supercluster in Atlantic Canada will improve competitiveness in fisheries, oil and gas and clean energy. The five groups represent consortia of more than 450 businesses, 60 post-secondary institutions and 180 other participants, such as research institutions and non-government organizations, according to a government release prior to the announcement.

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See SUPERCLUSTERS, Pg. 7
Arup Canada and IBI Group.

Andrew Knack

Partners is composed of Bechtel, EllisDon, Bombardier, vice construction and a revitalization of these older areas. We have fallen behind in our development of rapid tran-
sitions and is being delivered by a public-private partnership.

The number one criterion has become the redevelopment of mature communities,

Andrew Knack

City of Edmonton councillor

Edmonton has two LRT projects ready to begin: the Valley Line and the Metro Line South running from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) to Blatchford.

Knack said the provincial funding—along with other federal funding—will begin immediately with the Valley West Line and also begin efforts to construct the latter project.

However, a report to council estimated that the cost could raise to $2 billion depending upon the number of stations and their grade separations from street level. Council is still line-tuning the stations locations.

"I think we will come in at around $2 billion," Knack estimates.

Knack said the council will also have to decide whether to pursue a P3 route or another delivery method such as design-build. He adds, "the city wants to move on it.

"We would like to go to tender this summer," he said, with council able to choose a successful proposer for construction starting in 2019.

He said there are other details to be considered before putting the provost's tender as there is nothing to proceed. TransAlta Partners from bidding on the other leg of the line. At the same time, council will have to ensure that there is no unfair advantage and all builders are opening with the same cost information related to the expenses. At Lewis Farms a new community centre is also being planned. A short shrift was taken from the new station. It is going to be a major construction project and it is long over due for the community," he said. Council is hoping to trap- up the final designs of the new centre later this year and approve. The tender for the new community centre is expected to go out in mid-2021.

Edmonton's Metro Line consists of two segments: Metro Line North which runs from Churchill to the NAIT and was completed in 2017 and the put to be built Metro Line North.

The first phase of the Metro Line Northeast begins at a new station at ATC and will initially go only to a site.

"Building the core of the Green Line LRT is essential to supporting Calgary’s growth," said, Mark Logan, City of Edmonton transportation general manager.

Calgary's Green Line will be the longest LRT constructed in Calgary's history at 46 kilometres in length. The project was approved by city council in 2017. The first phase of the Green Line is 20 kilometres long with 14 stations.

Calgary's Green Line is 46 kilometres in length and was approved by Calgary council in 2017. The first phase of the Green Line is 20 kilometres (14 stations) and budgeted at $45.6 billion and runs from 6 Ave. N to 12 Avenue S.E.

The public-private partnership is expected to complete work starting in 2027, opening the LRT line in 2029.

The replacement cost estimate (established in June 2017) of $2.5 billion is the cost to construct the system, including a 10 per cent contingency for unexpected costs.

Not to be outdone, Metro Vancouver's Mayor has recently put together and obtained B.C. government approval for a funding formula yielding $2.5 billion (a combination of operating subsidies, user fees, increases and added parking revenue) for the second phase of its transit plan expected to cost $7.0 billion. The city will fulfill the legislative obligation to privatize 20 per cent of funding for the second phase with both the provincial and federal government plugging 40 per cent total.

Under the second phase plan, Metro Vancouver will build the Surrey-Sw該 sadlewood and the Millennium Line to Kelowna.

The west port (102 Street downtown and Lewis Farms Transit Center) that Knack wants to tend to by summer was originally estimated at a cost of $1 billion.

Calgary's City of Calgary's City of Calgary's City of
Municipalities of two minds regarding 2018 federal budget

PETER CAULFIELD
CORRESPONDENT

Canadian municipalities had a mixed reaction to the 2018 federal budget.

On the one hand, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) said, in a post-budget announcement, that the budget “respond[s] to municipalities’ calls to urgently fund opioid treatment and to take steps toward ensuring they have financial tools to safely implement cannabis legalization in their communities.”

To help address the opioid crisis, the federal government proposes to spend $231.4 million over five years, starting in 2018-19.

“This budget missed a key opportunity to generate frontline outcomes by expediting repairs to Canada’s social housing supply,” Brock Carlton, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, said, in a post-budget announcement.

The government’s multi-pronged attack calls for one-time “emergency funding” of $150 million to provinces and territories to improve access to evidence-based treatment services; a public education campaign “to address stigma that creates barriers for those seeking treatment”; improve access to public health data and analysis; provide detection and identification tools to border agents to intercept fentanyl and other substances at ports of entry; and expand the Substance Use and Addictions Program “to develop innovative approaches to treatment and prevention.”

According to public health officials, approximately 4,000 people died from opioid-related overdoses in Canada in 2017.

Federal residue duties on cannabis, when the substance becomes legalized in 2018, will be shared on a 75/25 basis, with 75 per cent of duties going to provincial and territorial governments and the remaining 25 per cent to the federal government.

The federal government says it expects that “a substantial portion” of the tax revenues to provinces and territories will be transferred to municipalities and local communities, “who are on the front lines of legalization.”

Brock Carlton, FCM chief executive officer, says the opioids treatment program will succeed or fail depending on how it rolls out.

“Municipalities are on the front lines,” said Carlton.

“They provide many services, such as police, ambulance and law enforcement, that become more in demand because of drug-related problems.”

But on the other hand, said the FCM, which represents 2,000 Canadian municipalities, “this budget missed a key opportunity to generate frontline outcomes by expediting repairs to Canada’s social housing supply to kick-start the National Housing Strategy.”

“Social housing in Canada is in need of repair, and the work can’t wait,” said Carlton. “There are 600,000 units of social housing in Canada that need work. The social housing stock in Toronto alone needs $1.6 billion over the next 10 years just to keep it liveable.”

Carlton says much of the social housing stock in Canada was built in the 1960s and 1970s and needs refurbishing now.

“Over the next 10 years, $615 million per year needs to be spent to get the stock of social housing up to where it should be,” he said. “Some social housing has been taken off the market because it’s fallen into such disrepair.”

Drugs and social housing aren’t the only things on the minds of Canadian municipalities, especially in rural western Canada.

In Saskatchewan, about one-third of the population is rural, compared to an average 20 per cent for Canada as a whole, says Ray Orb, president of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM).

“Our big concern is infrastructure,” said Orb. “We need good, basic high-speed Internet. Without it, our farmers are hurt, and it inhibits new business from moving in.”

Rural Saskatchewan also needs repairs to more traditional infrastructure — roads and bridges.

“Agricultural production is way up, which puts more heavy trucks on roads and bridges, which means they need more maintenance,” said Orb.

Next door in Alberta, rural municipalities are facing similar challenges.

“Rural Alberta municipalities need more and better broadband and Internet connection,” said Al Kemmere, president of the board of directors of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta.

“The municipalities do the work first and then they apply for the money,” said Kemmere.

“Sometimes it can take a year or even two years to complete a project, which puts a lot of pressure on their finances.”

It’s also a challenge for many rural municipalities to keep their roads and bridges in good repair.

“The municipalities do the work first and then they apply for the money,” said Kemmere.

“You can spend a year or even two years to complete a project, which puts a lot of pressure on their finances.”

The Canadian system of government can make it difficult for our municipalities to access sources of funding from senior levels of government — the federal and provincial governments — which like to keep a tight grip on the purse strings.

“If you compare Canada and the United States, Canada doesn’t have common political affiliations running from the federal down to the municipal level,” said Steve Mongrain, professor of economics at Simon Fraser University.

“Unlike Canada, municipal elected officials in the U.S. are usually Democrats, Republicans or Independents, like federal and state elected officials. So it can be easier for them to influence upper-level policies.”

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There's no end in sight to the B.C. housing crisis, Gordon says.

Continued from Pg. 3

Superclusters can be key drivers to diversify and energize the Canadian economy: economist

The price of entry level units and rents have increased sharply," Josh Gordon Simon Fraser University

Vacancy rates for renters are one percent or lower in most cities in B.C.; not just Vancouver, but also Victoria and Kelowna.

“The price of entry level units and rents have increased sharply," said Josh Gordon, assistant professor of public policy at Simon Fraser University.

“Many people are being put into precarious situations, either financially or in terms of insecure tenure,”

The average house price to income ratio, which is a typical measure of affordability, sits at around 12 to 1 in Metro Vancouver, Gordon says.

“That is by far the highest ratio Canada has ever seen, and it puts Vancouver among the most unaffordable markets in the developed world," he said.

All groups are affected by the crisis, but those most hurt are young people, the elderly and renters with limited incomes who face possible eviction.

“On the other hand, some people have done fantastically well, especially those in the real estate industry," Gordon said.

“The problem is that the gains have gone to people who are generally already well off, and the costs have fallen on those who have limited means. That’s a recipe for an angry and unhappy city.”

Gordon says foreign investors have played a major role in the crisis.

“Vancouver would be an expensive city in the absence of all of the foreign ownership, but foreign money has greatly exacerbrated the problem," he said.

Although media attention has been intense recently, the problem goes back at least 40 years, says Vancouver architect, planner and developer Michael Geller.

“Vancouver has had a housing affordability problem since the 1970s," said Geller.

“The problem worsened until the early 1980s, when there was a softening of the market because of high interest rates.”

Then there was Expo 1986.

“We invited the world and it came," he said. “And in 1997, Britain gave Hong Kong to China, which resulted in many of the rich fleeing the city to Vancouver.”

The high prices have spread from the west side of Vancouver to the east side and to increasingly distant suburbs, such as Surrey and Langley, Geller says.

“They could spread even further, to Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Squamish and Hope, as people adjust to the high prices by moving further and further out," he said.

“The future, some people will commute weekly from such places and will live in adult dorms in Vancouver or share a small apartment during the week.”

The crisis has not gone unnoticed by municipal governments.

According to the report, major policy shifts are needed to address homelessness, create new rental housing stock and stabilize the ownership market.

All levels of government, including First Nations, need to work together to solve the problem,” said Greg Moore, chairman of the UBCM Housing Committee.

Moore says the housing crisis is not a single problem.

“The solution is different in different regions of the province,” he said.

“There’s been a lot of loose talk about how to solve the housing problem. Many silver bullets have been proposed, but the problem is complex and there’s no single solution.”

“There’s no end in sight to the B.C. housing crisis,”

David Ley

University of British Columbia

The provincial government has also taken note.

In the 2018 budget speech in February, Finance Minister Carole James announced a 30-point plan for making buying and renting more affordable.

The plan includes increasing the foreign buyers tax from 15 per cent to 20 per cent, and extending it outside of Metro Vancouver to the Fraser Valley, Victoria, Nanaimo and Kelowna; introducing a new tax on real estate speculation; rooting out hidden foreign ownership; and investing $1 billion over 10 years in affordable housing.

While governments are sincere in their desire to fix the problem, there is no guarantee that their measures will be successful, said David Ley, UBC emeritus professor of geography.

“There’s no end in sight to the B.C. housing crisis," said Ley.

“Governments want to solve the problem, but the hole they have dug for themselves, by letting an unregulated flow of financial capital into the housing markets and letting investors do whatever they want, means it will be a long time before there is an affordable housing market here.”

Superclusters can be key drivers to diversify and energize the Canadian economy: economist

Continued from Pg. 3

Examples of such crops and their locations are sugar beets in southern Alberta, canola in Saskatchewan, hemp in Mani­ toba and pulses in all three prairie provinces.

“Prairie agriculture needs to develop more food processing, and the processing of the by-products of processing, too," Styles said. “They are the missing ingredients of prairie economic development.”

Alex Carrick, chief economist of Connect North, Markham, Ont., likes the supercluster idea.

“The Canadian economy needs to be energized," said Carrick. “We can’t continue to depend on commodities. Nor can we continue to depend on the U.S. market. We need to diversify and find new markets.”

Carrick says Canada must start thinking strategically about economic development, including identifying and nurturing knowledge-based clusters.

“Because we haven’t been thinking strategically, we got caught flat-footed by Trump’s NAFTA demands," he said.

In the US, by comparison, there are already many technology clusters.

“In addition to the most well known ones, such as Silicon Valley near San Francisco, and Route 128 near Boston, there are lots of other clusters, many less than 100 miles apart,” Carrick said. “And that’s where the young people want to go to live and work.”

Carrick is unsure if the supercluster initiative will lead to new construction.

“If there is new construction, it won’t be huge resources-processing buildings,” he said. “Any new construction will be small-scale and there might not be much of it, either.”

Jack Mintz, president’s fellow at the University of Calgary, likes innovation clusters, but doesn’t think government is effective at creating them.

“Every day or so there is a major innovation of some kind, and it’s hard to predict what it will be and when or where it will take place,” said Mintz. “Nobody knows in advance who the winners and the losers are going to be or where they’ll be located. Who would have guessed that fracking would become so successful? And it was all done by the private sector; no government money was involved.”
The interchanges on McOrmond Drive and College Drive and at Boychuk Drive and Highway 16 in Saskatoon, Sask. are ready for a major construction milestone.

Fifty-six girders, concrete structures ranging between 29 and 38 metres in length that support the bridge deck, will first be placed over the westbound and eastbound lanes of College Drive at McOrmond Drive, starting on March 26. Work on the interchange began in April 2017.

"Installation at this site will take approximately three weeks. The girders were manufactured in Alberta. Once on site, a 250-tonne crane will immediately lift them into place," said Bryan Zerebeski, project manager for the Saskatoon Interchange Project, in a statement.

Construction has also been underway on the Boychuk Drive and Highway 16 interchange since April 2017, and girders will be installed once installations at McOrmond and College are complete.

The Saskatoon Interchange Project, a bundling of the two interchanges into a single project, was undertaken because the surrounding neighbourhoods have experienced rapid development resulting in a rise in traffic volume, along with collisions and increased environmental damage, explains a release. Both interchanges will include three-metre-wide multi-use pathways to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists. It was determined by the City of Saskatoon that building the interchanges at the same time as a design-build package would result in cost savings.

PCL Construction Management Inc. was chosen through a procurement process to design and build both interchanges for approximately $56.6 million. The governments of Canada and Saskatchewan each contributed up to $10.9 million to the Boychuk Drive and Highway 16 interchange through the Provincial-Territorial Infrastructure Component — National and Regional Projects, and surrounding developers completely funded the McOrmond Drive and College Drive interchange.

Construction on the McOrmond interchange is estimated for completion by the fall of 2018, with completing of the Boychuk interchange by summer 2019.

SASKATOON

Two Saskatoon interchanges ready for girder installation

A major construction milestone will be accomplished in the coming weeks as part of the Saskatoon Interchange Project. Fifty-six girders, concrete structures ranging between 29 and 38 metres in length that support the bridge deck, will first be placed over the westbound and eastbound lanes of College Drive at McOrmond Drive. PCL Construction Management Inc. was chosen through a procurement process to design and build both interchanges for approximately $56.6 million.

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