The Sustainable Cities Initiative
The National Roundtable for the Environment and Economy (NRTEE), to which Prime Minister Chrétien appointed me in November 1996, examined the earth's unprecedented explosion of urban growth, particularly as it has occurred in cities of developing countries. As Chair of the NRTEE's Foreign Policy Committee from 1997 to early 1999, I created a Sustainable Cities Initiative (SCI). A number of urban experts, government officials, and members of the business and financial communities helped shape the initiative.

I won't go into extensive detail here, since the initiative can be examined at the NRTEE's web site (see the address at the end of this article). Moreover, David Crenna of Bayswater Consulting contributed to the initiative by preparing an extensive inventory of Canadian involvement in over 170 cities, 40 centres of urban expertise, and over 500 companies providing urban infrastructure and services. This inventory offers up-to-date details on Canadian activity in support of sustainable cities around the globe. (For more information, contact David Crenna at the address given at the end of this article.)

The essence of the initiative is that we are rapidly being transformed from a rural-based species into an urban-based one. The SCI report argues that Canadians can play a much more significant role in policy and business if we can overcome certain barriers:

- a lack of coordination among various federal programs and departments (e.g., Foreign Affairs, Industry, Environment, Trade and CIDA).
- a business culture based on international competition rather than on cooperation, strategic alliances, and consortium-building.
- inadequate financial systems and resources in the Economic Development Corporation, CIDA, Industry Canada, and financial institutions.

The SCI report was adopted by the NRTEE's Board of Directors in November 1998, signed off for release in February 1999, and transmitted in March to the Prime Minister, who publicly accepted it in April and assigned it to the Minister of International Trade. Federal officials are now establishing some pilot-scale "teams" of urban experts and business people in selected cities in developing or modernizing countries in Asia, South America, and Central and Eastern Europe.

In the next few years we will need to address these barriers through selected projects, so that Canadians can play a vigorous role. The stakes are immense, the challenges formidable:

- Global population will grow from 1998's 5.8 billion people to 8.5 billion in 2025, and to 10 billion in 2050. Of the projected increase of 2.7 billion between 1998 and 2025, 2.4 billion (over 90%) will live in cities developing countries.
- The cost of the basic infrastructure that will be required in just the next ten years is estimated at $1.5 - 2 trillion in Asia alone (Asian Development Bank), and at $4 trillion internationally (World Bank). The real need is probably double these figures.
- Balancing economic development, ecological capacity, social equity, governance, and capacity-building in urban sustainability strategies will require significant changes to urban planning, both internationally and here in Canada.

That's why the work we do in Canada on urban sustainability needs to be integrated into any initiatives that flow from the NRTEE's Sustainable Cities Initiative. It would be inconsistent for Canadian planners, urban experts, and business people to be preaching urban sustainability abroad while practising urban sprawl, energy waste, and gluttonous consumption at home.

For this reason, initiatives like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Local Agenda 21, undertaken in conjunction with the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), are a good start. So are the excellent urban sustainability plans of Hamilton/Wellington, Ottawa/Carleton, and the Greater Vancouver Regional District. The British Columbia Growth Management Act that I introduced as B.C.'s Premier in 1995 is an example of what a provincial government can do. The Georgia Basin Initiative, also launched by my government in 1999, has led to the Georgia Puget Basin initiatives I will now describe.

The Georgia Strait/Puget Sound Basin
The area encompassing Southwest British Columbia and Northwest Washington State—an area referred to here as the "Basin"—is the site of one of the most interesting series of initiatives for urban sustainability or "smart growth" in North America. Six million people live in the Georgia Strait/Puget Sound area, which is not only among the five most active areas of population growth in North America, but also one of the most challenging geographic regions in which to handle such growth. The number of residents is expected to grow to 10 - 12 million in the next thirty or forty years. The number of tourists and visitors to the area—currently over 15 million per year—is expected to grow at the same pace. The Basin has very little urban land: under 5% of the geographic area. Four mountain ranges—the Cascades and Olympics on the U.S. side, Vancouver Island and the Coast Mountains on the Canadian side—surround the Basin like a bowl. Huge stretches of ocean occupy much of the remaining geo­graphy: Georgia Strait, Juan de Fuca Strait, and Puget Sound. The San Juan and Gulf Islands dot these stretches. Prime agricultural, forest, park, and wilderness areas in British Columbia are protected by Agricultural Land Reserve, Forest Land Reserve, and Park legislation. In Washington State, a growth strategies act similar to B.C.'s, along with various pieces of legislation (including legislation protecting endangered species), likewise restricts urban land use.

A number of cross-border initiatives are underway to bring about a "smart growth" strategy for the Basin. Among them are:

- The Georgia Basin Futures Project headed by Dr. John Robinson of the University of British Columbia's Collaborative Sustainable Development Research Institute (the address of their web site is given at the end of this article). This is a five-year, long-action research project funded by a $2.5 million endowment from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council.
- The Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative, a five-year, $30 million-plus joint project involving the federal government's Department of the Environment and the Province of B.C.'s Ministry of the Environment, Lands and Parks. The initiative is focused mostly on issues of air, water, and biodiversity around the Basin.
- The Georgia Puget Basin Action Project, involving a network of urban/environmental activists, business, labour, government, and First Nations representatives from both B.C. and Washington State. The network was formed at a forum held at the University of British Columbia in late May, 1999. The purpose of the Forum was to move us all from "visioning fatigue" to addressing the need for a Basin-wide urban sustainability strategy that is both urban-practitioner-friendly and citizen-friendly. The goal is to create a ten- to twenty-year growth management strategy of both sides of the Georgia Strait/Puget Sound.

Canada/U.S. border. A web site is being established this fall, when an executive summary of the forum proceedings will also be made available.

- The B.C./Washington Corridor Task Force, established by and publicly launched by B.C. Premier Glen Clark and Washington State Governor Gary Locke in June 1999. As co-chair of the Task Force, I have been asked to address four main issues:
  1) The border, including matters of congestion, customs, intelligent transportation systems, and common facilities.
  2) Transportation, particularly "green transportation corridor" initiatives such as an upgraded and eventually high-speed Amtrak route linking Eugene, Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver, as well as improvements to the use and quality of highway systems both on the coast and inland.
  3) Tourism, involving "two nation vacation" promotion and marketing. Sustainable tourism ideas are being explored with Oceans Blue, a subsidiary of Tourism Vancouver and the first in North America to be focused on environmental tourism.
Third, planners can become active in the pilot projects of NRTEE's Sustainable Cities Initiative. Three are getting underway now: one in Katowice, Poland, another in Salvador, Brazil, and yet another in China. More are being established.

Fourth, planners can participate in other domestic programs, such as the FCM's Local Agenda 21, the NRTEE's Millennium Series, and especially the urban sustainability forum to be held next May in Montreal.

Do I believe Canadian planners, urban experts, and business people are up to the looming challenge of urban sustainability? I do, but we are going to have to move quickly and boldly.

First, they can participate in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities International Urban Program. The FCM's fourteen-year-old international urban initiative is helping to build local government capacity. This issue of municipal capacity-building is becoming increasingly crucial as many modernizing countries (e.g., China and countries in Eastern Europe) download and decentralize responsibilities.

Second, CIP can coordinate its international urban activities with those of municipal professional associations for city managers, engineers, and finance directors. A more comprehensive set of skills would then be available.

Summary

During the 1999 CIP Conference in Montreal, I presented two initiatives. The first of these was the Sustainable Cities Initiative of the National Roundtable on the Environment and Economy, an initiative which I chaired from 1997 to early 1999. The second was the Georgia-Puget Basin project, which involves a number of activities focused on a "smart growth" strategy and action plan for the immensely challenging geographic area encompassing Vancouver, Victoria, and Seattle.

In this article, I will give brief descriptions of these two exciting strategic activities involving urban sustainability. I will then show how they are linked, and conclude with a challenge to Canadian planners to help create a practitioner-friendly approach to urban sustainability both at home and abroad. As we approach the twenty-first century—the first truly urban century, when more people will live in cities than in the countryside—there are huge opportunities for Canadian planners and business people to do good and do well.

Planners also need to integrate sustainability into planning school curriculum, as well as into planners' daily practices and methods of conceptualizing. It is becoming less and less acceptable to separate physical and land-use planning from economic, social and community development, citizens' empowerment, and governance issues. Holistic, practitioner-friendly approaches to urban sustainability must be advanced quickly if we are to cope successfully with the urban tidal wave or "tsunami" that will arrive in the next few generations.

I have a few suggestions about how Canadian planners who are urban sustainability leaders can play a more aggressive role internationally.

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