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### *Canada's "New Main Street": The Trans-Canada Highway as Idea and Reality, 1912-1956.* By David W. Monaghan. (Ottawa: Canada Science and technology Museum, 2002, 90 p. ISSN 1188-2964. \$20)

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*Canada's "New Main Street": The Trans-Canada Highway as Idea and Reality, 1912–1956.* By David W. Monaghan. (Ottawa: Canada Science and Technology Museum, 2002. 90 p. ISSN 1188-2964. \$20)

The final report under the Trans-Canada Highway Act, December 10, 1949 to May 31, 1971, issued by the Minister of Public Works in 1972, was a very brief publication that summarized the expenditure, outlined the route and listed the general specifications. Aside from a few paragraphs describing avalanche control in the Glacier National Park section, the report has no quotable phrases or illustrations. Restricted by the constitutional framework of 1867, which allocated roads to the provinces, the federal government has always been curiously reticent about the Trans-Canada Highway, a mid-twentieth-century mega-project.

Building the world's longest national highway, which extended 4,784 miles (7,697 kilometres) in 1971 from coast to coast, finally receives more recognition in this study by David Monaghan. While engineering and economics were clearly significant, the major challenges were always the politics and administration of a shared-cost program. The author provides a framework for appreciating the interplay of lobby groups and governments in the long gestation of an interprovincial highway.

The first two chapters note the limited efforts of the Canada Highways Act (1919) in the 1920s and the unemployment relief legislation in the following decade. By the end of 1942, the major gaps in the

Rocky Mountains and Northern Ontario had been closed and a rudimentary highway across Canada was now in place. Chapter 3 examines the changing federal attitudes towards road building after the war. A Trans-Canada Highway, still regarded as a "rainy day project" by C. D. Howe in August 1948, was quickly moved up the political agenda. Legislation was drafted and passed in the following year and the signing of the provincial agreements in April 1950 launched the project. General standards were developed and the provincial work was to be supervised by a very small and inexperienced federal group that later became part of the Department of Public Works. The federal government optimistically thought that six years and a ceiling of \$100 million would be sufficient for the task of highway building. Selecting the route was an early challenge to the optimism and led to much wrangling and to strong reactions from places such as Edmonton and Halifax, which would be isolated from the new highway. The final chapter describes some of the construction efforts in the early 1950s. By 1955, it was evident that the highway would not be finished according to the original timetable. New legislation in the following year extended the deadline and increased the budget.

Although the Trans-Canada Highway was officially opened at the ceremony at Rogers Pass by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker on September 3, 1962, the road still needed further work, especially on paving. There were further extensions of time and budget to complete the job. By 1971 the federal contribution to the cost of the highway had risen to \$825 million. Over the past three decades many sections of the road have been upgraded, mostly from provincial funds. The Confederation Bridge, linking Prince Edward Island to the mainland and completed in 1997, is one of the later additions to the national highway.

The book is attractively produced in the format now well established by the Transformation series published by the Canada Science and Technology Museum. It is well illustrated with excellent photographs mostly from the National Archives collection. A view of the first milepost of the "Canadian Highway" at Port Alberni, British Columbia in May 1912 (p. 5) evokes the early optimism of a short-lived lobby group. Old legacies from the past are unconsciously displayed in the picture of the Honourable Robert Winters at the signing of the April 1950 provincial agreements (p. 47). The five men at the conference table are overshadowed by a huge wall map clearly labeled "Railways of Canada 1931." Officials elsewhere in Ottawa were no doubt still concerned about the heavy financial obligations incurred during the transcontinental railway boom before World War I.

Within the limitations of length and the awkward time frame that ends in 1956, David Monaghan gives the reader an interesting and

perceptive account of the first phase of highway development from a federal perspective. While most of the study has a political emphasis, the economic implications are noted and some of the contexts of evolving road-building technologies and design principles are also presented. The complex interplay of terrain, traffic patterns, technology, costs, politics, and the finer details of federal supervision of the projects undertaken by provincial highway engineers are only considered in a very abstract way. A regional or sectional case study would have been very beneficial in showing how the processes of route selection and construction of the national highway really worked on the ground.

*Canada's "New Main Street"* shows the potential for much more work on the great road-building efforts of the 1950s and 1960s. There are many facets to be explored and questions to be answered. Why, for example, did Quebec delay its entry into the agreement until October 1960? What were the distinctive engineering achievements resulting from the project? How did the completion of the highway transform the perceptions and possibilities of longer-distance movements by an all-Canadian route? David Monaghan has opened up some new sources, highlighted the value of the National Archives collection, and pointed the way for future studies.

Gerald T. Bloomfield

**Biographical Note:** Dr. Gerald Bloomfield recently retired as professor of geography at the University of Guelph. Throughout his academic life, he has specialized in urban and economic geography, with a particular interest in the development and location of the world automotive industry. See for instance "The world automotive industry in transition," in *Restructuring the Global Automotive Industry: National and Regional Impacts*, ed. C. M. Law (London: Routledge, 1991), 19–60. He also contributed to the *Historical Atlas of Canada*. His continuing research interests focus on the archeology of industry and transport. *Address:* Department of Geography, University of Guelph, Guelph (Ontario) N1G 2W1, Canada.