

DIFFERENTIATING THE CANADIAN NORTH FOR COHERENT INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

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SUMMARY

Canada's northern and Arctic environment poses significant challenges for infrastructure development. The region is characterized by unique ecosystems, extreme climatic conditions and a sparse population, which are factors that have inhibited infrastructure development in the past. Nevertheless, various practitioners, academics and northerners have emphasized the need for reliable and safe connections between north and south and within the North. The lack of infrastructure is a major impediment to the well-being of northerners who lack access to essential services, such as clean drinking water (Patrick 2011) or safe and reliable roadways. Infrastructure Canada (2018) noted that the current southern-based "one-size fits all" northern infrastructure approach is inefficient because northern conditions and challenges often do not respond to policies that are conceived in the south. Currently, infrastructure projects are often conducted on a one-off basis without establishing broader connections in the northern region. Thus, this paper draws on the Canadian Northern Corridor (CNC) concept (Fellows et al. 2020) as a solution to deliver much-needed infrastructure to northern communities.

At the same time, this paper cautions that it is critical to recognize the diversity of the Canadian North and it is vital to consider northern Indigenous practices that can inform infrastructure development for a CNC. This paper offers a discussion of Canada's northern diversity by exploring the relevance of Hamelin's nordicity index (1979) as a policy tool to better understand and respond to the distinct challenges and opportunities across the Canadian North and Arctic. Although the CNC concept reflects a pan-Canadian approach, it strongly advocates for the recognition, participation and inclusion of all northern stake- and rights-holders to inform future infrastructure development and to avoid past mistakes. The CNC could thus offer a coherent northern infrastructure framework that addresses the shortcomings of made-in-Ottawa policies for the Canadian North and Arctic.