



Q&A with Richard Florida

Richard Florida is an author, urbanist, and the current Director of Cities at the University of Toronto's Martin Prosperity Institute. We spoke with him about how Canadian cities can evolve and prepare for the future through P3s.

Mediaplanet You founded the Creative Class Group which focuses on helping companies and regions achieve growth and prosperity. In your experience, what role can private partners play in improving our cities?

Richard Florida In Canada, the private sector has got to play a bigger role in driving the revival of urban areas. We're seeing a massive transformation in how our cities are built and how they propel innovation. With the rise of urban technologies like ride-sharing, co-working, and co-living, the city is becoming an arena of innovation, and companies are driving that.

A future city is one built with innovation in mind. Changes in how it's organized, how mobility occurs, and how people live and work are all critical to its success. Governments have to get smarter in how they work with and regulate these private companies who are actively participating in the city's growth because the private sector is an increasingly important part of our urban life.

Mediaplanet How important is infrastructure to facilitating a city's prosperity and growth?

Richard Florida Infrastructure is critical. Historically, the key factor associated with urban growth was whether infrastructure was being built that would allow the city to scale. First, we had small places bounded by as far as we could walk. Then, horse-drawn carriages

and street railways expanded the city several miles.

Ultimately, we developed the car and the modern post-war city with suburbs. Now, infrastructure is critical, because we're at the next great juncture. Once you get a city to the size of Toronto, you can no longer move people around based on the car. The city starts to break down and roads become gridlocked, so in order to scale you have to invest in subways and mass transit.

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Historically, very few cities can make these shifts. Those that have — certainly New York and London — created the template for their growth before the onset of the car. In the West, it's hard to think of a city that has overcome this inertia and built the kind of infrastructure it needs once the car and single-family home came on the scene. The only way we can grow is to extend our transit and rail lines

and evolve beyond the car.

Mediaplanet What role do you think the P3 model plays in developing infrastructure?

Richard Florida The P3 model is the reason American cities were rebuilt — it is an incredible model. The rebuilding of American cities was not done with federal or state policy; it's all been done through local action, civic action, and these P3 models. It's the wave of the future, and in many ways it's a more effective and efficient way of doing things. Properly regulated, it can also be a more democratic way of doing things. The genius of America was its ability to invent these new models, and flexibly adapt to new conditions. We're behind on this in Canada, and there's no holding it back. It's such a powerful force for change and flexible adaptation — if you resist, it will just move elsewhere, and other places will capitalize on its benefits.

Mediaplanet How can we ensure private companies play a role in supporting sustainability and inclusive development?

Richard Florida It's already happening. In Newark, the city government was bankrupt and for many years corrupt, and the city was collapsing. It was a P3 model led by corporations and local actors that created a strategy for rebuilding in an inclusive way.

It's incumbent upon corporations to be good community members and urban citizens. All of this has to be done with an eye towards environmental sustainability, openness and transparency, and inclusion. Those will be three standards that P3s are held to.