AMBM

ASSOCIATION DES MUNICIPALITÉS BILINGUES DU MANITOBA

ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA BILINGUAL MUNICIPALITIES

Prosperity Framework

for Manitoba's Bilingual Municipalities

LEVERAGING OUR BILINGUAL ADVANTAGE TO PROPEL A PROUD, STRONG, AND RESOLUTELY FORWARD-LOOKING CANADA.

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Background

The Association of Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (AMBM) represents 16 municipal governments committed to providing services in both official languages. Together, these municipalities—which include both rural and urban communities—represent 60% of Manitoba's population. Approximately 70% of the province's Francophones reside within their boundaries, where the Francophone population represents an average of 30% of residents.

As reflected in the 2021 Census, these municipalities are experiencing unprecedented growth: from 2016 to 2021, they recorded a population increase of over 8%, well above the provincial average of 5%. This historic growth testifies to the attractiveness of our communities, and presents both challenges and opportunities.

AN INTEGRATED ECOSYSTEM TO SUPPORT THE COLLECTIVE PROSPERITY AND VITALITY OF OLMCS

Manitoba's bilingual municipal leadership also heads the AMBM Group, a unique consortium that brings together the AMBM, the Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (*Conseil de développement économique des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba*, or CDEM), and Eco-West Canada (EWC). These three entities combine their expertise to support the prosperity of Manitoba's bilingual municipalities while maximizing their impact on the development, vitality and sustainability of Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs) across the province.

A STRUCTURING TOOL: THE MUNICIPAL MATURITY MODEL (3M)

To support municipalities in the progressive, coherent and adapted implementation of their bilingual service commitments, the AMBM has developed the Municipal Maturity Model (3M)—a first in Canada. Adopted in the spring of 2024 by all member municipalities covered by this new regulatory framework, the 3M enables Manitoba's bilingual municipalities to assess their capabilities, set concrete targets for themselves and measure their progress and investment in official languages in three key areas: 1) service delivery and communications with the public, 2) governance, leadership and strategic direction, and 3) people management.

In recent years, it is estimated that Manitoba's bilingual rural municipalities have collectively invested over $1 million per year to provide municipal services in both official languages. Thanks to the 3M, it is now possible to quantify these investments and track their evolution from year to year on a comparable basis. The model structures municipal processes, strengthens accountability and facilitates alignment with government priorities, notably those arising from the modernized *Official Languages Act*.

A NATIONAL CONTEXT REQUIRING STRONG LOCAL ACTION

Canada is emerging from a crucial election period, marked by the emergence of a new government. In an unstable international context and under economic pressure, it is imperative to adopt a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient approach to growth. This prosperity begins with municipalities, which are true drivers of development. Their recognition as full intergovernmental partners is essential to steering equitable and consistent growth that is aligned with the realities on the ground.

As the order of government closest to the people, Manitoba's bilingual municipalities are strategically positioned to mobilize local stakeholders and implement concrete solutions that promote innovation, social cohesion, and adaptation to demographic and climate realities. Together with the Manitoba government, they are best positioned to translate national priorities into tangible results in the daily lives of citizens.

To unlock their full potential, federal programs and policies must be tailored to territorial and bilingual realities, systematically incorporating an OLMC lens and, where relevant, a rural perspective. This means reflecting the specific needs of these communities and building tools that are truly accessible, effective, and equitable.

From this perspective, planning cannot be limited to one-off or reactive interventions. It must be based on a data- and results-driven approach. This vision also calls for enhanced intergovernmental coordination. Sustained collaboration between municipal, provincial, and federal governments is necessary to align priorities, optimize resources, and act consistently, based on the specific needs of the territories.

COMMUNITIES READY TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF TOMORROW'S CANADA

Manitoba's bilingual municipalities are ready to do their part to build a stronger, more equitable, and more united Canada. As the country looks to rebuild, it is essential to build on its strengths. Our dynamic bilingual communities, with their concrete solutions, are a key lever for the country's sustainable development. Contributing to their growth means investing in the building of a resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking Canada.

Whether it's infrastructure, housing, local services, or sustainable development policies, it's time to move beyond short-term thinking and build communities that are ready to meet the challenges of the coming decades.

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK TO DRIVE A RENEWED PARTNERSHIP

The *Prosperity Framework for Manitoba's Bilingual Municipalities* proposes renewed vitality, driven by a strengthened intergovernmental partnership. Building on Manitoba's bilingual municipalities means building a stronger, more united and more competitive Canada. The five strategic priorities put forward build on well-established positions within the AMBM, while providing new momentum. They are broken down into 23 concrete recommendations for the Government of Canada.

Strategic priority n° 1 :

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the foundation of dynamic, inclusive, and prosperous communities. It supports the economy, structures growth, promotes regional attractiveness, and ensures quality of life.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, every dollar invested in local infrastructure adds between $1.20 and $1.60 to Canada's real GDP. There is no doubt that infrastructure investment is one of the most powerful and scalable drivers of economic growth, as well as a powerful tool for economic development across Canada.

However, the needs are considerable and urgent.

A CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEFICIT

Incidentally, infrastructure to support housing construction is a major challenge. Studies conducted in 2024 by CDEM in 11 bilingual rural municipalities revealed a need for 1,279 new housing units by 2026. These studies enabled several of our members to submit structured funding applications—notably to the Housing Acceleration Fund (HAF)—thereby meeting a prerequisite often required for access to capital funding. However, only 10% of the funding granted by the HAF to Manitoba that same year was allocated to rural areas. This imbalance undermines the attractiveness of bilingual regions while increasing pressure on existing infrastructure.

According to the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM), the infrastructure deficit in the province exceeds $11 billion—an amount that only takes into account the upgrading of existing infrastructure and does not include expansion projects. The estimated shortfall for water and wastewater infrastructure outside Winnipeg is over $3 billion.

At the national level, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) points out that road and transportation infrastructure are in critical condition: $82.9 billion would be needed to replace those deemed to be in poor or very poor condition. Added to this are massive needs in drinking water and wastewater systems across the country, which are hindering sustainable community growth. Our bilingual communities are no exception to this reality.

Furthermore, the FCM points out that the current municipal funding model in Canada does not allow municipalities to adequately address these issues. The lack of predictability, the scale of the needs and the administrative complexity make effective planning difficult. This situation is particularly burdensome for small rural communities, which must cope with limited resources while meeting growing expectations for housing, development, and public services. According to the FCM, although rural Canada accounts for 15% of the population, these municipalities manage 36% of the infrastructure essential to several economic sectors that contribute nearly $200 billion to GDP. By supporting rural contributions to prosperity and investing in infrastructure in rural, northern and remote areas, we can maximize the country's economic potential.

Added to this is a recurring challenge: current federal programs struggle to take into account the specificities of our bilingual municipalities, which have established a formal regulatory framework for official languages through the Municipal Maturity Model (3M). These municipalities have increased responsibilities to provide equitable services in both official languages, without having the financial levers adapted to their reality—particularly with regard to their operating budgets.

IMPACT OF STRATEGIC, TARGETED INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS ON THE VITALITY OF OLMCS

In relation to infrastructure, Manitoba's bilingual municipalities are also responsible for designing, maintaining, and animating inclusive, high-quality gathering spaces for OLMCs. These spaces are essential for strengthening community vitality, promoting citizen participation, and normalizing the use of French in the public sphere.

Investing in infrastructure in these communities is about much more than meeting material needs: it is about creating the conditions for bilingual municipalities to succeed, increasing their attractiveness, strengthening their competitiveness, and supporting the full development of OLMCs. Every quality space that emerges—whether educational, cultural, recreational or community-based—becomes a lever for development and rootedness for the Francophone community.

Recognition of the structuring role of infrastructure is also integrated into the 3M, adopted by Manitoba's bilingual municipalities. This model expressly identifies infrastructure planning, renewal, and maintenance as an indicator of organizational maturity related to official language commitments. It recognizes that strategically planned infrastructure—whether physical, digital, community or cultural—is essential to meet the needs of official language minority populations, promoting their vitality, and ensuring consistency between municipal investments and language priorities.

However, this infrastructure often remains inadequate. The *Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne* (FCFA) *du Canada* recently reported a shortage of 72,000 Francophone early learning and child care spaces across the country. This lack of suitable spaces directly jeopardizes the continuity of French-language learning, weakens the local social fabric, and undermines the vitality of OLMCs.

AMBM RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA:

1. **Explore how the Canada Community-Building Fund (CCBF), or any other related mechanism**, can be optimized to maximize a measured and targeted impact on Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs) served by Manitoba's bilingual municipalities, consistent with the regulatory framework of the Municipal Maturity Model (3M) and related and complementary provincial and federal laws and regulations.

2. **Increase federal investments in housing infrastructure** by ensuring a fair and measurable share for rural and bilingual communities, taking into account locally identified needs.

3. **Create a new federal fund dedicated to drinking water and wastewater infrastructure**, delivered through a flexible funding mechanism free of ineffective conditions, to specifically address the critical infrastructure deficit outside major centres.

4. **Reform municipal financing** by increasing annual direct transfers to municipalities and linking them to economic growth to enable long-term planning and a proactive response to infrastructure needs.

5. **Reduce bureaucracy and increase flexibility in the implementation of infrastructure projects** to better respond to the distinct challenges of municipalities of all sizes, particularly in rural areas.

6. **Ensure effective coordination so that the implementation of the modernized *Official Languages Act* rigorously applies a dual official languages and rural lens** in the development and delivery of federal infrastructure funding programs, so as to promote strategic and targeted investments in OLMCs served by Manitoba's bilingual municipalities, particularly for educational, cultural, and recreational infrastructure that has a structuring impact on Francophone vitality.

7. **Invest in the implementation of a new federal program dedicated to funding rural and northern municipal infrastructure**, with a budget of at least $500 million per year for 10 years, taking into account the disproportionate responsibility of these municipalities for managing infrastructure assets relative to their population[1].

1 This recommendation echoes the recommendations issued by the FCM in the context of the 2025 federal election (source: https://strongertogether.fcm.ca/infrastructure).

Strategic priority n° 2 :

Skilled bilingual workforce and talent

Sustained population growth in Manitoba's bilingual municipalities—with an increase of over 8% between 2016 and 2021—is putting increased pressure on public infrastructure, essential services and the job market. In this context, labour shortages are becoming a major obstacle to local and regional economic growth, particularly when it comes to recruiting skilled Francophone and bilingual workers, especially in rural areas.

To address this, several complementary levers must be activated: economic immigration, the mobility of French-speaking workers from other provinces to our communities, and vocational education—including training in French—from an early age. These strategies are part of an integrated vision of human capital development, essential to building a resilient and productive local economy.

A RESPONSE TAILORED TO THE REALITIES ON THE GROUND

A subsidiary of the AMBM, the CDEM takes a proactive approach by implementing initiatives tailored to the needs of employers. The CDEM is currently working to expand its range of employability services, both in person and online, across all member municipalities. These services include:

- Job search assistance;
- Counseling and case management services;
- Coaching in the workplace;
- Mentoring;
- Support for entrepreneurship.

This approach is based on a detailed understanding of the economic and demographic realities of OLMCs and relies on evidence-based data to develop customized solutions.

HIGH-GROWTH SECTORS

According to the study *Labour Market Outlook in Manitoba's Bilingual Municipalities 2022-2028*, several sectors will experience significant recruitment challenges in the coming years. The strongest job growth is expected in:

- Arts, entertainment and leisure (+21.6%);
- Professional and technical services (+10.6%);
- Transportation and warehousing (+9.4%);
- Health care and social assistance (+8.6%); and
- Educational services (+7.3%).

The occupations most in demand will be in health care (+8.5%), natural and applied sciences (+7.1%), teaching, law and social and community services (+6.9%), as well as technical and manual trades, which are very present in rural areas.

FRANCOPHONE AND BILINGUAL ECONOMIC IMMIGRATION: ONE LEVER AMONG MANY

Manitoba's bilingual municipalities offer strong potential for attracting Francophone and bilingual economic newcomers. The *Strategy to Support Economic Immigration in Manitoba's Bilingual Municipalities* aims to align talent attraction with concrete market needs. The CDEM plays a central role in this by coordinating the *Invitation to Manitoba* sub-component of the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP) and supporting talent identified abroad.

However, several obstacles remain: low selection rates, administrative delays, complex processes, and a mismatch between the profiles selected and the real needs of the market. An additional and increasingly pressing challenge is the reduction in the number of candidates allocated to the province under the MPNP. This constraint significantly limits Manitoba's capacity to address its specific labour market needs. In this context, it is imperative to prioritize Francophone and bilingual immigration—even amid allocation restrictions—to ensure inclusive economic growth and to strengthen the economic resilience of Manitoba's bilingual communities.

A CHAIN TO STRENGTHEN TOGETHER

Strengthening the chain of attraction, selection, and retention of talent requires sustained collaboration between all orders of government and economic development stakeholders. This involves:

- More targeted recruitment efforts;
- Greater mobilization of employers;
- Better support for integration;
- And broader recognition of bilingual skills as a strategic asset.

LEVERAGING THE TALENTS OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

Developing the current and future workforce requires broader access to training, specialized education and market-driven career paths aligned with market needs. It is also crucial to support lifelong learning and invest in high-level bilingual skills. Investing in Manitoba's bilingual municipalities means investing in a skilled workforce that is rooted in its community and essential to Canada's prosperity.

AMBM RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA:

8. **Apply a linguistic and regional lens to economic immigration planning and selection** to prioritize Francophone and bilingual candidates wishing to settle in rural areas. This approach must be based on reliable data to anticipate the needs for essential services, particularly in terms of settlement. It must also aim to strengthen reception, integration and employability capacities in rural communities, by adapting proven urban practices to regional realities.

9. **Expand the scope of employment assistance services in Manitoba's bilingual municipalities** by enhancing the CDEM's overall service offerings for job seekers, employers and entrepreneurs. This includes increasing Francophone and bilingual employability services, supporting OLMCs with services tailored to local realities, and supporting structuring initiatives aimed at strengthening the strategic capacities of the job market and entrepreneurship.

10. **Align the efforts and capacities of all three orders of government to build more welcoming, attractive and sustainable Francophone and bilingual communities,** ensuring that Francophone and bilingual economic immigration levels are in line with the actual capacity of communities to receive newcomers.

11. **Facilitate interprovincial workforce mobility** by harmonizing the recognition of credentials and certifications in regulated professions in order to better meet the needs of the labour market in Manitoba's bilingual municipalities and remove barriers to the settlement of Francophone and bilingual talent in the regions.

12. **Support the implementation of long-term support strategies for rural employers** to raise their awareness of the benefits of recruiting Francophone and bilingual talent and strengthen their capacity to ensure harmonious inclusion in the workplace.

Strategic priority n° 3 :

Economic development

Manitoba's bilingual communities are fertile ground for Francophone and bilingual entrepreneurship. From 2018 to 2021, more than 42,000 businesses in Canada were owned by members of official language minorities, nearly 18% of which were located in rural areas or small towns. In Manitoba, the proportion of official language minority businesses in rural areas (4.5%) exceeds that in urban areas (1.5%), illustrating the entrepreneurial dynamism of our regions. These rural businesses have an average of 11 employees, demonstrating their role in shaping the local economy. This dynamism contributes directly to workforce retention and community vitality.

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES IN LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Manitoba's bilingual municipalities play a predominant role in local economic development. In particular, they provide local services to businesses, develop industrial zones and parks, and establish infrastructure and services that promote entrepreneurship. In a context of scarce resources, AMBM members, with the support of the CDEM and EWC, must be able to count on predictable and appropriate financial tools to develop their full potential.

INFRASTRUCTURE CONDUCIVE TO BUSINESS AND TRADE

For Manitoba's bilingual municipalities to become true economic hubs, they must have modern, efficient, and strategically located infrastructure. Roads, railways, airports, ports, digital networks, industrial parks, and logistics centres are essential for transporting products to markets and attracting new investment. However, according to the FCM, Canada has fallen from 10th to 32nd in the world rankings for the quality of its commercial infrastructure. Upgrading local infrastructure would not only strengthen the resilience of local economies, but also create sustainable jobs and accelerate the opening of new markets.

TOURISM AND CONNECTIVITY: LEVERS OF ATTRACTIVENESS AND GROWTH

Tourism is an important lever for economic development in Manitoba's bilingual municipalities, both for its potential to promote cultural heritage and for its ability to generate local economic benefits. By promoting Francophone tours, festivals, heritage events, and immersive experiences, municipalities are working continuously to enhance their appeal and showcase Manitoba's Francophone community, in close collaboration with the CDEM team.

At the same time, digital connectivity—including reliable access to high-speed Internet and cellular networks—is essential to economic vitality, innovation, and territorial equity. In a context where telework, digital services, online entrepreneurship, and digital transformation are gaining momentum, rural digital infrastructure must be strengthened. It is imperative to recognize connectivity as a strategic infrastructure in its own right.

STRATEGICALLY LOCATED AT THE INTERSECTION OF FUTURE-ORIENTED INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

Manitoba's bilingual municipalities are strategically located within transportation and trade corridors, and correspond to the key sectors of the Manitoba economy highlighted by the World Trade Centre Winnipeg: precision agriculture, protein processing, transportation and logistics, next-generation buses, aerospace, digital economy, insurance, cultural and creative industries. These strengths, combined with their linguistic duality and ability to mobilize, make bilingual communities key levers for provincial and national economic prosperity.

THE CDEM, A DRIVER OF ECONOMIC GROWTH

Active since 1996, the CDEM is a key player in economic development and entrepreneurship support in Manitoba's bilingual municipalities. Building on this expertise, it now intends to expand its role by stepping up its efforts in the areas of trade and investment attraction, complementing the mandates of other specialized organizations and focusing exclusively on Francophone markets, both in Canada and internationally, with the aim of fully leveraging the bilingual advantage of the AMBM Group and its members.

The role of municipalities in economic development is explicitly recognized in the Municipal Maturity Model (3M). The model identifies economic development initiatives, including tourism, the green economy, and entrepreneurship, as one of the key indicators of organizational maturity. It urges municipalities to develop economic development plans that take into account their language commitments, in collaboration with the CDEM and EWC.

The objective is clear: to provide bilingual communities with the resources they need to accelerate the development of their territory and adapt it to the economy of tomorrow. This includes improving the reception and support of investment projects, planning strategic sectors, implementing strategies and programs to enhance the attractiveness and promotion of communities, and developing new business opportunities at the national and international levels. In partnership with the World Trade Centre Winnipeg and other key stakeholders, these initiatives will enable local businesses to access Francophone markets, strengthen their strategic partnerships, and seize new growth opportunities.

A member of RDÉE Canada, CDEM is part of a network of nearly 70,000 Francophone businesses outside Quebec. According to a RDÉE impact study, every dollar invested in this network generates nearly $8 in benefits for the Canadian GDP.

For example, the *Strengthening the Job Market in Manitoba's Bilingual Rural Municipalities* project, carried out in 2024, identified nearly 1,200 active employers in Manitoba's bilingual rural municipalities, with a further 44,000+ businesses in the City of Winnipeg alone. This pool represents significant potential for developing business partnerships and attracting investment.

REMOVING INTERPROVINCIAL BARRIERS TO UNLEASH ECONOMIC MOMENTUM

Interprovincial trade barriers directly hinder the economic growth of bilingual communities. The Montreal Economic Institute estimates that eliminating these barriers by 2020 could increase Manitoba's GDP by $5,000 per capita by 2030. The FCM asserts that eliminating these barriers could increase Canada's GDP by 4% to 8%, or up to $200 billion, while reducing consumer prices by up to 15%. This requires better harmonization of building codes, a reduction in exceptions to the Canadian Free Trade Agreement (CFTA), and greater labour mobility between provinces.

LEVERAGING THE FRENCH-SPEAKING WORLD AS A DRIVER OF TRADE

French is now the third most widely spoken business language in the world, spoken by more than 321 million people. The French-speaking economic area accounts for 20% of global trade in goods and 16% of global GDP. According to the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), the number of French speakers could reach 850 million by 2050. Manitoba's bilingual municipalities want to fully leverage this competitive advantage by increasing trade partnerships and attracting investment from French-speaking markets.

OFFICIAL RECOGNITION ANTICIPATED

In this context, official recognition of bilingual municipalities as territories with a strong Francophone presence becomes essential. These municipalities have adopted a formal commitment to official languages through municipal by-laws. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages, in its 2024 report, recommended that the Government of Canada take bilingual municipalities in the Prairies into account when developing regulations for the designation of regions with a strong Francophone presence[2]. Such recognition would allow for better alignment with federal support tools, prioritization of investments, and expanded development opportunities for our communities.

It is important to remember that Manitoba's bilingual municipalities are the only ones in the country—or at least among the few—to have made a formal commitment to official languages through municipal by-laws. This fundamental distinction anchors their action in a structured, measurable and rigorous approach, which deserves to be recognized and supported at the national level.

It is important to emphasize that the Manitoba government has clearly demonstrated its commitment to recognizing the province's bilingual character. It even wishes to put forward a vision for a truly bilingual Manitoba, in which the full economic potential of both official languages would be activated to support the province's inclusive growth.

2 This recommendation by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages has its roots directly in an intervention by Madeleine Arbez, Executive Director of CDEM, who was able to highlight the distinct reality of bilingual municipalities on the Prairies.

AMBM RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA:

13. **Officially recognize bilingual municipalities in the Canadian Prairies with a formal commitment to official languages (by way of municipal by-law) as regions with a significant Francophone presence**, applying the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Official Languages when developing federal regulations under the modernized *Official Languages Act*.

14. **Design and implement a short-term pan-Canadian strategy to eliminate interprovincial barriers**, in partnership with the provinces, to stimulate internal trade and enable businesses in bilingual municipalities to expand their markets.

15. **Actively support Manitoba's bilingual municipalities in implementing economic strategies that capitalize on their bilingual advantage, in collaboration with the Manitoba government**, to facilitate access to the Canadian and global Francophone economic space, in particular by organizing targeted trade missions and attracting foreign direct investment.

16. **Strengthen federal investments in Francophone economic development**, in particular by supporting the CDEM in maintaining and expanding its community economic development, business support, tourism, youth and corporate management services. This support is essential to meet the growing needs of Francophone and bilingual communities, particularly in rural areas, and to realize the strategic priorities of bilingual municipal leadership.

17. **Increase federal investment in strategic infrastructure in bilingual municipalities to strengthen their capacity to attract investment and develop business.** This includes support for modern, high-performance infrastructure projects tailored to the needs of local businesses and economic partners to make bilingual municipalities competitive economic hubs on the provincial, national and international levels.

Strategic priority n° 4 :

Sustainable development and climate resilience

Municipalities own 60% of the essential infrastructure that supports the Canadian economy. However, these strategic assets are aging, while environmental conditions are changing rapidly. The renewal of this infrastructure and the implementation of new approaches must be done with a view to efficiency, sustainability, and climate change adaptation.

In recent years, municipal governments have faced unprecedented climate and economic challenges that have highlighted their vulnerability and the need for increased support. Local communities are now grappling with growing budget pressures, limited access to technical expertise, and more frequent extreme weather events.

THE NEED TO BUILD CAPACITY TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

At the forefront of this reality, Manitoba's bilingual municipalities have demonstrated a clear commitment to equipping themselves, in particular through the expertise of the AMBM's subsidiary, EWC. EWC supports small and medium-sized municipalities in Manitoba and across Canada in the assessment, financing, and implementation of sustainable infrastructure projects. Its approach is based on energy efficiency, resilience and climate adaptation. EWC is also a driving force in transforming municipal transportation, conducting feasibility studies for fleet electrification, supporting the conversion of municipal and provincial vehicle fleets, and promoting the deployment of regional eco-friendly mobility solutions.

The impacts of climate change are tangible and growing. According to the Canadian Climate Institute (2025), by 2030, nearly 16,000 new homes in Manitoba will be dependent on the Red River dike and floodway. Without proper maintenance, flooding costs could reach $28 million in an optimistic scenario, rising to $360 million in the worst case. Forest fires could cause $15 million in losses by 2030. In addition, the overall cost of climate change in Manitoba could reach $2,235 per capita by 2050 in a high emissions scenario, according to ClimateWest. These losses include direct costs (damage), indirect costs (disruption) and secondary costs (absenteeism and mental health).

The reality for rural communities is particularly worrying. With fewer human and financial resources, they nevertheless suffer the most immediate effects of climate hazards. Spring 2022 provided a concrete example: flooding resulted in $446.6 million in financial assistance to disaster victims. However, many local communities do not even have the resources to carry out the feasibility studies required for planning infrastructure projects. They lack in-house specialists and find external services inaccessible (source: *Emergency Management Organization*).

In a context where 72% of those surveyed by the Léger firm[3] believe that municipalities must implement sustainable development policies—and 85% believe that they should play a more concrete role in the fight against climate change—the need for tools, funding, and support is undeniable.

Over the past decade, EWC has entered into several agreements with the federal government, notably with Natural Resources Canada, demonstrating the relevance and credibility of its model. This type of partnership should be expanded and consolidated to support sustainable transition in all bilingual municipalities in Manitoba.

3 Source: Léger. City Index 2025.

AMBM RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA:

18. **Invest heavily in sustainable and resilient infrastructure in Manitoba's bilingual municipalities, as well as in climate adaptation projects** led by specialized partners such as EWC, while promoting intersectoral collaboration between all orders of government. Such proactive investment will reduce reconstruction costs, protect lives and better equip communities to cope with growing climate risks.

19. **Implement efficient, interconnected and sustainable public transit solutions in small rural communities**, using a regional and interregional approach tailored to the territorial and demographic realities of Manitoba's bilingual municipalities.

20. **Support rigorous planning and the production of evidence** needed to structure green infrastructure projects in small communities by making the necessary technical and financial resources available from the outset.

21. **Strengthen funding for climate change adaptation measures in rural municipalities**, taking into account their increased exposure to extreme weather events, their structural vulnerability, and their limited financial capacity.

Strategic priority n° 5 :

Bilingual government services and intergovernmental coordination

Canada's bilingual character is first experienced at the local level. It is in everyday interactions—at City Hall, the community centre and the municipal library—that French-language services take on their full meaning for OLMCs. And that is precisely where Manitoba's bilingual municipalities stand out.

In 2023-2024, the AMBM took a decisive step forward by creating the regulatory framework for the Municipal Maturity Model (3M), a structuring tool that is unique in Canada and recognized by the Manitoba government. The 3M allows member municipalities to assess their capacity to provide services in both official languages, set clear targets, and measure their progress using evidence-based data. It offers a tailored, progressive roadmap rooted in municipal realities. This model is fully consistent with the new *Official Languages Act* and the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-2028.

Through this initiative, the AMBM has addressed a structural gap by fully integrating the municipal level of government into the continuum of public services offered in both of Canada's official languages. The 3M initiative completes the intergovernmental framework, positioning municipalities as essential partners in the delivery of bilingual public services. This represents a logical and necessary progression: municipalities are the level of government closest to OLMCs, and their actions have a direct, tangible, and measurable impact on the vitality of Francophone communities.

The implementation of the 3M initiative—made possible through funding from the 2023–2028 Canada–Manitoba Agreement on French Language Services (CMAFLS)—demonstrates that, with the right tools, bilingual municipalities can play a leading role in promoting Canada's official languages. This support is invaluable, and the outcomes observed, along with the return on investment, are expected to be consistently positive. However, the current funding is temporary and lacks the stability required to ensure the long-term sustainability of the progress achieved. To maintain and expand these efforts, stable and strategic recurring funding is essential.

In this regard, new funding mechanisms must be established that are stable, predictable, and long-term. These mechanisms should incorporate both Francophone and rural perspectives, recognize municipal contributions, and enable results-based action. In an era of accountability and impact measurement, the 3M initiative provides the necessary evidence base to inform public policy, strengthen intergovernmental coordination, and support long-term planning.

AMBM RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA:

22. **Optimise a stable and predictable long-term intergovernmental funding mechanism** to support bilingual services in municipalities, building on the results of the 3M and recognizing both the concrete investments already made and the ongoing progress made by municipalities in actively offering services.

23. **Promote intergovernmental collaboration** to improve bilingual municipal services.

Conclusion

Manitoba's bilingual municipalities are ready. Ready to strengthen their role in the country's collective prosperity. Ready to work with the Government of Canada to build vibrant, sustainable and inclusive communities. This framework offers a vision that is grounded in reality, supported by evidence and focused on the future. To achieve its full potential, it calls for a renewed partnership based on recognition, stable commitments and concerted action among all orders of government.

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