

# MOVE: Putting America's Infrastructure Back in the Lead

By Mark Abramson

*Move: Putting America's Infrastructure Back in the Lead*, by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, makes an important contribution to the literature on public-private partnerships, known to many of us as PPPs or P3. The book provides dispassionate insights into the national debate over public services through private delivery.

In the past, much of research on public-private relationships has been ideological in nature. Researchers at conservative think tanks have too often heralded public-private partnerships on ideological grounds. Because of its public sector origins, the public administration community has often been somewhat skeptical (often justifiably) about public-private partnerships. The challenge now for researchers is to depoliticize the debate over public-private partnerships and begin to document where public-private partnerships have worked and where they have not.

In *Move*, Kanter sorts out the important distinction between privatization and public-private partnerships. All too often, commentators have equated privatization with public-private partnerships although they are clearly different. The lack of an agreed upon language has hindered the discussion on the use of the private sector in providing (or partnering) to provide public services. Based on her research on real examples, Kanter describes privatization as getting “out” of a public service by finding private owners for public assets and thus raising cash. In contrast, Kanter argues that public-private partnerships have the potential to combine private investors and public funders to tackle projects too large for either to handle alone. As budgets at all levels of government continue to be tight (to say the least), the necessity to find new funds and new funding mechanisms will become even more crucial in the years ahead.

*Move* is focused on the transportation challenges facing the nation. Transportation is also the sector with the most experience in developing public-private partnerships and exploring alternative funding arrangements to support large infrastructure projects. Kanter describes the success of the private sector in providing freight rail services, while the nation's passenger rail service continues to face many problems. *Move* also examines the nation's airlines and highways and the challenges both face. The move to “smart roads” and “smart cities” are also examined.

There are success stories throughout *Move*. One of the success stories is the Port of Miami Tunnel that was a thirty-year effort to develop a tunnel to get trucks off of local roads (which created severe traffic jams) into a tunnel that would move trucks from the port directly onto highways. Kanter describes the thirty-year journey to complete the tunnel that required ongoing negotiations and compromises between local government, state government, national government, and private sector companies. The journey was indeed a difficult one that included a change in private sector partners at a crucial junction in the project. After several stops and starts in construction, the tunnel opened in August 2014.

Based on her analysis of the public transportation sector, Kanter concludes that the public sector clearly needs more “tools” at its disposal to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While focused on transportation, Kanter's conclusion is clearly applicable to other public activities, including social services, housing, and education. In transportation, Kanter concludes that the nation can no longer simply rely on one traditional tool – funding infrastructure through municipal bonds. Thus, the public sector needs to develop and experiment with a variety of new tools that include public-private partnerships. Kanter documents the experience of Chicago and Indiana in their privatization initiatives that ultimately did not work well. Her critique of these privatization initiatives is based on research, not ideology. More such critiques and analysis are clearly needed.

Another tool recommended by Kanter are infrastructure banks that could be created for state and local governments, as well as the national government. Both Asia and Europe have developed strong infrastructure banks. Kanter discusses the creation of a Chicago Infrastructure Trust that could serve as model for other local infrastructure banks. One cannot come away from reading *Move* without concluding that our public sector managers need more tools.

*Move* also describes the clear need for a more effective intergovernmental system in the United States. In looking toward the future, Kanter writes, “A strategic national framework could jump-start action on transportation infrastructure by reducing uncertainty and making the priorities and rules clear, thereby opening the way for innovation.” This national strategic framework, writes Kanter, would be implemented by regional, often metropolitan, planning groups. Thus, more research by the public administration community will be needed to look at how regions are working with state and the national government to put together funding for future infrastructure improvements.

*Move: Putting America's Infrastructure Back in the Lead* is highly recommended for both public administration practitioners and public administration academics. For practitioners, Kanter provides many examples of how practitioners are making “government work” (often in conjunction with the private sector) in the transportation sector which can be replicated in both the transportation public sector and other government sectors. For academics, Kanter provides an excellent example of the type of research that is now needed to better explore new tools for the public and private sector to work together.

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