

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Andrea Elliott, Joe Manget and William B.P. Robson

To: The Citizens and Leaders of Canada's Cities

Date: May 31, 2021

Re: **FIVE IDEAS TO HELP CITIES MAKE THE MOST OF THE RECOVERY**

Toronto, like other major Canadian cities, is creative and resilient. Its underlying economic strength, built on world-leading talent and diverse, innovative local businesses, will enable it to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. That is the good news.

Tackling the uneven impact of the current crisis will take hard work and tough choices. As members of the City of Toronto's Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group, we are committed to building an inclusive economic recovery that gets the economy and our cultural realm back on track, and also remedies the structural inequities that create barriers to prosperity for many of our racialized and economically disadvantaged communities.

Here are five ideas we believe can strengthen current recovery efforts, and pave the way for further positive change.

1. Link safety to productivity. Broad economic recovery requires public confidence. Toronto can take the lead by expanding its collaboration with private sector and government partners to help employers re-open quickly and safely. An example of this approach is the Toronto Region Board of Trade's [Pilot Zone projects](#) in the Financial District, Scarborough Centre and Pearson Employment Area. These have brought area businesses together with city officials and public health experts to establish comprehensive, effective local protocols for safe re-opening. Also needed: a long-term communications strategy focused on restoring public confidence in the safety of commercial and cultural activities.
2. Restoring confidence in public transit. This will require government, transit agencies and employers to collaborate on innovative marketing, communication and incentives. Tactics worth considering include reduced off-peak fares, employee discount programs, and the introduction of staggered working hours. In Toronto's case, the city should also continue to advocate for provincial funding to support the Toronto Transit Commission's efforts to reduce crowding and expand transit capacity.
3. Keep commerce moving with a co-ordinated approach to traffic and public-realm improvements. Initiatives like ActiveTO in Toronto, which reserves selected streets for pedestrians and bicycles, and the curb-lane patio program for restaurants, have provided an important lifeline for both people and small businesses while also making streets more vibrant and welcoming. Cities must collaborate with local businesses to determine if such temporary measures should be made permanent, and ensure that while taking this unique opportunity to enhance the quality of life for residents, traffic keeps moving, supplies are delivered and gridlock is avoided.
4. Expand and enhance existing initiatives to rebuild local tourism. Canada's cities offer a multitude of interesting places to residents as well as visitors. Toronto should continue to work with its partners in the hospitality sector to enrich existing [programs](#), augmenting tangible benefits for businesses, cultural organizations, and residents alike. As travel restrictions loosen, the city can expand campaigns to attract visitors from across the province, country, and eventually, the world.
5. Support retail innovations to promote local resilience and expand opportunities for small businesses. Toronto should build on the success of current COVID recovery initiatives, such as an expanded Digital Main Street and a new [ShopHERE](#) e-business platform to bring small, local enterprises the web-based tools they need to compete in a socially distanced marketplace. Toronto should also intensify its collaboration with private-sector partners by jointly establishing a fund to support business innovation.

The ultimate success of Canadian cities' recovery efforts – measured by a stronger, more equitable economy – depends on many epidemiological and economic factors beyond their individual control. But the economy will re-open as vaccines drive infections down. We are hopeful that by addressing, informing and supporting the city's recovery, our group's recommendations will help Toronto restore its economic and cultural vitality, and inspire similarly successful recoveries and future successes across Canada.

Andrea Elliott is executive vice-president of Moose Knuckles Canada. Joe Manget is chairman and CEO of Edgewood Health Network. William Robson is CEO of the C.D. Howe Institute. All participated in the City of Toronto's Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group in their personal capacities.

To send a comment or leave feedback, email us at blog@cdhowe.org.

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A version of this Memo first appeared in [The Toronto Star](#).