

CANADA'S TRANSIT POLICY FRAMEWORK: A CONSENSUS EMERGES



City of Edmonton, Merrolinx, Société de transport de l'Outaouais

Canada remains the only G8 nation without a central policy of predictable, long-term support for public transit. For this reason, CUTA has spent several years promoting the need for a broad strategy to maximize transit's positive contributions to quality of life across the country.

Over the last decade, Canada's federal, provincial and municipal governments have greatly increased capital funding to expand and renew transit systems. Even greater investments lie ahead – but the country still lacks a coordinated framework of policies and programs to guide those investments and ensure that Canadians receive the greatest possible value from them. To this end, there is a federal and provincial consensus on the need for a Canadian policy framework to guide the success of public transit. This consensus recognizes the value of predictable long-term funding for transit and a range of supportive programs.

This issue paper highlights the need for all orders of government to join forces and actively pursue change for the benefit of Canadian communities. It summarizes some of the key steps leading to this point, and suggests possible directions for progress.

What is a transit policy framework?

In *Transit Vision 2040* (available at www.cutaactu.ca), CUTA highlights how Canadian communities rely on public transit to help overcome several major challenges. Vision 2040's six themes range from customer service to corporate greening, but the first theme – *putting transit at the centre of communities* – is the key to making it all possible. As the vision states, "Without a more transit-supportive social and political culture, Canadian communities are unlikely to offer the enhanced context and resources that transit needs to fulfill its potential."

To build that transit-supportive culture, Vision 2040 emphasizes that Canada requires a transit policy framework – in fact, it is the first among the vision's 27 strategic directions. The framework would be a set of transit policies that integrates objectives and activities among different orders of government (i.e. municipal, provincial and federal) as well as within each jurisdiction. An ideal framework would set goals for Canada's transit systems and highlight the roles, responsibilities and priorities of all orders of government.

One role of a policy framework would be to guide the flow of transit capital and operating investments in a way that maximizes their positive effects on economic growth, environmental quality, public health, equity and accessibility. The fifth theme of Vision 2040 – *ensuring financial health* – highlights the need for predictable, reliable and adequate long-term capital funding for transit. The policy framework should guide different jurisdictions in committing sufficient resources, directing the flow of funds, and leveraging investments to produce the best possible results.

A successful policy framework could have several important outcomes:

- Better long-range infrastructure planning enabled by secure provisions for future funding, leading to a reduced reliance on short-term funding programs that focus on shovel-ready projects.
- Allocation of federal and provincial funds to projects that best support those governments' stated objectives.
- Better integration of land use and transportation systems to capture important synergies between urban development and infrastructure.
- Timely application of transportation demand management (TDM) tools to maximize the effectiveness of supply-side measures.
- More effective coordination and collaboration (e.g. data collection and cooperative research) within the transit industry, enabled by clear national and provincial objectives.
- More thorough performance measurement to ensure value from investments, and to improve future planning processes.

CUTA's vision suggests that the development of a transit policy framework should be a collaborative process led by federal and provincial governments, with the participation of municipal associations. However, federal leadership does not imply that federal priorities would be imposed on provinces and municipalities – rather, each jurisdiction should develop and implement policies that reflect its own context and objectives.

What do Canada's federal and provincial governments think?

In October 2009, the Urban Transportation Task Force (UTTF) of the Council of Deputy Ministers Responsible for Transportation

and Highway Safety reached a Canada-wide consensus on the need for an overarching transit strategy that will improve quality of life, competitiveness and sustainability in Canadian communities.

The UTTF report, entitled *Urban Transit in Canada: Taking Stock of Recent Progress* (available at www.cutaactu.ca), is a collaborative review of the shifting public transit landscape. In it, Canada's senior orders of government acknowledge that growing transit investments have increased ridership and brought real benefits for public health, environment and the economy. They agree on the need for new funding partnerships among governments, and for good governance, progressive planning practices and transportation demand management strategies that can make any degree of funding more effective. They call for their own jurisdictions to work with municipalities to improve transportation and mobility in urban areas by exploring opportunities for collaboration that move beyond funding. *Urban Transit in Canada* includes four recommendations:

- All levels of government need to work together to provide adequate funding to support transit, while respecting jurisdictional responsibilities.
- Recent federal investments in public transit have supported national economic, social and environmental priorities, and the federal government's continued commitment to provide sustainable, predictable, long-term funding for transit is welcomed.
- The movement of people and goods in urban areas must be improved through greater investment in transit, transportation demand management, improved planning processes, and the use of advanced technology.
- All governments should promote transit use by raising public awareness of its economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Better transit means fewer cars, fewer cars mean cleaner air, and of course cleaner air means people breathing easier.

Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada and Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, at the FCM Annual Conference in Toronto, 2010



City of Ottawa

Canada's business leaders make the case

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce is an influential network of more than 300 chambers of commerce and boards of trade. It represents 175,000 businesses of all sizes, in all sectors of the economy and in all regions. In 2009, the Chamber passed a resolution that expressed strong support for a transit policy framework:

Canada's cities act as engines of economic growth for the nation. However, there is not a coordinated transportation plan to address the investment in infrastructure needed to support this urban shift. Canada continues to be the only OECD and G8 nation without a long-term federal transit plan; consequently, a national transportation strategy should be a priority for the federal government.... A dedicated, stable commitment to public transit will enable Canadian transit agencies to make long-term transportation plans that will help to bolster the economy, better serve transit users and provide the investment confidence required to attract private sector investors. With a dedicated national transit program, Canada can move forward into the 21st century with funding to maintain the existing infrastructure and develop new transit projects that are important to relieve congestion, improve mobility for all Canadians and strengthen the economy.

Recommendations

That the federal government develop a National Transit Strategy including:

- 1. A permanent federal funding mechanism to support urban transit infrastructure.**
- 2. Cooperating with provincial and territorial governments to facilitate and encourage private investment in infrastructure projects, particularly through public-private partnerships.**
- 3. Support for municipalities in their attempts to develop jurisdictional wide planning, which would involve integrated land use, and would limit sprawl.**

Canadian Chamber of Commerce, "Strengthening Canada's Urban Public Transit System," 2009



Saint John Transit

We need a national vision for public transit.

Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Official Opposition and Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, at the FCM Annual Conference in Toronto, 2010

The agreement by all ten provinces to these recommendations must be seen as the first step toward the development of a Canadian transit policy framework. Furthermore, these recommendations clearly reinforce the need for an adequate, sustainable, long-term funding framework for public transit – echoing strategies previously proposed by CUTA and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (see the next section). They will be critical to the creation of a long-term partnership that ensures a healthy future for public transit in Canada.

What other milestones have been passed?

Transit Vision 2040 is only CUTA's most recent initiative promoting the need for a transit policy framework. It follows on the heels of two other projects that built awareness and buy-in among governments and other key stakeholders.

In March 2007, CUTA joined forces with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) to urge federal implementation of a National Transit Strategy proposed by the FCM's Big City Mayors' Caucus (available at www.fcm.ca). There were five key elements in this proposal (also the subject of CUTA's Issue Paper 22, available at www.cutaactu.ca):

- Dedicating federal transit investment to maintain, renew and expand transit operations.
- Offering incentives for transit use.
- Creating knowledge through research and sharing it with transit stakeholders.
- Requiring communities that receive federal transit funds to adopt long-term plans that make transit the primary response to growing travel demands.
- Using performance measurement to ensure the effective use of federal funds.

In February 2008, CUTA hosted a one-day National Transit Forum in Ottawa. Nearly 100 representatives of federal departments, provincial governments, municipalities, transit systems and private businesses gathered to identify shared perspectives and aspirations. The event was designed to respect jurisdictional authorities, highlight valuable experiences, and promote stronger relationships. By the end of the day, there was a strong feeling among participants that continued dialogue towards a Canadian transit policy framework was essential.

[Transit] is a green investment that also helps you ease urban commutes. Let's get it done.

Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada, at the FCM Annual Conference in Toronto, 2010

Then, in May 2010, the FCM Big City Mayors' Caucus issued a strong call for efforts to reverse growth in congestion levels and commuting times in large cities. It passed a resolution that expanded further on its 2007 National Transit Strategy proposal:

“...**RESOLVED** That the Government of Canada commit to working with its provincial, territorial and municipal partners to identify gaps in Canada’s national transportation system, and then collectively develop a long-term plan, with clear objectives and milestones, to fill these gaps, as a way to support economic growth and environmental sustainability.”

“We need huge investments in public transit.”

Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois,
address to Force Jeunesse, 2007

Looking ahead

Public transit has clear benefits – social, economic and environmental – for Canadians, as highlighted in CUTA’s research report *The Economic Impact of Transit Investment: A National Survey* (published in January 2010 and available at www.cutaactu.ca):

- The economic benefit of Canada’s existing transit systems is at least \$10 billion annually.
- Transit reduces vehicle operating costs for Canadian households by about \$5 billion annually.
- Transit reduces the economic costs of traffic collisions by almost \$2.5 billion annually.
- Transit reduces annual greenhouse gas emissions by 2.4 million tonnes, valued at \$110 million.
- Transit saves about \$115 million in annual health care costs related to respiratory illness.

These benefits will grow when Canadian governments work together to provide adequate, predictable and sustainable transit investment, and when they implement policies and programs that maximize return on that investment.

CUTA has led a national dialogue on these issues, and now the federal and provincial consensus needed to forge a working partnership has emerged. Canada’s transit industry encourages the federal government to lead the provinces and municipalities in the collaborative creation of a transit policy framework for the benefit of the country, its communities and citizens.

“Excellent public transit and efficient housing in high-density nodes along existing transit corridors will make cities livable and people-friendly. The federal government must take the lead in funding the “greening” of Canada’s cities.”

Green Party of Canada, *Vision Green*, 2010



TransLink



Durham Region Transit

The Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) is the voice of Canada’s public transit industry. For additional information including research reports, industry updates, news bulletins and more, please contact us or visit our website.



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