



For immediate release

Tuesday, January 22, 2002

## **Urban Competitiveness Agenda Needed Now**

The Toronto Board of Trade's Annual Dinner 2002 was held Monday, January 21, 2002. The following remarks were made by Board Chair Chris Ridabock at the dinner.

It has been my pleasure to serve as your Chair since June of last year. At that time, we adopted Vision 2004. It is our commitment to you, our members, to press for positive change and help keep our city competitive, liveable, and enviable.

*Vision 2004* states: "The Toronto Board of Trade is the champion of a competitive and vibrant Toronto, with a mandate to contribute directly to our members' success by acting as a dynamic business catalyst and providing innovative and valuable business tools. We will create opportunities for governments and the business community to work together on issues that are important to our members."

I believe we are living up to that mandate in so many ways. Our programs and events continue to attract you in record numbers. Our products such as our salary compensation surveys meet your need for decision-making data. Our facilities welcome you daily with quality and service.

However, our most important role is to be the voice-- the champion for business in this city-- to lobby for change and provide leadership on the issues we face collectively. Whether you are a business owner, employee or elected official, I'm sure we all agree that our city is the prime creator of wealth, of jobs and offers a quality of life that is the envy of others.

I love this city. I came to Toronto over three decades ago and have embraced all of the wonders opportunities and greatness it has to offer. However, like many of you, I am concerned that despite much past success and growth, we are at a crossroads.

That is why, for the past several years, the Toronto Board of Trade has been urging all levels of government to establish an urban competitiveness agenda. We have taken the message to Ottawa. To Queen's Park. And to City Hall.

Why? Because Canada's major cities are under increasing strain to remain prosperous and competitive. This strain is eroding the advantages of our cities, our province, and indeed, our nation. The Toronto Board of Trade believes an agenda on urban competitiveness must be built upon five key pillars.

First: Canada's major urban regions must be able to compete on a global stage. Our cities compete with more than 300 city regions world-wide.

Second: All levels of government must bear responsibility for ensuring our cities are livable, functional, and commercially viable. Government investment of our tax dollars must be targeted at urban priorities.

Toronto creates an enormous amount of wealth. Yet during the past several years of prosperity, city revenues have seen minimal growth. Our provincial and federal governments must reinvest in this vital asset to keep it producing.

The development and renewal of our physical and social infrastructure can no longer be ignored. Our cities must be able to meet growing service demands, and absorb anticipated population growth.

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Third: Cities must be able to take greater control of their destinies. Jurisdictional wrangling and financial limitations strain local government's ability to deal with their challenges. We need a new deal for Toronto that meets its particular requirements.

Fourth: attitudes, policies, governance structures and priorities must change to reflect the reality that Canada is no longer a rural economy. It is an urban economy. In fact, one in six Canadians lives right here in our city region.

Fifth: Maintaining a high quality of life is critical to the continued economic growth, and social survivability of Canada. A safe, attractive, diverse and affordable urban environment is key to our competitiveness. We must remain attractive and offer a city that can meet the expectations of top talent.

The Toronto Board of Trade is voicing your concerns and priorities. I am pleased to say that our focus on urban competitiveness is paying off. All levels of government are listening, and we are seeing some changes.

The Toronto Board of Trade is a strong advocate for cost-effective, and integrated passenger transit throughout the GTA. In June, the Board released its report entitled "A Strategy for Rail-Based Transit". We were pleased to see a few months later, the province announce its \$3 billion dollar investment in rail transit.

Last month's federal budget promised a new infrastructure foundation. We believe this is a very positive first step. In fact, the program reflects specific discussions we've been working on with the federal government for over 18 months. At the same time, news media in this city are also helping to raise awareness and the level of debate. Rarely does a day go by without editorial opinion, solid reporting and in-depth coverage, about the need for an urban competitiveness strategy.

The Toronto Board of Trade will continue to advance your issues. Your priorities. Your vision for this city.

We will navigate the future, very much guided by the informed views of our members, as expressed in our frequent surveys and the expertise that over 400 volunteers provide through participation in our working groups. We are your champion for a competitive and vibrant Toronto.

Visit [www.bot.com](http://www.bot.com) and click on "Navigate the Future" for more Urban Competitiveness information.

For more information please contact Bonnie Shulman at 416-862-4565.