

New school in Ste. Anne among Southeast upgrades in budget

By Alex Lambert

Ste. Anne's long-awaited school will finally be breaking ground in the coming years, according to the province's new budget.

Manitoba's 2025 budget includes 11 new schools across the province, 97 new hospital beds, and waived provincial parks fees for a year.

Construction for the Ste. Anne Regional High School will start in either 2027 or 2028, according to a technical advisor for the provincial government.

The other 10 schools announced on Thursday were in Winnipeg and western Manitoba. Parkhill School in Steinbach is still supposed to open next year, and Green Valley School's new gymnasium is expected to be complete by the 2026-27 school year.

The province also announced upgrades to multiple sections of highway across Manitoba, including resurfacing southbound traffic along Highway 75 between St. Jean Baptiste and the US border.

Terry Shaw, regional vice president of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters said the repairs are great for business.

"It's fantastic, that's a major trade corridor, the busiest north-south corridor west of Windsor, Ont. if my stats are correct," Shaw said. "It's direct road access to our largest market, which is the United States."

The province also said it is designing the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway west of Falcon Lake to the Ontario border, something Shaw said should have been done a long time ago.

"That is decades overdue, not only in terms of safety, but economic security," he said. "If that road gets closed for any length of time, our country is cut in half. It is a critical economic pathway that needs protecting."

The province also announced \$22 million to help with the ongoing construction at the Bethesda Regional Health Centre.

Missing from updates to the provincial budget were improvements for emergency departments at rural hospitals, and the 97 new hospital beds also announced won't go to any hospitals in the Southeast.

The NDP government ran on improving healthcare in 2023, while wait times haven't dropped in the last year and a half, including some patients waiting over a dozen hours in Winnipeg hospitals.

The emergency room (ER) at the Ste. Anne Hospital has only been open eight hours a day since late 2023, and the ER in Morris is completely closed.

Finance Minister Adrien Sala said fixing healthcare starts with hiring staff, and that fixing wait times and operating hours can take years.

"It starts with staffing," Sala said. "We're not done, we're going to keep doing that work."

He said filling roles outside of Winnipeg can be a challenge.

"With new spaces for paramedics, for doctors, for healthcare aides, again, especially in our northern and rural communities, where they do have some more challenges in fulfilling those roles."

Sala repeatedly pointed to the province bringing in 1,255 new healthcare aides last year, although many of those workers were students, who don't have as much experience as registered nurses or doctors.

Other investments in the southeast include \$3.6 million for a new bridge in Cooks Creek. \$8 million for bridge and drain repairs along PR 201 just east of Dominion City, and \$20.7 million for repairs of the Emerson Pump Station.