

Tuesday, May 18, 2010

Quality of life will depend on sustainable infrastructure, Siemens study shows

- Urban transportation is Canada's biggest infrastructure challenge -

Toronto, Ontario – Quality of life in Canada's cities may rank “among the very best” today, but the future is not as bright, according to a national study released today on the sustainability of cities. While 74 per cent of the experts participating in the survey rate the quality of life in their cities as above average, only 44 per cent are optimistic about their cities' future without substantial investments in infrastructure to increase competitiveness, protect the environment and ensure quality of life.

The study -- entitled *The Sustainable Cities Challenge in Canada* -- was commissioned by Siemens Canada (www.siemens.ca) in conjunction with the David Suzuki Foundation and was conducted by GlobeScan in 12 of Canada's largest cities. It reflects the views of a sample of experts on issues related to infrastructure for cities from government, the private sector, academia, and non-governmental organizations.

Focusing on key infrastructure areas – transportation, energy, water and waste water, healthcare, and safety and security – the study reveals that experts are divided on how effectively their cities are adopting sustainable infrastructure solutions. Less than a majority (41 per cent) think their cities' leaders recognize the vital role that infrastructure decisions can play in protecting the environment and addressing climate change. And nine in ten experts see a high need for investment in transportation infrastructure – far greater than other areas.

“At Siemens, we are very interested to know what Canadian city leaders and key stakeholders are thinking, which is why we undertook and invested in this study. We want to engage Canadians in a dialogue about sustainable cities, increase awareness of the subject and encourage more people to think about the future today,” said Roland Aurich, president and CEO of Siemens Canada.

Can transportation infrastructure survive a “perfect storm”?

Results of the study released today add critical information to the ongoing dialogue initiated by Siemens to address the key challenges facing cities.

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Building on the themes currently dominating that discussion, experts who participated in the study say that transportation infrastructure faces a “perfect storm” of problems in the coming years. Six in ten experts, especially those in Atlantic Canada and the Prairies, say that old or obsolete infrastructure is the biggest challenge facing their respective cities. Lack of long-term strategic planning and inadequate capacity are also considered to be factors contributing to the problem.

Experts also cite transportation infrastructure as a key factor affecting a city’s competitiveness. When asked to name which type of infrastructure is the most important in attracting investment to their cities, 63 per cent of experts point to transportation. Yet only one-half believe that when making infrastructure investments, their cities place high importance on making the city competitive to attract private investment.

Similarly, the study reveals that while the subject of sustainable infrastructure is accepted, implementation is lagging. Only four in ten experts (mainly in government) think that their cities recognize the vital role that infrastructure decisions can play in protecting the environment and addressing climate change. Three in ten disagree, suggesting a lack of awareness of the link between infrastructure and the environment.

“Many say it is too late, however we don’t think so,” added Mr. Aurich. “At Siemens, we are committed to being responsible and innovative when it comes to the environment and sustainable cities. We want to work with Canadians to make a sustainable difference.”

"This report demonstrates the urgent need for Canadian cities to examine the crucial role forests, wetlands and farmlands can play in providing truly "green" infrastructure services," said Peter Robinson, CEO of the David Suzuki Foundation. "On the path towards sustainability, these cities will need to invest in the protection of this natural capital to ensure we all continue to benefit from the essential ecological services nature provides, like cleaning our air and water and regulating the climate."

“This research also shows that our cities risk putting significant tax dollars into transportation projects that may move a lot of people but don’t deliver on environmental protection, economic competitiveness and quality of life,” said Rob Kerr, vice president, GlobeScan.

“What we’ve learned from this study is invaluable: using infrastructure dollars more effectively will make our cities more sustainable and competitive,” said Mr. Aurich. “At Siemens, we believe that technology is critical to making cities fit for the future,” he added.

Key Highlights

Experts' views on how quickly and efficiently their cities will adopt sustainable infrastructure solutions differ widely across the country. In Vancouver, 71 per cent rate their city among the best at adopting green solutions. Those in Quebec are at the other end of the spectrum, with almost no one rating their city above average.

In terms of environmental challenges, the study shows that experts point first to transportation-related issues (20 per cent) and water/waste water (19 per cent). These issues are followed by urban sprawl (14 per cent) and atmospheric issues such as air pollution and climate change (11 per cent). Across regions there is differentiation: experts in Quebec and British Columbia perceive transportation to be the most serious, while in Ontario and Prairie cities, water challenges hold the number one position. Experts in Atlantic Canada consider both transportation and water to be equally serious, while urban sprawl is the most serious for experts in Alberta cities.

The study shows that aging water infrastructure and poor public awareness are other major challenges that cities must face in the near future.

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