



Ensuring the prosperity of city regions, the provinces and Canada

City regions are facing pressing concerns. Although the immediate priority is to invest in competitive and attractive infrastructure, cities agree that there must also be stable investment in housing, services for persons, education and training, and support for immigration, culture and environmental protection.

Given these critical concerns all government levels, cities and Canadian stakeholders must work to accelerate the country's economic growth so that we may generate the necessary resources for optimizing our investment.

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Priority issues of Canadian city regions

Invest in competitive and attractive infrastructure to accelerate economic growth and ensure our citizens' quality of life

Across Canada, the repair, preservation, maintenance and protection of municipal infrastructure is a major economic and technological challenge whose ultimate aim is to improve both the quality of life of citizens and the international competitiveness of our businesses, city regions, provinces and country as a whole.

There is a general consensus that investment in infrastructure like water treatment and supply, roads and bridges reaps tremendous dividends that benefit public health, the environment and the economy.

However, without significant investment, Canada's infrastructure will quickly deteriorate. Declining infrastructure sets off a chain of major repercussions, including higher maintenance, restoration and repair costs, increased inefficiency and greater system vulnerability, which, in turn, threatens public safety.

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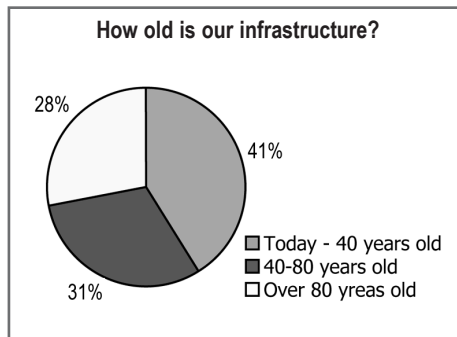
In 1996, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Task Force estimated that the region would require between \$43 and \$55 billion in infrastructure spending for the following 25 years.

In the Montreal Metropolitan Area, over \$9 billion is needed over the next 15 years to rebuild ageing municipal water mains, sewers and roads.

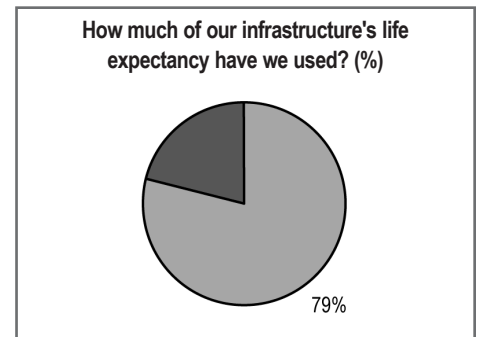
Edmonton has appraised its infrastructure spending for the period 2004-2008 at over \$3 billion.

Faced with ageing infrastructure and grappling with serious budget deficits, city regions must find new ways to plan, manage and fund their infrastructure projects, working closely with the other orders of government.

The first step is to establish a tripartite government investment program for municipal infrastructure.



Source: Canadian Society for Civil Engineering



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Enhance the mobility of people and goods by providing efficient transportation and transit systems

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Our city regions must remain attractive to businesses. In today’s global economy it is essential that cities have efficient transportation network.

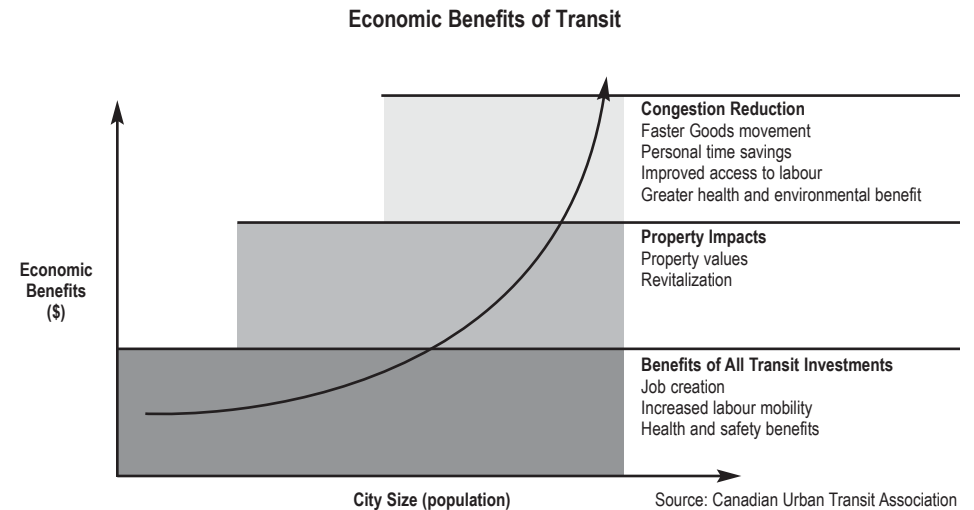
Enhancing the flow of people and goods has a beneficial effect on society as a whole. It reduces business losses related to congestion - goods are moved faster, which enables the economy to be more productive - while individuals enjoy greater access to the job market, public services and recreational activities.

Public transit is one of the crucial links in the free flow of people and goods because it reduces the number of vehicles on the road. City regions with efficient public transit systems enjoy a competitive edge.

The Canadian Urban Transit Association estimates that Canada’s public transit systems will require \$21 billion in infrastructure spending for the period 2004-2008. Of this amount, \$6.9 billion is required to maintain existing equipment while \$14.1 billion is needed to meet the expected increase in demand. The high price tag is due primarily to the precipitous drop in public funding in recent years.

Investment in public transit would not only enhance the movement of people and goods, it would have a positive impact on the growth of Canada’s downtown areas. Furthermore, according to the Treasury Board of British Columbia, public transit spending creates more jobs than money spent on other modes of transport.

A failure to reinvest in our transit systems would lead to increased traffic, diminished air quality and an inability to meet Canada’s commitments under the Kyoto Protocol. It is vital to institute a long-term, stable investment program supported by a partnership and specific fiscal measures.



Foster a sufficient supply of affordable housing

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Affordable housing is essential for building liveable, well-integrated communities. Growing city regions need a sufficient supply of housing that is affordable for all income levels, including low-income workers. We must work to see that there is enough housing for immigrants who settle in our cities and for all the people who make, and will continue to make, our metropolitan regions such dynamic centres.

The lack of affordable housing has a direct impact on many people, particularly low-income families. According to the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, one out of five households cannot afford decent housing. The problem is particularly evident in the major city regions, where most of the country’s poverty is concentrated.

In Toronto, 29% of all households spend over 30% of their income on shelter, 30% being the so-called threshold of affordability. The percentage of such households is 26.1% in Montreal, 31.4% in Vancouver, 24.7% in Halifax and 20.7% in Winnipeg.

In addition to meeting a need, affordable housing is, according to the TD Bank Financial Group, sound economic policy that prevents a number of problems. An insufficient housing supply can, in fact, constitute a major roadblock to business investment and growth, and influence where immigrants choose to settle in the country.

City regions must set objectives that require the participation of governments, non-profit organizations and the private sector in the search for creative, innovative solutions to meet the needs of Canadians.

Provide high-quality human services

City regions are on the front line when it comes to the demand for basic education, health and social services, recreational activities, access to culture, public safety, etc. Some of these responsibilities are new and most should be better co-ordinated with other orders of government, given the major economic resources involved.

Some regions face special challenges in this area. For example, many city regions provide services and programs targeting specific populations like recent immigrants, single-parent families, Aboriginal peoples the homeless, youth and senior citizens.

It is important to recognize cities as partners when negotiating the terms of delivery of services to citizens.

Furthermore, community organizations and third sector economy businesses can provide innovative answers to problems in this area.

Increase education levels and training

Most Canadian city regions have lower education levels than most of their American counterparts. In today's knowledge-based economy, lack of education is the prime factor behind our city regions' low productivity, making the shortage of skilled workers one of the chief stumbling blocks to Canadian business competitiveness.

Currently, nearly 40% of Canadian adults have difficulty with everyday reading tasks. To enable workers to meet the demands of the job market, the Conference Board of Canada stresses the priority of funding continuing education (Canada 2010: Challenges and Choices at Home and Abroad, Conference Board of Canada, 2002).

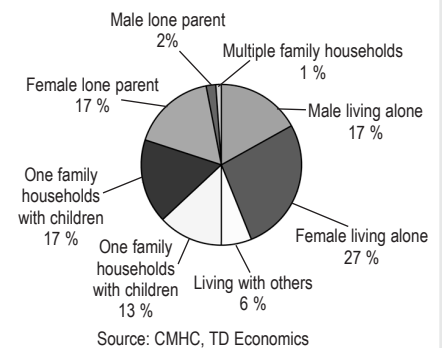
City regions hold little leverage in terms of education and training. However, they can play a catalyst role by adapting various government activities and mobilizing interested employers, institutions and community groups.

Like Ottawa's TalentWorks project, city regions must, with the support of senior orders of government, promote initiatives that foster co-operation among individuals, businesses and institutions.

Count on immigration to enrich the community

Immigration has always enriched Canada's culture and economy, particularly in our city regions. The numbers of immigrants as well as their cultural diversity both play a vital role in today's dynamic knowledge economy.

Canadian households in core housing need in 1996



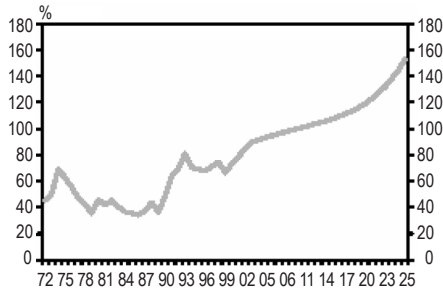
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Per cent of the total Canadian population increase accounted for by immigration



Source: Statistics Canada, TD Economics

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In light of Canada's ageing population and falling birth rate, immigration is more important than ever. Consequently, it will alter the ethnic, linguistic and cultural face of our city regions. In many cities, new residents are poised to become the majority.

City regions will successfully attract and retain new immigrants primarily by becoming more competitive and creating high-quality jobs. Additional efforts must also be made to provide the services and infrastructure immigrants need to integrate into Canadian society.

The various orders of government already support some of the basic services required by immigrants. However, we must guarantee the availability of funding and human resources to provide immigrants with settlement, community, language instruction, training and employment services. It is also necessary to institute measures to facilitate the recognition of new arrivals' education and work experience.

Support a vibrant arts and culture scene

The city regions that have earned a reputation as the most dynamic are also those that have made arts and culture a central element of their development and positioning strategy.

Above all, arts and culture play an essential role in the health of a community. They educate, inform and reflect who we are as a community. Arts and culture are, therefore, a vector of social cohesion.

Arts and culture also make up a key job market in any city region. In addition, easy access to a variety of creative and cultural activities is increasingly recognized as an important factor in today's knowledge economy.

Many city regions such as Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal have already adopted or are about to adopt policies that recognize the vital role played by arts and culture. Through such policies, these city regions are essentially promoting the same issues: guarantee public access to arts and culture and provide the tools needed to ensure the optimal development of this economic sector.

Supporting a vibrant arts and culture scene obviously requires considerable investment. Therefore, it is important to find innovative solutions for involving governments and the private sector in the funding of core projects. Another option to explore would be earmarking specific fiscal measures for arts and culture.

Protect and promote our environment

Environmental protection, air and water quality and waste management are among the top concerns of Canada's city regions because of their impact on the health and quality of life of all citizens.

The redevelopment of sites abandoned because of contamination is also a concern because of the potential risk to public health and groundwater quality. It is estimated that Canada is home to some 3,000 such sites. However, these properties also offer tremendous development potential.

With sustainable development now a popular concept, environmental questions have now become part of a broader issue that involves striking a balance between the environment, social and economic interests that make our cities both liveable and competitive.

Many government initiatives already support city regions in their efforts to protect and promote the environment. The most notable examples are the Green Municipal Funds administered by the FCM and the federal and provincial funds devoted to the assessment and remediation of contaminated sites.

These initiatives must be continued and all three orders of government should discuss the possibility of instituting new strategies, particularly when it comes to protecting wooded areas in urban environments.