

# PLANNING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE TO REALIZE CANADA'S POTENTIAL: THE CORRIDOR CONCEPT

Andrei Sulzenko and G. Kent Fellows\*

## SUMMARY

Canada in 2016 faces new and uniquely modern challenges. At the same time, our prosperity largely depends on our nineteenth and twentieth century accomplishments. Canada was built by visionaries who were able to overcome massive geographic and topographic challenges to create a great trading country, bound together and made successful by infrastructure projects like the trans-continental railways, highways and the St. Lawrence Seaway. But as we approach the 150th anniversary of Confederation, today's Canada faces serious challenges to its continued growth and prosperity as a trading country; challenges that are political and economic as well as geographic: improving access for our goods to diversified international markets, improving interprovincial trade and, most importantly, including the north in the prosperity of the south.

Is there a way to unite Canada economically east, west, north and south, to bring badly needed trade diversification, and to encourage private investment in national infrastructure projects? The School of Public Policy and CIRANO have done initial research on this issue, and we conclude that there are strong grounds to start a discussion about a Northern Corridor right-of-way.

### **What is the Northern Corridor right-of-way?**

The Northern Corridor concept is about establishing a new multi-modal (road, rail, pipeline, electrical transmission and communication) transportation right-of-way through Canada's north and near north. Northern Corridor would prepare the way for privately funded and economically driven projects to, for example, transport a full range of export commodities efficiently to port facilities on all three coasts while also improving economic development and living conditions in remote areas. This infrastructure would improve access for Canadian goods to alternative markets, assist with trade diversification, enhance regional development and interregional trade opportunities in Canada, support northern and Indigenous economic and social development goals along with Arctic sovereignty objectives, mitigate environmental risks through monitoring and surveillance within a contained footprint and reduce the emissions intensity of transportation in Canada's north and near-north.

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In initial concept, the Northern Corridor would be approximately 7000 km in length. It would largely follow the boreal forest in the northern part of the west, with a spur along the Mackenzie Valley, and then southeast from the Churchill area to northern Ontario and the “Ring of Fire” area; the corridor would then traverse northern Quebec to Labrador, with augmented ports. The right-of-way would have room for roads, rail lines, pipelines and transmission lines, and would interconnect with the existing (southern-focused) transportation network.

The Northern Corridor is a practical and focused response to the need for government to do what government should do in terms of infrastructure – create the environment in which private investment, properly regulated, can be applied to projects without intransigent “one-off” regulatory processes for a new right of way for each project. The establishment of a multi-modal right-of-way facilitates a long-term, integrated approach to the approval, construction and operation of infrastructure. Another benefit of the Northern Corridor concept is that comprehensive approaches, which due to their scale allow for accommodation of many diverse interests, can (paradoxically) be more achievable than a series of incremental steps.

The objective of this paper is to examine the potential of the Northern Corridor and outline the range of issues that would need to be studied in detail to determine the viability. A three-year, academically-led, peer-reviewed process is proposed to provide the information and analysis necessary for this purpose.

