The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is blessed with many rich assets. The geographic, cultural, social, demographic and economic advantages have enabled them to take a leading position in the world. However, to build the best future for their country the Vision for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is being strategically aligned to take advantage of their unique competitive advantages.

This vision is to use their investment power to create a more diverse and sustainable economy and to use their strategic location to build their role as an integral driver of international trade between three continents: Africa, Asia and Europe. The focus of this vision is to build around three themes: a vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation. Of course, all three of these are intrinsically linked and it is this linkage that has provided the opportunity for Hill International under the authority of the Mayor His Excellency Eng. Fahad bin Mohammed Al Jubair and Deputy Mayor Eng. Jamal Melhem (KSA Eastern Province) to focus delivery through a Project Management Office (PMO) that really gets to the heart of governance infrastructure development. Speaking at the National Municipality Excellence & Expansion Summit’ on the 6th October 2016 the Mayor stated ‘that it is important we realize the potential of a strategic governance move as the Ministry of Municipal & Rural Affairs aims to review and develop the current operations model and bring about change’. This in light of guidelines provided through the National Transformation Program. http://vision2030.gov.sa/en

There are a variety of projects affected that will take advantage of this new approach such as the King Abdullah Civic Center Dammam, see picture 1, which is a large capital investment opportunity and is a landmark waterfront development for Dammam and the
Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The 197,000 square-meter development programs includes a civic center and exhibition center, covered stage/theater, marketplace, maritime museum, public library and the King Abdullah Center for Cultural Understanding. Two hotels are planned, one family-oriented and one for business travelers, along with a sports training facility, marina, mosque, amphitheater, gardens, parks and public squares. At a total construction of 160 million dollars it is the largest publically funded civic development in the Eastern Province.

Saudi Arabia intends to implement mega infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges and rail projects, see picture 2 above, worth $77 billion (SR288.75 billion) with overall, infrastructure projects currently employed to develop roads and bridges in the GCC countries estimated at $109 billion (SR408.75 billion). A report released by Ventures Middle East stated that ‘Saudi Arabia captured the five biggest construction projects (contracts) in the Middle East region, with the Ministry of Housing approving eight contracts worth $1 billion (SR375 billion) for the construction of housing projects in a number of cities, including Dammam and Qatif in the Eastern Province with Government controlled development lead by Saudi Electricity Company (SEC) planning to construct 14 power generation plants during 2017-2021. Sadeq Al Hajji, director of the power networks planning at SEC.

The Kingdom has also recently kicked off major industrial and petrochemical projects in Jubail and Yanbu industrial cities with costs reaching SR327 billion. Jubail is a city in the Eastern province on the Persian Gulf coast of Saudi Arabia and is host to the largest industrial city in the Middle East. These projects estimated to raise the Kingdom’s share to global petrochemical market to more than 12 percent and its petrochemical products to nearly 100 million tons annually.

Information Technology into existing or new Governmental projects and is the fastest growing segment of infrastructure development within municipal government. Incorporating existing smart applications with new applications to improve quality of life of the citizens will be one of the initial processes incorporated into new system procurement thinking.

The PMO role in delivering these infrastructure challenges brings about the opportunity to realistically apply large scale governance change within the municipality to enhance performance, efficiency and ultimately improve citizen’s satisfaction, at optimal cost. However, as with any new initiative, there are always a number of challenges and the Eastern Province Mayor and Deputy Mayor working in line with the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (MoMRA) are working together with Hill International to revamp the existing organizational governance structure. The vision of the project is to be a leader in providing outstanding services for the development of the eastern region cities, direct urban development and municipal service provision to achieve excellence through creativity in effective management of critical issues with transparent and electronic transformation.

The challenge for Hill International PMO is to develop, not only the governance model in line with municipality vision of the future, but also the project management tools to ensure continual improvement through use of Smart Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that identify project critical issues early and apply accountability within existing governance structures. The process is a strategic alignment of project gateways, carefully monitored from project inception to end of design life, to deliver these quality management objectives. Program issues are easily identified and escalated to create a governance platform that can measure strategic and governance authority and responsibility in line with governance performance that holistically accounts for changing management structures, processes, procedures, budget, and resource constraints.

To achieve this there will be active participation by the members of the Municipality Divisions who are an important component of this program. The Divisions in conjunction with the PMO will develop implement these macro and micro processes and provide a full training program that will then be utilized throughout the Municipalities. This strategic change in culture from the existing approach to a process driven approach will establish a new governance processes that sets realistic, clearly defined, responsible, accountable and above all transparent goals.

The Mayor and Deputy Mayors both agree that there has not been a better time for Eastern Province Municipality reform and have endorsed Hill International to implement this new approach across the Municipality. It is my privilege to be a member of the Hill International PMO team, Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation, Chartered Institution of Civil Engineers and Saudi Council of Engineers to play a leading role in this dynamic and challenging initiative, as Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province move forward to achieve their strategic objectives and a positive governance future.