

# Framework for an Urban Strategy for Canada

Submission to the  
**Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues**  
by the  
**Canadian Institute of Planners**

Presented by:

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## Background

The Canadian Institute of Planners met with the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues on March 11, 2002. CIP presented the Task Force with a position paper. In response, CIP was asked to submit its views on an appropriate national urban vision and strategy. This paper proposes a framework for a National Urban Vision and a National Urban Strategy for consideration by the Task Force.

Statistics Canada 2001 Census data released today confirms that the relevance and importance of urban issues to the Government of Canada has become more pronounced than ever. Canada's population has surpassed 30 million. These data indicate that 60 per cent of Canadians are clustered in the top 25 cities (urban centred regions).

CIP recognizes Canada's growing need for a national urban strategy and for a flexible, multi-stakeholder framework that respects the varying needs of Canada's regions and population.

## National Urban Vision

Canada's future quality of life and international competitiveness will depend on its urban centred regions. These regions will comprise cities and their adjacent hinterlands of towns, villages and rural areas, connected and defined by socio-economic ecological interactions and interdependencies. Urban centred regions will be of different sizes and national significance, reflecting the realities of Canada's economic landscape, population distribution, and geography.

Canada's urban centred regions will be the envy of the world for their quality of life, livability, and efficient management. These regions will play the lead role in the nation's economic, cultural and social development. They will be the primary engines for wealth and job creation regionally and nationally. The urban centred regions will have the critical mass of intellectual capital and institutions necessary to produce the innovation and creativity our nation needs to be competitive on a global basis. They will have the institutional capacity required to deliver high-quality health care, social services, and amenities that create healthy communities. Finally, they will have the institutional structures and fiscal capacity to deliver services that respond to challenges and opportunities identified at the level of the urban centred region, and compatible with the nation's interests.

## National Urban Strategy

To achieve this vision, Canada must focus on challenges and opportunities of mutual interest, not jurisdictions. The achievement of this vision will require a collaborative, accessible and action-oriented approach to governance. Many stakeholders will have roles to play in achieving this vision: public, private, non-governmental organizations, communities and individuals. The challenges are complex and inter-connected; this will demand creative, flexible and adaptive interventions by stakeholders.

Our country's urban centred regions will require multi-level coordination and sustained investments in social and physical infrastructure. Finally, the national urban vision will evolve, with priorities reflecting changes in the economic, social and environmental decision-making context.

## Guiding Principles

The National Urban Strategy will comprise a framework of policies, programs and projects. In many cases, stakeholders will re-orient and re-focus existing activities to support the vision. It is likely that new interventions will have to be designed. These guidelines also assume that the Government of Canada acts in the spirit of "flexible federalism."

Interventions should adhere to the following guidelines:

- § **Solutions must originate in the urban centred region.** People and institutions in these regions have an intimate understanding of the challenges and appropriate actions. This resource must be respected; local perspectives must be reflected in investment decisions.
- § **Meaningful consultations.** In this environment of multiple stakeholders, it will be necessary to support and manage continuous consultations, often on a multilateral basis.
- § **Subsidiarity.** Responsibilities and resources must be delegated to the level of government, or stakeholder group, best able to deliver the goods and services.
- § **Interventions must address critical needs.** The principle of "triage" must be followed: address critical issues of health and safety first, then deal with less important matters. Examples of first priority items would include ensuring potable water in urban regions, health and safety, management of urban sprawl, revitalization of urban centers, and protection of agricultural lands and green spaces.

- § **Investments must create spin-offs.** Since resources will be limited, investments must be strategic and generate a positive multiplier effect, especially in economic development terms. There must be a demonstrable return on investment for investors.
- § **Investments should be cost-shared.** This will depend on the intervention. Cost sharing formulae and protocols are necessary. Funding must be sustained and reliable.
- § **Performance criteria must be developed and met.** We must make the necessary shift from concern about outputs, to outcomes and impacts. We need to ensure that our resources have been used efficiently and effectively. This will require a collaborative program of monitoring and evaluation, based upon a test of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

**Respectfully submitted,**

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