



URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE, COMMUNITY VALUES AND THE CIWP

Infrastructure is what makes Canada's cities possible. At the same time, it raises a number of major issues for urban policy. Caroline Andrew and Jeff Morrison examine some of the critical policy issues in their recent review of the 1994-98 Canada Infrastructure Works Program in the second edition of *Urban Policy issues: Canadian Perspectives*.¹

As Andrew and Morrison show, infrastructure has long been a part of Canada's policy debates. Attention has focussed at different times on the political and economic strategies that underlie local infrastructure decisions and the impacts of political structures on infrastructure decisions have received limited attention. Much less well understood, Andrew and Morrison argue, is the idea of infrastructure as a reflection of community values.

It is on the latter policy question that the authors make their most important contribution. Drawing on Rochefort and Cobb's concept of "the politics of need", the authors contend that:

often the most critical phase of political struggle is not around who can influence decisions, but around who can influence the definition of needs. Once there is an understood sense that certain needs exist, solutions are found. The solutions will make sense in terms of the way the needs were defined and in terms of the interpretation given to the needs.

Andrew and Morrison go on to trace how the "need for infrastructure" was reflected in the 1994-98 Canada Infrastructure Works Program. More precisely, the evidence suggests it translated into two fundamental policy questions: who should pay for infrastructure?; and what should be built?. Who should pay is about the division of costs between the public and private sectors (e.g. based on the goals of programme) and different orders of government. What should be built is about whether investments are made in basic infrastructure, such as the rehabilitation of water mains, or urban amenities that enhance the quality of life of citizens, such as playgrounds and libraries - and the political strategies behind the different choices.

¹ Caroline Andrew and Jeff Morrison, "Infrastructure" in Edmund P. Fowler and David Siegel, eds. *Urban Policy Issues: Canadian Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: 2002).

Highlights for Infrastructure Canada

Andrew and Morrison's analysis of CIWP implies that how infrastructure needs are defined should be considered a fundamental question for future policy design. How the needs are defined – and whose they are – has very real implications: it affects who pays and what is built.

Based on their analysis of CIWP and their discussion of earlier infrastructure initiatives, such as the federal sewage treatment loans programme or the Municipal Improvements Assistance Act, Andrew and Morrison conclude that: "urban infrastructure (has been) seen by the federal government as a way to create jobs (and perhaps win elections) rather than as a way to create cities". They also note that relatively few infrastructure programmes have been explicitly linked to the development of an information-based economy that is able to compete globally in the 21st century. Both conclusions point to the important role that redefining the need for infrastructure will play in seeing infrastructure as an innovative tool for achieving a broader range of federal policy objectives.

Copies of the reports and studies referred to are available from the Research Division.