

CANADIANS EVALUATE, PRIORITIZE PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Although Canadians Say Roads and Highways Are In Worst Condition, Hospitals and Schools Viewed As Higher Priorities for Government Attention



Ipsos Reid

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Although Canadians Say Roads and Highways Are In Worst Condition, Hospitals and Schools Viewed As Higher Priorities for Government Attention

Ottawa, ON – Although Canadians say roads and highways are in the worst condition, hospitals are seen as the higher priority for government attention according to a poll conducted by Ipsos Reid for Canadian publication *Municipal World*.

Canadians nationwide were asked to evaluate the condition of eight areas of public infrastructure throughout their province, including: roads and highways, hospitals, water treatment facilities, sewage treatment facilities, public recreation facilities, public transit systems, schools and electricity generation and delivery.

The findings of this research, featured in the April 2007 issue of *Municipal World*, show that nearly three in four Canadians (73%) say that the roads and highways in their province are in either “declining condition” or in “desperate need of an overhaul”. Regionally, residents of Saskatchewan and Manitoba (93%), Quebec (86%) and the Atlantic Provinces (82%) most often say their roads and highways are in poor condition. It is worth noting that this research was conducted just prior to the collapse of an overpass in Laval, Quebec, in September 2006, an event likely to prompt even greater concern over the aging of that province’s roads and highways.

A slim majority of Canadians (54%) say hospitals are in poor condition, including more than two thirds of British Columbians (67%) and residents of the Atlantic Provinces (61%).

Nearly half of Canadians (48%) also say schools in their province are in poor condition, including 72% among residents of Alberta.

On the positive side, more than half of the public say that electricity generation and delivery (76%), water (63%) and sewage (57%) treatment facilities, public recreation facilities (58%) and public transit systems (52%) are in “good” or “excellent” condition.

Residents of Ontario are less likely than residents elsewhere to consider electricity generation and delivery to be in good or excellent condition (59% compared to 92% among Quebec residents, for example).

Priorities for Government Action

Canadians were also asked to rank the priority of each of the same eight major areas of public infrastructure. Not surprisingly, the areas seen to be in the worst condition – roads and highways, hospitals and schools also rank as the highest priorities for government attention.

Although Canadians say roads and highways are in the worst condition, hospitals are seen as the higher priority for government attention. Over three in four Canadians rank hospitals (77%) among the top three priorities compared to just over half ranking schools (55%) and roads and highways (54%) among the top three priorities.

Only in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are roads and highways (86%) seen as a greater priority for government attention than hospitals (60%). Roads and highways are also a much higher priority among Quebec residents (70%), although hospitals (86%) are seen to be in even greater need of government attention in the province.

Given how poorly Albertans evaluate the condition of their schools it is not surprising that they also see schools (76%) as the highest priority for government attention, in a tie for first place with hospitals. Fewer than half of Canadians view the other tested elements of public infrastructure among the top three priorities for government attention: water treatment facilities (33%), public transit systems

(29%), sewage treatment facilities (23%), electricity generation and delivery (19%) and public recreation facilities (10%).

Government Performance

When asked how well their municipal governments have managed their responsibility for the eight areas of public infrastructure tested, over three in five say their municipal government does a good job managing public recreation facilities (64%), water treatment facilities (64%) and sewage treatment facilities (62%).

Over half (54%) say their municipality does a good job managing electricity generation and delivery, while fewer than half say their municipality does a good job with schools (48%), public transit systems (46%) and hospitals (42%).

Roads and highways are a clear area of weakness, with the majority of Canadians (56%) saying their municipal government has performed poorly in managing this responsibility. Transportation, in general, seems to be an area of weakness given that a significant proportion of Canadians also rate their municipal government poorly in managing public transportation (40%).

In nearly every case, Canadians say that their municipal governments do a better job than either the provincial or federal orders of government at managing their responsibilities with respect to the eight tested areas of public infrastructure.

Only with respect to electricity generation and delivery do more Canadians say their provincial government (60%) does a better job than their municipal government (54%). In addition to electricity generation, managing water (52%) and sewage treatment facilities (50%) are areas where at least half positively view their provincial government's performance.

On the other hand, at least half of Canadians say provincial governments have poorly managed their responsibilities for roads and highways (63%), hospitals (60%), schools (53%) and public transit systems (50%).

In no area, among the eight areas of public infrastructure tested, does a majority of Canadians rate the performance of the federal government positively. Areas where the federal government is seen as doing a relatively good job managing its responsibilities include electricity generation and delivery (43%), water (40%) and sewage treatment facilities (40%).

As with provincial governments, majorities of Canadians say the federal government has poorly managed its responsibilities for roads and highways (64%), hospitals (62%) and schools (53%).

Views on P3s

The public does not appear to have fixed views with respect to public-private partnerships (or P3s). Some findings suggest that Canadians would support these arrangements as alternatives to government control; but, so much depends on how these public-private relationships are described and also the types of infrastructure to which these arrangements would apply.

When asked whether a private sector corporation should have a significant role in developing public recreation facilities (63%), public transit systems (53%) and roads and highways (50%), at least half of Canadians say yes.

However, with respect to schools (68%), hospitals (67%), water (62%) and sewage (57%) treatment facilities and electricity generation and delivery (58%), most Canadians say the private sector should not play a significant role.



These are the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted for Municipal World magazine conducted online between September 21 and 26, 2006, among a nationwide sample of 1,173 Canadian adults obtaining a ± 2.9 percentage point margin of error. These data were weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to Census data.

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