

PRÉCIS

THE STATE OF INFRASTRUCTURE IN AUSTRALIA: THE 2004 QUEENSLAND REPORT CARD

The Report Card has become a popular tool for monitoring and evaluating progress within a particular sector over a period of time. Non-governmental and professional organizations also use report cards to raise awareness and to advocate for change. The Institute of Engineers in Australia and the American Society of Civil Engineers both issue regular Report Cards on the state of public infrastructure to assess and track the state of infrastructure in their respective countries.

Background

Engineers Australia (EA, formerly known as the Institute of Engineers, Australia) published its first national infrastructure report card in 2000. Entitled "[A Report Card on the Nation's Infrastructure](#)", the report examined the state of roads, bridges, railways, water and wastewater. An expanded national report followed in 2001, and in 2002 EA began to produce individual report cards for Australia's states and territories, beginning with the [2003 New South Wales \(NSW\) Report Card](#). The reports provide information on the state of infrastructure governance, sector trends, level of service, funding and investment, asset management, environmental and economic impacts, security issues, future needs, and an explanation of the grade for each category. The [Queensland Infrastructure Report Card](#) is the second report in this series. It rates the quality of roads, railways, airports, seaports, water, storm water, electricity supply, gas and telecommunications infrastructure at the State level. Each sector is evaluated based on a range of relevant parameters including asset condition, asset availability and reliability, asset management, sustainability (economic, environmental and social) and security. A variety of stakeholders were consulted for the study, including infrastructure owners and operators, industry associations, and expert panels and members of Engineers Australia.

Key Findings

Queensland's infrastructure ranks well compared to the 2001 national report card and the *2003 New South Wales Report Card*, ranking lower in only two categories – State roads and electricity. Rural State roads received a grade of C+ due to the lack of aggregated statewide data on their condition and sustainability. Specific concerns include local governments' poorly developed asset management systems in rural areas, uncertainty over future funding of national roads, and the safety of roads in rural areas. According to the report, urban state roads ranked low due to the lack of commitment to adequate funding and integrated planning. In urban areas traffic congestion is a growing problem, resulting in unpredictable and often longer travel times. According to the [State Infrastructure Plan for Queensland](#), there is an estimated \$4.8 billion¹ backlog in rehabilitation and maintenance on State-controlled roads.

¹ Australian dollars.

Electricity received a grade of D+, which is very low compared to the national grade of B-. Although infrastructure for electricity generation and transmission is rated as good, the Report states that the capacity and reliability of the distribution network are of “serious concern.” The overall grade is indicative of the importance of distribution infrastructure to the overall system, as electricity generation capacity is of little consequence if there is no way to deliver it.

Relevance to Infrastructure Canada

Many of the recommendations included within the report have direct relevance to the Canadian context. Canada is facing many of the same issues with regards to public infrastructure provision as our Australian counterparts, including aging infrastructure; a significant infrastructure funding deficit; lack of long term planning, coordination and integration between and among orders of government; and similar demographic trends eg. urbanization and an aging population.

Although Queensland infrastructure is generally in a better state of repair than infrastructure in the rests of Australia, the report warns that significant improvements are needed in all sectors if the state is to continue to meet its current and future infrastructure needs. The study identifies several major impediments to infrastructure provision, including a lack of coordination between spheres of government², the failure to put in place long term plans for infrastructure, and the generally low priority given to infrastructure in budgets.

The *2004 Queensland Infrastructure Report Card* offers a number of recommendations to address these issues, including:

- Establishing an Infrastructure Advisory Council tasked with providing government with detailed infrastructure research as well as recommendations on infrastructure deficiencies, prioritization and funding options.
- Basing the planning and provision of infrastructure on integrated land use planning and emphasizing sustainability issues and cost-effective pricing.
- Given that a large proportion of Queensland’s population lives in urban and near-urban areas, the federal government should directly contribute to the funding and planning of urban infrastructure.

In particular, the Report identifies coordination between governments to be a major impediment to effective infrastructure provision in Australia. Organizations in Canada such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities have also identified the need for increased coordination and cooperation between the different orders of government to resolve the critical infrastructure issues faced by Canadian communities. With the New Deal for Cities and Communities, the Government of Canada has taken a significant step in engaging municipal stakeholders as partners in addressing these long-standing issues.

² Similar to Canada, government in Australia is three-tiered - Commonwealth (or Federal), State and Local.

The Canadian government has also recognized the need for significantly improved knowledge on the state of infrastructure in Canada as an essential component of sustainable, strategic infrastructure policy and decision-making. The Infrastructure Canada Research Strategy and initiatives such as the Horizontal Research Roundtable on Infrastructure are designed to facilitate and foster targeted collaborative research on the state of Canada's public infrastructure.

As the *Queensland Infrastructure Report Card* demonstrates, Canada and Australia are confronted with common infrastructure issues, and as the experiences of both countries indicate, strategies to modernize public infrastructure need to focus not only on funding mechanisms but also on ways to encourage and facilitate research and collaboration.