Infrastructure New Zealand
2025 International Delegation

Building Strong Foundations: Canadian System Design and Infrastructure Delivery

Summary Report

Toronto, Ottawa, Montréal
May 2025

Infrastructure New Zealand

Introduction

In May 2025, Infrastructure New Zealand (INZ) undertook its second international delegation to Canada, marking ten years since our inaugural visit. The objective of this 10th INZ international delegation was to explore Canada's infrastructure system settings, approaches to private sector partnerships, major public transport investment, and the growing role of First Nations in infrastructure delivery.

New Zealand is currently navigating significant shifts in our own infrastructure system, including renewed efforts to attract private capital to support the delivery of nationally significant projects. Against this backdrop, Canada offers a timely and valuable case study of how different institutional and investment settings can help unlock infrastructure opportunities.

Too often, Aotearoa New Zealand looks inward when considering how to improve the speed, quality, and value of our infrastructure delivery. INZ has long advocated for learning from international best practice and better understanding how other countries leverage strategic planning, partnerships across all levels of government, private sector investment, and the role of indigenous peoples in infrastructure development.

With its federal system of government, Canada has recognised that delivering on a long-term national vision for infrastructure requires empowering all parts of the system including First Nations communities, to grow their capability in funding and delivering infrastructure that supports economic development and investment. Canada's evolving approach to devolving infrastructure responsibility to First Nations presents a model for Aotearoa to consider as we strengthen our own institutional frameworks.

The development of Canada's Public-Private Partnership (PPP) procurement model, world-leading pension funds, Infrastructure Bank, and mature infrastructure advisory sector also provided the delegation with critical insights. These elements represent both opportunities and challenges from which New Zealand can learn as we work to improve our own planning, funding, and delivery environment. Crucially, unlocking these opportunities will also require a shift in mindset, towards greater ambition, collaboration, and long-term thinking.

In recent years, Canada has made major investments in public transport and climate-resilient infrastructure in metropolitan centres. Montréal's light rail system, conceived around the same time as the proposed Auckland Light Rail project, is now fully operational, providing valuable lessons for New Zealand as we consider the future of urban transport. If we are to establish a long-term, bipartisan transport plan, it must be multimodal, resilient, and aligned with New Zealand's broader climate, economic, and population challenges. New Zealand's abundant renewable energy resources also present an opportunity to position our infrastructure and economy competitively on the global stage.

For New Zealand to remain globally competitive, we must lift the value we get from infrastructure investment, attract foreign capital, and strengthen the institutions that support delivery. This will require not only new policy settings but a coordinated effort to empower all parts of the system to deliver on a shared, long-term vision for Aotearoa.

We invite you to explore the key insights and findings from this study tour and to continue the conversation with INZ and delegation members as we work together to shape the future of New Zealand's infrastructure system.

Building Strong Foundations: Canadian System Design and Infrastructure Delivery

Summary of Key Findings

This document represents a summary of our delegation's key findings from our time in Toronto, Ottawa and Montréal, Canada. The full report, with detailed notes on each session, and insights from the delegates is available by scanning this QR code.

Thank You to Our 2025 Delegates and Hosts

Thank you to our delegates who committed significant time and resources to accompany the INZ team to Toronto, Ottawa and Montréal Canada.

These insights and recommendations for the future of New Zealand government relationships are not only a reflection of the input from the speakers and sponsors we hosted but the delegates themselves who brought the full weight of their experience to bear in discussions about the lessons learned from each of our sessions. This group has directly contributed to this report are part of the INZ delegation alumni community.

Attending Delegate List

Andrea Rickard	Managing Director	Beca Limited
Andrew Kittle	Director, Head of Project Finance	Westpac New Zealand Limited
Anthony McFadden	General Manager Rail Projects NZ, NSW, QLD	John Holland
Cam Law	Director People, Movement and Place	Aurecon
Fraser Robertson	Director	RCP
Fraser Wyllie	Managing Director New Zealand and Pacific	McConnell Dowell Constructors Ltd
Graham Mitchell	CEO	National Infrastructure Funding and Financing
Greg Pollock	Managing Partner	Agite Consulting
Guido Cacciaguerra	Executive Vice President	Webuild
Hannah Crosby	Director, Corporate Finance	ANZ
Ian Purdy	Head of Direct Property and Infrastructure	Accident Compensation Corporation
James Gill	Director	Industrial and Commercial Bank of China
Luke Donnelly	Director - Infrastructure	WT
Manea Sweeney	Director	Tonkin + Taylor Group
Maurice Hoban	Principal and NZ Pacific Regional Lead	GHD
Matt Dobbs	Head of Infrastructure	ASB
Natalie McClew	Partner	PwC
Pete Wiles	Director - Transport	WSP New Zealand Limited
Quin Henderson	Chief Executive Officer	Southbase Group
Roger Vreugdenhil	Managing Director	Stantec New Zealand
Ruth Fairhall	Deputy Chief Executive	Ministry of Transport
Sara Cheetham	Partner - Major Projects and Construction	Dentons
Sarah Anderson-Butler	Partner	Bell Gully
Simon Gray	Special Counsel	MinterEllisonRuddWatts
Susan Lucking	Head of Infrastructure, Government and Specialised Finance	Bank of New Zealand
Tim Palin	Partner	Frequency
Tim Walker	Owner	Mafic Partners
Tom Bennett	Partner	Buddle Findlay

2025 Infrastructure New Zealand Delegation Team

Issy Pasley	Events and Marketing Lead	Infrastructure New Zealand
Katie Bradford	Strategy and Engagement Manager	Infrastructure New Zealand
Michelle McCormick	Policy Director	Infrastructure New Zealand
Nick Leggett	Chief Executive	Infrastructure New Zealand

Thank You Also to Our Hosts

Pre-Delegation Briefing	**High Commission of Canada in New Zealand**
Pre-Delegation Dinner	**ICBC**
Day One - Toronto, Ontario	**Stantec**
Day Two - Toronto, Ontario	**GHD**
Day Three - Ottawa, Ontario	**Dentons**
Day Four - Ottawa, Ontario	**PWC**
Day Five - Montréal, Québec	**WSP**

The Delegation Met With These Organisation

Toronto

- Canada Infrastructure Bank
- Indigenous Canada Infrastructure Initiative
- Canadian PPP Council
- Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP)
- Ghella - Eglinton Crosstown West Light Rail Transit Extension
- Infrastructure Ontario
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

Ottawa

- Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada (Ministry)
- Zibi and Dream Ltd
- Public Service and Procurement Canada
- First Nations Tax Commission / First Nations Infrastructure Institute
- Assembly of First Nations

Montréal

- Longueuil City Council
- Autorité Régionale de Transport Métropolitain (ARTM) (Montréal Metropolitan Regional Transportation Authority)
- La Caisse (Previously known as CDPQ)

Ten Cross-Cutting Lessons for New Zealand

01.

From Contracts to Collaboration

KEY INSIGHT

Procurement models must be flexible and fit-for-purpose – not ideological or fixed.

Canada is moving away from rigid public-private partnerships to more collaborative delivery models like progressive design-build and alliances. Success depends less on the model chosen and more on early collaboration, shared incentives, and the right capability at the table. NZ must break the cycle of model overcorrection. Alliances, PPPs, and hybrids all have their place when applied wisely.

The model is not the message – alignment, trust, and fit-for-project matter more.

02.

Deliver Projects, Not Just Procurement Processes

KEY INSIGHT

Canada's success lies in de-risking early, defining the 'why,' and building momentum.

Early contractor involvement, progressive costing, and early works packaging reduce project friction and market withdrawal. New Zealand needs to cut complexity and empower decision-makers early. Delay equals cost. Every phase should reinforce speed, clarity, continuity, and not create… more gates.

Time is the enemy – build fast, learn faster.

03.

Public Sector Must Be Set Up to Succeed

KEY INSIGHT

Public servants need capability, incentives, and permission to lead.

In New Zealand there is little upside for delivery success and high consequences for failure. This stifles innovation. Canada invests in long-term institutional capacity, cross-sector secondments, and performance-based procurement leadership. We must transform the public service from passive contract managers to active project enablers.

If we want brave projects, we need brave people – and brave systems behind them.

04.

Infrastructure Needs a National Vision, Not Just a Pipeline

KEY INSIGHT

A project pipeline isn't a strategy – it's an output of one.

Canadian leaders start with national purpose: resilience, housing, productivity, and inclusion.

NZ must build infrastructure around a long-term vision for our country, not just what we can afford today. Bipartisan alignment is more important than electoral cycles.

The twin sister of vision is the right mindset to enact it. Positive, engaged and forward thinking. If one message stands out, it is the importance of a long-term national vision for infrastructure, one that supports nation-building projects, leverages private and institutional capital, and ensures resilience in the face of climate, housing, and economic challenges. For New Zealand, building that vision is essential to our future infrastructure success.

Shared vision and aspiration are essential components of significant and complex projects. These are the foundations that build trust and support, foster collaboration, and sustain momentum.

But a big vision isn't enough on its own. Early and meaningful engagement with specialist investors is instrumental to 'making it happen,' mobilising investment, applying commercial discipline and leveraging the capabilities and resources required.

Build what matters most, not just what's cheapest or easiest.

05.

Whole-of-Life Thinking Unlocks Value

KEY INSIGHT

Capital cost is only part of the picture. Lifecycle cost must guide decisions.

Canada bakes in operations and maintenance (O&M) considerations from day one and involves operators and unions early. Design choices today (e.g., snow melt systems, drainage) define cost and performance for 30 years. New Zealand must move away from 'lowest upfront cost' thinking to 'best long-term outcome' planning.

Spend a dollar now to save seven later – invest in longevity.

06.

Markets Respond to Certainty, Scale, and Simplicity

KEY INSIGHT

The private sector wants clear rules, right-sized projects, and trusted relationships.

Canada's project structuring is evolving. Smaller, clearer scopes with better integration planning attract more bidders. New Zealand's drop in tender participants signals market fatigue with risk-heavy, ambiguous procurements. We must treat the private sector as a partner not just a vendor and invest in long-term market confidence.

Trust feeds the market; complexity drives it away.

07.

Finance Must Be More Creative and Inclusive

KEY INSIGHT

Public capital alone won't close the infrastructure gap.

Canada is testing new funding models: value capture, municipal borrowing, and private equity in collaborative delivery. Montréal's REM light rail network shows how land value uplift can fund transit. 'Where the rail goes, the city grows.' New Zealand must diversify its funding toolkit and unlock iwi and private capital, especially for water and housing infrastructure.

Don't fear private capital – shape it with public purpose.

08.

Indigenous Partnership is a Path to Equity and Performance

KEY INSIGHT

True partnership with First Nations builds both social capital and infrastructure capacity.

Canada's First Nations Infrastructure Institute offers a model for building iwi asset-owner capability. Equity participation, local land tax revenue opportunities, flexible repayment structures, and governance inclusion drive real outcomes. New Zealand can lead globally in indigenous partnership if we match intent with action.

From consultation to co-creation: infrastructure is reconciliation in action.

09.

Celebrate the Benefits – Not Just the Build

KEY INSIGHT

Canada communicates infrastructure as nation-building, not just capital expenditure.

Job creation, climate resilience, housing unlocked, and GDP growth are tracked and reported.

New Zealand needs to stop apologising for ambition and switch to telling the story of benefits with data and heart. We should publish an annual 'infrastructure dividends' report to reframe the national conversation.

Projects succeed when the public believes in their purpose.

10.

There is No Nirvana – But There is Progress

KEY INSIGHT

Every model has flaws. There is no perfect system, only better ways forward.

Progressive improvement, continuous learning, and cultural shifts are more important than structural reform alone. New Zealand must reward delivery, back leadership, and avoid letting fear of failure define our approach.

The most expensive project is the one we never build.

Insights

The delegation explored how federal, provincial, and municipal systems work together to deliver infrastructure across a large diverse nation. While Canada faces many familiar challenges – cost escalation, delivery delays and housing pressures – their system demonstrates greater pragmatism, clearer long-term vision, and more effective use of private capital. There are tangible lessons for New Zealand to draw from, particularly around leadership stability, procurement maturity, and market confidence.

01.

Economic and Policy Context

Canada, like much of the world, is facing economic headwinds. Growth is forecast to slow, inflation remains elevated, and rising construction costs are impacting infrastructure delivery. Yet unlike New Zealand, Canada is deliberately using infrastructure investment to drive long-term economic resilience, productivity, and trade diversification.

KEY INITIATIVES INCLUDE:

Nation-Building Projects to enhance domestic and global trade links.

Dedicated Delivery Agencies, such as the Canadian Infrastructure Bank and project-specific oversight units.

Targeted Funding, directed towards renewable energy, climate resilience, indigenous inclusion, and social infrastructure, particularly healthcare.

Despite political shifts, Canada has demonstrated stability in infrastructure priorities, with both centre-left and centre-right governments supporting growth-focused investment.

02.

Key Lessons for New Zealand

Vision First and Pipeline Second

A project list is not a strategy. Canada's focus on infrastructure as an enabler of national goals – productivity, resilience and climate outcomes – is critical.

New Zealand must articulate a long-term, cross-party infrastructure vision, supported by a consistent pipeline.

Infrastructure Culture and Capability

Canada's 'growth mindset' is evident across government, agencies, and industry.

Pragmatism, learning from failure, and the willingness to adapt procurement and delivery models are cultural strengths.

New Zealand's over-complicated, risk-averse environment undermines delivery. We must simplify, encourage innovation, and strengthen early decision-making.

Political Stability Drives Delivery

Canada's consistent federal policy environment has enabled decades-long infrastructure planning, workforce development, and investment. New Zealand's policy churn drives a start/stop nature that costs us billions of dollars per year in lost efficiencies. It also undermines continuity and investor confidence.

Toronto City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square.

03.

Procurement and Funding Models

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) Must Fit the Project

Canada has delivered over 300 PPP projects, which has been particularly successful in social infrastructure under C$1 billion.

But both countries have also seen PPP failures, largely from poor risk allocation or applying the model where it doesn't fit.

The lesson: model selection must follow project needs, not ideology. There can, however, be significant benefits to PPPs. PPPs offer a smart, long-term approach to infrastructure delivery by combining the strengths of both sectors. They allocate risk (whether financial, construction, or operational) to the party best equipped to manage it, leading to more resilient outcomes.

By taking a whole-of-life view of assets, PPPs promote better planning and cost control over time. New Zealand is woeful in its asset management performance to date. We need to do better. PPPs also unlock private capital and technical expertise, easing the financial burden on governments while encouraging innovation and efficiency. Done well, PPPs can deliver infrastructure that is faster, smarter, and better value for money.

PPPs must align with project scale and risk profile. Ideology should not dictate model selection.

Evolving Procurement Approaches

Progressive Design and Incentivised Target Cost Contracts are gaining traction, providing:

- Early contractor involvement.
- Greater collaboration and shared risk.
- Innovation through flexible design phases.
- Canada's rigid, risk-transfer-heavy PPPs are being refined to suit complex or large-scale projects.

New Zealand's lowest-cost, adversarial contracting approach discourages innovation, weakens industry investment, and contributes to poor outcomes.

Over-Templating Kills Innovation

Rigid government templates and affordability caps often limit innovation. Procurement should encourage flexibility and trust in supplier capability, especially in complex, evolving projects.

New Zealand's infrastructure future cannot rely on hope and habit. We must embed long-term thinking, build procurement excellence, and measure what matters. Canada proves that even imperfect institutions can evolve with the right leadership and commitment to social impact and market confidence.

Procurement Capability is a National Asset

Canada shows that procurement expertise, not process, should be centralised. New Zealand's small market must concentrate knowledge to avoid duplication and failure.

Private Finance and Impact Investment

Private capital is deeply embedded in Canadian infrastructure delivery and has a high degree of public acceptance (excluding toll roads).

Equity participation models, like Montréal's Réseau Express Métropolitain (REM), are unlocking new funding streams like value capture around train stations.

New Zealand lags significantly in private capital utilisation, hindered by public scepticism and limited policy support.

04.

Governance, Institutions, and System Design

Institutional Strength and Flexibility

Canada's infrastructure system features independent agencies like Infrastructure Ontario, providing procurement expertise, knowledge retention, and market stability.

New Zealand lacks an equivalent, centralised body to build procurement capability and manage delivery knowledge across the sector.

Canada demonstrates a willingness to establish new agencies to solve specific bottlenecks.

Indigenous Participation

Indigenous ownership, equity participation, and mandated involvement in procurement are advancing economic inclusion.

New Zealand leads on engagement practices but can expand economic participation models to examine access to more direct revenue streams and increased self-determination, and as partners in infrastructure development and ownership.

Municipal Role and Local Empowerment

Canadian provinces and municipalities own 97% of core public infrastructure, with clear roles across government layers.

Municipalities are incentivised to increase housing density and improve asset management, particularly in response to funding constraints.

New Zealand's two-tier system often results in blurred responsibilities and fragmented delivery.

05.

Broader Observations and System Challenges

Community engagement is essential – early, transparent consultation builds trust, including around controversial financing models.

Climate resilience is also a priority, with infrastructure standards evolving in response to severe weather events.

Housing delivery faces familiar affordability and productivity barriers, addressed through design catalogues, density incentives, and financing support.

Canada's regulatory system, while complex, shows a willingness to reform and streamline to meet delivery targets.

Social Outcomes Need Real Metrics

Canada is ahead in attempting to quantify the social return of infrastructure. Housing reduces health costs, ultimately making the country more productive. New Zealand lacks robust KPIs and valuation tools to do the same.

Impact Investing is Still Evolving – Caution Required

Scepticism remains around governments claiming to be "impact investors". New Zealand should demand rigorous risk pricing and benefit modelling before adopting this language.

Recommendations for New Zealand

01.
Strategic Vision and System Stability

Establish a long-term, bipartisan infrastructure vision linked to national productivity, climate goals, and social outcomes.

Build policy stability to unlock workforce development, private capital, and delivery momentum.

02.
Procurement Capability and Institutional Strength

Create a New Zealand Infrastructure Institute as a centre of procurement excellence, accessible to all public sector agencies and private sector partners.

Embed Progressive Design and Incentivised Target Cost Contracts to encourage collaboration, innovation, and better risk allocation.

Move beyond lowest-cost contracting to models that deliver whole-of-life value and build industry capability.

03.
Private Capital and Alternative Funding

Normalise private finance participation in infrastructure, particularly in social infrastructure, supported by transparent public communication.

Canada's Infrastructure Bank provides us with lessons in patience and course correction. The bank started slowly, funding one major project in its first few years. Over time it adjusted and shifted, attracting C$24 billion in private capital for around C$12 billion. New Zealand tends to give up too early on bold models.

Investigate a New Zealand Infrastructure Bank concept, learning from Canada's early course corrections.

Blended Finance between public and private accelerates new infrastructure projects. How do we evolve projects that sit between either purely government or purely private? A bank that injects public capital on behalf of, but not directed by, government is something we must investigate. We need to explore blended finance models and equity participation frameworks to attract new capital.

04.
Indigenous and Local Government Inclusion

Expand indigenous economic participation beyond engagement to ownership and equity models.

Empower municipalities with tools for housing delivery, including density incentives and value capture mechanisms around transport nodes.

05.
Focus on Delivery, Maintenance, and Operational Outcomes

Shift from project fixation to whole-of-life asset performance, embedding operations and maintenance considerations from project inception.

Recognise the cost of inaction. The most expensive projects are those delayed or cancelled.

06.
Cultural Reform and System Confidence

Incentivise performance within government agencies and create environments where innovation is rewarded, not penalised.

Learn from Canada's persistent, adaptable approach – progress over perfection.

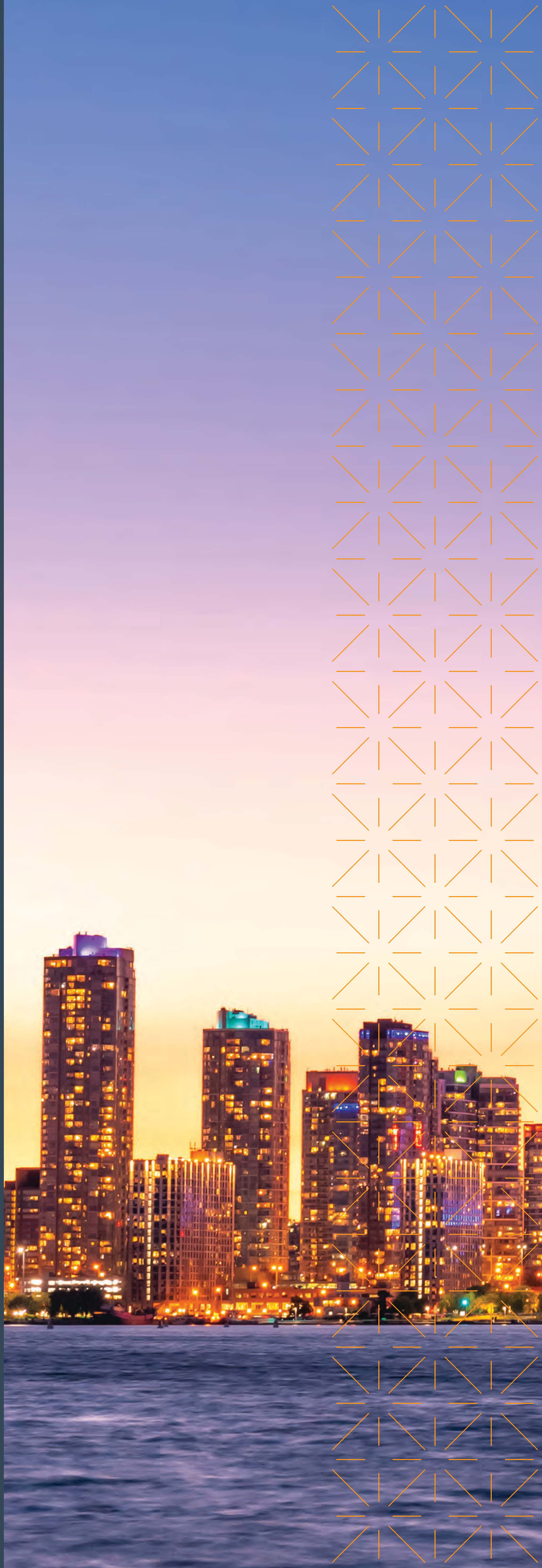
Reflection

Canada's infrastructure system is not flawless, but it demonstrates that leadership stability, cultural pragmatism, and institutional maturity can deliver meaningful progress. Canada's response is bold, coordinated, and evolving. Through investment, engagement, and institutional confidence, it is making steady progress.

New Zealand must move beyond short-term fixes, overcome cultural barriers to private capital, and embed long-term system thinking to close our infrastructure deficit and deliver for communities. For New Zealand, the lessons are clear; build and retain capability, enable partnership, embrace private capital with clear guardrails, and prioritise delivery over design perfection. If we want to deliver infrastructure that truly supports our social, economic and environmental aspirations, we must move beyond the politics of potential and into the practice of action.

The time to act is now – we cannot afford the cost of inertia.

Aerial view of Ottawa, Canada



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