



# THE LATE LOCATES PROBLEM

By Patrick McManus  
Executive Director, Ontario  
Sewer and Watermain  
Construction Association,  
Greater Toronto Sewer and  
Watermain Contractors'  
Association

**2**020 aside, we have been experiencing a significant and long-term infrastructure construction boom in Ontario for well over a decade. After a generation of underinvesting in critical core public infrastructure, all three levels of government have recognized the need to invest sustainably in rehabilitating and replacing crumbling assets and expanding to accommodate growth. As investments grow, however, bottlenecks in the construction industry that slow down production are becoming more pronounced. For any construction projects that require excavation (e.g., sewer and watermain, roads, foundation, new housing developments, etc.) the most significant of these bottlenecks is the utility locate system. Ask any contractor working in these sectors, in any corner of the province, what the biggest cause for delay is in their construction project schedule, and invariably they will tell you it's late locates.



In 2013, the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act (better known as the One Call Act) centralized the utility locate system in the province under Ontario One Call. Contractors advocated for this system, to improve health and safety measures by ensuring no utilities were missed when calling for locates prior to excavation and to streamline the administration process. The Act was not reinventing the wheel, as many U.S. states already had One Call systems in place, most requiring utility owners to deliver locates two to three days following a request being placed. In Ontario, utility owners were granted a five-day turnaround time to address these requests in what they deemed to be a more reasonable timeline.

The problem is that this timeline has never been enforced. And because administration of the Act has been handed over to One Call, whose Board of Directors and voting structure is dominated by utility owners, there has been no desire to move forward on enforcement. In other words, utility owners would have to agree to penalize themselves in order

to enforce the five-day timeline. This has created tremendous issues across the province as excavation contractors have grown increasingly frustrated over the last six years given the amount of business lost and delayed as a result of the late delivery of locates.

Delays are the enemy of the construction industry. Delays cost money, they push back project completion times, and they are terrible for public relations. In the excavation construction sector, delays are particularly problematic because the project areas that we work in are most often in the middle of the street. So, a delay in our project work means extra expense, more time with municipal streets torn up, and longer traffic disruptions.

By way of example, the equipment and labour costs alone for a typical linear infrastructure construction crew in the GTA will run between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per day. If a project is delayed due to the late delivery of a locate, a contractor is forced to absorb this daily cost and potential liquidated damages for a project which runs longer than

anticipated. It makes costing these projects accurately very difficult and there is simply no recourse for a contractor to force utility companies to deliver these locates within the legislated timeline.

There is no excuse for why we take weeks in Ontario to deliver utility locates when most US states can deliver them in two to three business days.

Small fines for each late locate delivery would very quickly clean up this process. Modifying the Board and voting structure at One Call to ensure the utility companies are not self-governing would also help. Placing enforcement with an independent third-party organization (i.e., TSSA) would bring greater transparency and accountability to the timeliness issue and differentiating between single address locates and "project" locates (i.e., multi-address locates) would help to better track where the issues exist.

There are many more options for how to make the system better. We just need to will to act and enforce where it doesn't presently exist.



# AVERTEX

UTILITY SOLUTIONS INC.

At AVERTEX we strive to be the most **TRUSTED** and **CAPABLE** company in the underground utility construction industry. You can be assured that **the job will be done right** regardless of what it takes!

**SECTORS**

- Electrical Utilities
- Railroad Utilities
- Renewable Energy
- Telecommunications
- Water & Sewer
- Specialty Services:
  - Rock Boring & Trenching
  - AXIS Guided Boring
  - Pipe Bursting & Ramming

**AVERTEX .ca**      1.888.837.3030

## Today's Contractor Working for a safer tomorrow

North Rock specializes in infrastructure, general contracting, and is a design/build project pioneer.

**Tony DiPede**, [tony@northrockgroup.com](mailto:tony@northrockgroup.com)  
[George@northrockgroup.com](mailto:George@northrockgroup.com)  
Concord: 905-660-7481 • Barrie: 705-725-9065  
[www.northrockgroup.net](http://www.northrockgroup.net)