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May 8, 2006

The Honourable Lawrence Cannon
Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities
Government of Canada
330 Sparks Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0N5

The Honourable James M. Flaherty
Minister of Finance
Government of Canada
140 O'Connor Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0H5

Dear Ministers:

The Toronto Public Library Board would like to express its support for the establishment of a new National Infrastructure Program for urban communities, and, in particular, for the inclusion of public libraries as eligible organizations in the distribution of federal infrastructure funding.

Infrastructure is the platform upon which Canada's quality of life and international competitiveness depends. We depend on strong cities and communities for our prosperity and quality of life; cities and communities are the keys to Canada's well-being and prosperity. Libraries provide a wide range of services to the community, all of which have an impact both on the users of that service and on society at large. Many of those impacts are economic and social in nature.

As outlined in the attached Briefing Paper, libraries make direct economic contributions to the community in a variety of ways, including the cost of items circulated, the contribution to the GDP, as a creator of jobs, the purchase of book-related products, the purchase of services of other industries, as well as the contribution to local construction and renovation businesses. In terms of the indirect economic impact, libraries have evidence to support the fact that property values increase with the existence of a public library in a community, we increase business for surrounding businesses and we are a stimulus for economic vitality and neighbourhood revitalization.

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The social impact of libraries on their communities is equally impressive. Lifelong learning, social inclusion, participation in a democratic society, support for newcomers, services to persons with disabilities, support for children and students and the promotion of literacy for adults are a few of the numerous benefits that result from the provision of a public library service in the community.

Public libraries have shown that they are effective partners in delivering new services made possible through existing infrastructure programs, such as the *Connecting Canadians* program. Access to the Internet has become a key service offered by public libraries. The existing investment in public Internet access, the support infrastructure already in place, including trained staff able to assist the public, the current hours of service that include evenings and weekends and the ability to attract external grant funding have positioned the Library as a primary community access point to e-government and other Internet services.

However, like most public sector organizations, we are under constant budget pressure. A key issue is the struggle to translate start-up funding into sustainable and ongoing funding. The start-up funding to enhance Internet access, content development, training, and literacy programs creates additional sustainability pressures for libraries. Only with sustained funding can libraries maintain the valuable services that we provide to our communities.

For these reasons we strongly encourage you to promote the inclusion of public libraries as eligible organizations in the distribution of federal infrastructure funding.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Booth', with a stylized, cursive script.

William Booth
Chair, Toronto Public Library Board

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