

Media Release

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**New Columbia Institute Report Raises Concerns about Accountability and the Proposed
Canada Infrastructure Bank**

(Vancouver B.C.) Today, Columbia Institute released a new report, *Canada Infrastructure Bank and the Public's Right to Know*, that examines the proposed Bank, and government legislation that restricts public access to information. The report highlights concerns expressed by information commissioners and includes examples of how the Canadian government can do better.

"The federal government is ready to invest \$35 billion in public funding to create a new Infrastructure Bank intended to attract private investors for public projects," observed report author Keith Reynolds. "At the same time, in June, government passed legislation that would reduce the public's access to information about the Bank."

The report found that in recent years, a number of Canada's Information Commissioners have been raising concerns about transparency – particularly when public services and infrastructure projects are delivered by private corporations.

As governments increasingly turn to public-private partnerships for the delivery of services, proprietary information, trade secrets, and competition are cited as rationales for secrecy with these private contractors.

Freedom of Information requests to government are often denied, delayed or redacted. This erodes the transparency and accountability needed for the functioning of a healthy democracy.

"In B.C. we only need to go back a few weeks to find a text book example of why greater government transparency is needed," observed Charley Beresford, Executive Director of Columbia Institute. "It took almost a year for a media outlet to receive information they had requested about potential political involvement in the construction of the Port Mann Bridge – involvement that may have occurred four years earlier and that was made public only after an election."

The report identifies three recommendations to government that would improve transparency in the private delivery of public services.

1. Private entities delivering substantial public functions or services, or receiving substantial government funding to carry out public functions or services, should be subject to access to information legislation.
2. Canadian jurisdictions should adopt a policy of prompt and full proactive disclosure of all procurement records, including preliminary analyses, business case documents, successful and unsuccessful bids, evaluations of bids, and contracts.
3. Canadian jurisdictions should move to a discretionary standard for the release of information that has gone before cabinets or cabinet committees. Information commissioners should be given access to these documents and the ability to rule on whether such documents should be released.

The report notes: "The Canadian government says the CIB will contribute effectively to the everyday life of Canadians. Yet, without increased transparency, Canadians will never know if this is true."