

URBAN STYLE: THE LOCAL POLITICS OF CABINET

Anthony M. Sayers
Department of Political Science
University of Calgary
asayers@ucalgary.ca

David de Groot
Department of Political Science
University of Calgary
gdade@ucalgary.ca

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INTRODUCTION

In a qualitative analysis of eight federal electoral districts in British Columbia in the 1988 election, Anthony Sayers suggests that the character of riding contests affect “the way in which the candidate is presented to voters” (1999, 109). In particular, the nature of urban ridings transforms local candidates into representatives of regional interests in the national campaign, while at the same time these candidates transmit the national agenda to the local riding.

The central dynamic of this relationship is that the complex character of urban, or more correctly, city, ridings attract high profile candidates, who can successfully respond to their complex social environment. Furthermore, this creates incentives for parties to seek out such candidates, and encourages Prime Ministers to appoint them if they are successful. Specifically, these ridings’ density, professionalism and extensive media coverage, along with their heterogeneous economic and social makeup, encourage political parties to use urban candidates as spokespersons to address the myriad of issues that arise in a national campaign. As such, parties have a vested interest in attracting competent, high profile candidates in such ridings. The populations of these ridings provides for many such potential candidates.

One of the key inducements parties offer such candidates is membership in cabinet, something for which apparently competent MPs should be well suited. Moreover, there is now a presumption that these urban ridings deserve a member of cabinet. As one MP has noted ‘ you have to have a minister from PEI, you have to make sure you have a minister from the big cities... then you have 100 other factors, demography, ethnicity.... (Kam, 2003).

As a result, it has been suggested that urban ridings are disproportionately represented in the parliamentary executive compared with either suburban or rural constituencies (Sayers, 1999). That is:

H1: Urban Members of Parliament, due to the character of urban ridings, are disproportionately represented in cabinet when compared with their non-city counterparts.

In analyzing this proposition, we begin by reprising and amending earlier arguments for differential outcomes in the sorts of candidates that are likely to be successful in urban, suburban and rural ridings.

The analytical section discusses the variables used to distinguish between urban, suburban and rural ridings, and uses data from the past five elections to assess whether there are significant and predictable differences in the nature of campaigns and in the probability that an MP selected at random from each category of riding will be a member of cabinet.

We find predictable differences in the career paths of MPs from urban ridings compared to those from suburban or rural ridings. This buttresses claims that local conditions and effects are critical for understanding the nature of politics, campaigns and elections in Canada. But it also has implications for public policy and other aspects of governance, as it suggests issues and attitudes associated with one or other category of riding may disproportionately influence cabinet deliberations. As well, if cities disproportionately supply MPs for cabinet, they are also likely to be selected as regional ministers.

The debate over the role of regional ministers as powerbrokers in cabinet is central to “the nature of modern cabinets [and] concerns the degree to which the role of regional ministers has declined over the last half century” (Sayers, 2002: 310). According to some

authors, the growth of the administrative state leaves senior ministers with relatively few discretionary powers (Cairns, 1979: 6; Smiley, 1980: 134). However, others argue that ministers have taken advantage of project funding opportunities to etch out a role in directing resources (Bakvis, 1991: 287-289). Both sides agree, however, that the centralization of the federal executive and replacement of regional party organizations with assertive provincial ones has altered the nature of regional representation (Sayers, 2002: 310). There is no longer a role for regional ministers. Against this we suggest that a form of regional minister is still evident in cabinet, but that his/her appointment is subordinate to the selection of city MPs as cabinet members. Because their primary allegiance is to a large, complex city, they will view their role differently from ministers who owe their place in cabinet primarily to their role as a regional powerbroker. It is perhaps the novelty of this new form of regional representation that prevents traditional accounts of cabinet politics from explaining changing patterns of cabinet composition. That is, a sound understanding of local conditions is critical to a comprehensive account of national cabinet politics.

URBAN RIDINGS AND CABINET MINISTERS

The link between urban ridings and cabinet positions has its roots in profound changes that have shaped modern – increasingly urban – societies. In general, when we speak of urban ridings, we are referring to those few, most urban, ridings across the country – city ridings. These ridings tend to have complex political agendas and well developed media that give them a special place in election campaigns and political representation and underpin the link between cities and cabinet.

The complex political agendas found in cities reflect the importance of associational relationships and the heterogeneous character of urban ridings. Urbanization is accompanied by a move from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesselschaft*; that is, from a society based on communal attachments to one derived from associational relationships. As such, urbanization is more than a shift from less populous to more regions. Rather, in the process of urbanization, recent migrants seek to establish new associational links, in order to compensate for the loss of the communal links that fundamentally represent country ridings. Critical to the importance of associational relationships is the notion of transience: these relationships help mobile individuals meet their psychological need for community (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974, 328-9; Sayers 1999, 110).

In addition, city ridings tend to be socially heterogeneous; ethnically diverse, home to many whose first language is not the dominant one and encompassing very different levels of economic well being as well as lifestyles. Together, heterogeneity and associational politics encourage group-based politics that underpins a complex political agenda. Successful brokering of these diverse interests requires a competent, and perhaps more professional candidate or MP than is necessary in less heterogeneous ridings.

As a result of transience and heterogeneity, many city voters do not share a common history in the riding. Their understanding of elections and campaigning, and even the nature of their local political community, is as likely to come from the media as it is to be informed by local tradition. In an increasingly group oriented political culture, city voters are likely to identify with one or more of the groups that are involved in debating public policy rather than with a traditional, geographically defined local community.

The presence of a well-developed media industry in city ridings helps give form to this political agenda and makes it regionally dominant. The location of major media outlets in and around cities reflects the commercial and social significance of cities and their central historical role in the life of a metropolitan region. They are the point from which the rest of the metropolis spreads.

As well, the high population densities of cities tends to attract not only large media outlets, but also a range of smaller organizations - for instance, ethnic and lifestyle publications - that help sustain a complex local political environment. Moreover, the media play an important role in the maintenance of the associational relationships that relatively transient city populations rely upon.

Taken together, complex local agendas and good media coverage have special appeal for political parties. Complex local agendas and the network of groups that sustain them provide parties with a means of understanding a range of political interests and communicating with the groups that promote them. This might be done directly – by meeting with leaders of say business groups or environmental organizations headquartered in the city – or indirectly via the media.

Local campaigns in these ridings must address these many issues, and candidates must be familiar with a range of matters and policy, often acting as spokespeople for their party. Many of the groups that have members in city ridings, and may have regional headquarters there, have members spread across the country. They see elections as an opportunity to have their concerns canvassed, and often use the media in cities to raise issues.

Positive media coverage is a golden resource for any party, particularly at election time. Because media coverage – metropolitan, provincial and national – is based in major urban centres, there is a significant multiplier effect attached to the way in which a party is seen to be managing relations with major social and economic organizations in cities.

For example, media reports of good relations between a party and major business organization housed in downtown Toronto will play well with pro-business voters not only in that metropolitan region, but provincially and even nationally. This is particularly true during elections, when national news organizations are working feverishly to provide daily coverage of the election; stories close to the urban headquarters of media organizations are much cheaper and easier to bring to air or print, and are often read across the region or country.

The question for party strategists is how best to make use of the opportunities offered by city ridings. Their preference is for a candidate who can make the most of the available media coverage to help the party's broader campaign. This suggests a candidate comfortable in dealing with the media and who is also able to confidently articulate the party's position even when confronted with a complex local agenda. Clearly individuals with some experience of public life – high profile candidates – will be well suited to these challenges.

This is reinforced by both the demands made of candidates in urban ridings and through this, the perceptions of city voters. Because the political agenda in these ridings is complex, candidates must be adept at dealing with diverse issues and circumstances. City voters get to judge their candidates in this often-intense environment. That is,

constant media attention, complex local, regional and national issues, and demands from a diverse group of groups place heavy demands on city candidates.

These pressures are likely to remain, even between elections. The density of social and political organizations in city ridings provides a convenient means for political parties and governments to sustain their connections with civil society. Executive dominated Canadian governments rely heavily on such connections to provide them with critical information on the mood of the wider society, and in return, use these connections to help manage the relationship between government and society (Pal, 1993). As well, media looking to make sense of a wide range of issues are likely to seek out nearby city MPs. If they are competent media performers, this becomes a reinforcing cycle – the media seeking out high profile MPs, and parties providing such MPs for city ridings.

Political parties know that city riding MPs will play a key role in both their election and inter-election activities. If political parties and governments are to make the most of the opportunities provided by city ridings – media coverage, access to a complex political environment – then it makes sense to aim to provide high profile candidates and MPs to these ridings. For the government, this means there are strong incentives to ensure high profile competent MPs - just those who are likely to make it into cabinet – represent these ridings. For their part, city voters will come to expect regular representation in the cabinet. That is we should find disproportionate numbers of city MPs in cabinet.

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected for the last five Canadian federal elections: 1984, 1988, 1993, 1997 and 2000. This date range has been selected for two primary reasons. First, the inclusion of both Liberal and Conservative majorities allows us to test whether the relationship holds regardless of party affiliation. Second, the inclusion of the 1984 election is important because it allows us to test the relationship in a government that had strong representation across all regions of Canada. Federal elections since 1993 have been marked by regionally concentrated partisan representation, which may limit the ability of the governing party to effectively represent various major cities (e.g. Calgary under Liberal majorities). The 1984 election avoids this difficulty.

To operationalize city ridings this study relies on economic, social and geographic indicators provided by Statistics Canada, Elections Canada and Eagles et al. When using Statistics and Elections Canada data, the most recent census has been applied to the most recent representation order at the time of the election, which ensures that riding characteristics are as accurate an indication of the riding's characteristics at the time of the election, as is possible. However, in several cases this involves applying censuses to more recent representation orders than would otherwise have been applied at the time of the census. Table 1 outlines the data source for each election year along with which representation order and which census was applied in each case.

Table 1: Source Data

Election Year	Representation Order	Census^α
1984	1976	1981
1988 ^β	1987	1987
1993	1987	1991
1997	1996	1996
2000	1996	2001

^α Census data has been collected from Statistics Canada; physical characteristic data, such as area, has been collected through Elections Canada

^β Data for the 1988 election is different than the other elections due to a lack of readily available data at Statistics Canada. Data for this election has been drawn from Munroe Eagles et al., *The Almanac of Canadian Politics* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1991).

Defining city ridings is difficult because conventional definitions of urban areas are too expansive. For example, Statistics Canada defines “urban” as an “area with a population of at least 1,000 and no fewer than 400 persons per square kilometre”. (Statistics Canada, 2001a). However, according to this definition 78% of Canadians live in urban areas. (Statistics Canada, 2001b, 9). Moreover, this definition fails to adequately capture the nature of the entire riding. Rather, it captures the nature of individual areas within each riding. As a result, more accurate indicators are needed in order to determine those ridings that have true city characteristics. For our purposes eight indicators are used to operationalize city ridings. While many mirror the urban characteristics discussed above, several indicators are variables outlined by social geographers as being correlated with city centres:

Density. There are two limitations to using density as an indicator of urban ridings. First, density does not provide an understanding of the shift from *Gemeinshcaft* to *Gesellshcaft*. Second, researchers have noted, “the most immediate physical characteristic of Canadian cities is their low density and extensive development pattern” (Thraves, 1991, 271). However, despite these limitations density is a linear variable which is associated with

urban centres. Furthermore, given its simplicity, density provides a strong initial indicator.

Private Dwellings. Kasarda and Janowitz suggest that transience is the primary characteristic of urban centres (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974, 328-9). Similarly, Anthony Sayers comments on the mobility of urban citizens when he states, “these ridings often have substantial numbers of voters living in high rise apartments” (Sayers, 1999, 115). As such, analyzing the percent of the population that rents housing, and the percent who have moved since the last census provide strong indicators of transience. Analysis of the value of private dwellings is also beneficial as other research suggests that Canadian urban centres can be distinguished “in terms of land values and bid rents” (Collins, 1991, 156). In general, due to higher surrounding commercial prices, residential home prices in city centres are higher than surrounding areas.

Immigrants. City centres “tend to be occupied by more recent immigrant groups” than either sub-urban or rural centres (Collins, 1991, 163). For example, in the 1990s Citizenship and Immigration Canada reported that 94% of immigrants settled in urban areas. Moreover, 80% settled in the census metropolitan areas of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2001).

Ethnic Heterogeneity. One result of increased immigration patterns to urban centres has been “to create very different ethnic profiles in metropolitan centres, ensuring that there are considerable ethnic variations in the social balance of these centres” (Davies, 1993, 112). Sayers also notes this variation stating that country ridings are “in general socially

homogenous” (Sayers, 1999, 112). This study uses the Herfindahl index¹ to calculate ethnic heterogeneity/homogeneity.

Occupation. Davies has argued that, since World War II, occupation structures of urban centres are characterized by *economic convergence* rather than *differentiation*. This convergence is towards the specialization of service/corporate based occupations (Davies, 1993, 110). This would suggest an increase in the proportion of individuals involved in managerial/financial/administrative occupations. However, given that many country ridings require managerial staff to run primary sector industries, there is little difference in the percentage of managerial staff in country ridings. However, due to this primary production, country ridings are characterized by high primary sector employment, the occupation measure employed by this study.

Education. Education varies across ridings, with each type of riding demonstrating unique patterns. Country ridings are likely to have lower levels of post-secondary education (Sayers, 1999, 112). Whereas suburban and city ridings are likely to have higher education levels, though in many cases coupled with an increased number of drop-outs (Sayers, 1999, 116). This study uses the percent of individuals with high education as one education indicator of city ridings.

¹ The Herfindahl index calculates an Ethnic Diversity Index, as defined by:

$$EDI = \sum_{i=1}^n (E_i)^2$$

Where E_i is ethnic group i 's proportion of the total population in the district and $n = \dots$ ethnic groups. If all \dots ethnic groups are of equal size in a riding then the EDI would be equal to $.10$. Ridings dominated by one ethnic groups will be associated with EDI measures approximating 1. Description based on Munroe Eagles et al, *The Almanac of Canadian Politics* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Age. Not discussed in the previous analysis by Sayers, urban geographers have noted that “the elderly are usually over-concentrated in core areas or older suburban locations” (Thraves, 1991, 273).

Using the variables listed above this study creates an index of urban-ness which is then correlated with whether a candidate received a cabinet position. However, due to differences in questions by Statistics Canada, not every variable is available in each election year. Table 2 states which variables have been included in each election’s urban index.

Table 2: Riding Variables by Election Year

Variable	Election Years				
	2000	1997	1993	1988	1984
<i>Geographic Descriptor</i>					
Riding Density	√	√	√	√	√
Residential Land Value	√	√	√	√	
<i>Social Descriptors</i>					
Proportion Immigrants	√	√	√	√	√
Proportion Minorities	√	√			
Ethnic Homogeneity	√	√			
Proportion High Education	√	√	√	√	√
Proportion Elderly	√	√	√	√	√
Proportion Transience					
<i>Movers</i>		√	√	√	
<i>Renter</i>	√	√	√	√	√
<i>Economic Descriptors²</i>					
Proportion Business					
<i>Industry Classification</i>		√	√	√	√
<i>Occupation Classification</i>	√	√			
Proportion Primary Sector					
<i>Industry Classification</i>		√	√	√	√
<i>Occupation Classification</i>	√	√			
Cronbach’s Alpha	.892	.890	.851	.839	.806

² In 1997 Statistics Canada used both occupation and industry to measure primary, secondary and tertiary employment. As a result for this year the two variables have been averaged to avoid duplication.

Table 2 also illustrates that the inter-reliability of the variables used is quite high, suggesting that the variables create an accurate account of city ridings. This is further confirmed in Appendix A which lists the top ten urban ridings in each election using the above criteria. As the appendix illustrates each of these top ten ridings are in major cities such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. These “top ten” ridings will be used in future categorical analyses of riding-candidate relations.

DISCUSSION

As a preliminary examination of this relationship Table 3 uses aggregate data from the 2000 election to examine whether the ridings from which cabinet ministers are drawn are indeed more urban than those of backbenchers. As these are population rather than sample data, significance is not strictly relevant. However, it is worth noting that density, elderly, transience and ethnic makeup are distinctive enough to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3: 2000 Riding Characteristics by MP Status

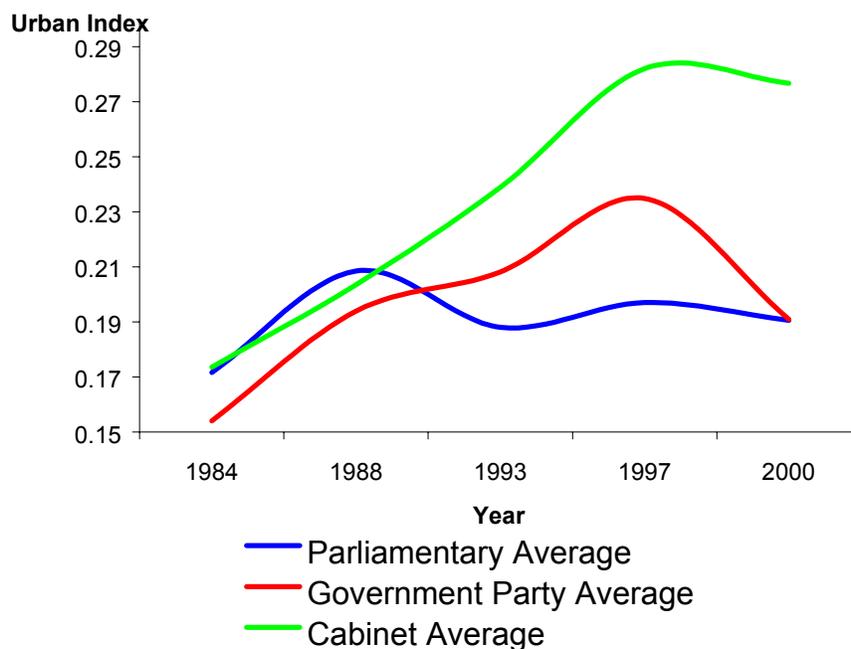
	Backbench MPs	Cabinet MPs
<i>Geographic Descriptors</i>		
Land Value	\$171,111.37	\$186,681.35
Density	1342.60	2650.74
<i>Social Descriptors</i>		
Elderly	11.87%	13.37%
Transience	32.35%	43.81%
Immigrants	19.58%	26.91%
University Education	18.22%	21.52%
Minorities	13.88%	19.74%
Ethnic Homogeneity	.7870	.6863
<i>Economic Descriptors</i>		
Primary Sector Employment	3.76%	2.63%
Business Sector Employment	27.01%	29.25%

The table confirms that the ridings from which cabinet ministers are drawn display characteristics consistent with our definition of urbaness. This relationship also holds for

the 1984, 1988, 1993 and 1997 elections. All the factors relate in the predicted manner – for example, ridings represented by ministers are more ethnically and socially diverse and more densely populated than of backbench MPs.

Having found some evidence of the predicted relationship we generated an index of urbaness for each of the elections using the variables included in Table 3 that were available for all five elections. These are transience, proportion of immigrants, proportion of individuals with university degrees/certificates, and density. As our measures are designed to distinguish differences in the degree of urbaness across ridings, there is little evidence of the increasingly urban nature of Canadian society.

Figure One: Urban Representation in Parliament over Time

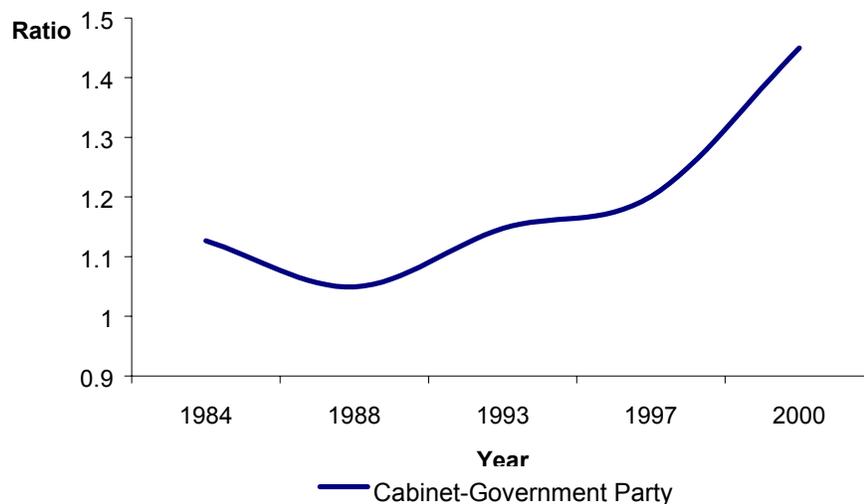


The use of various sources to generate the measures for each election has no doubt introduced some artifactual variability. That being said, the fact that the trend line for the Canadian average is flat suggests we have a reasonable set of measures for addressing this issue; that is, as a relative measure, it about cancels out over time.

Figure One indicates that cabinet is more urban than the governing party caucus. However, there are some fascinating differences between the parties. During the Tory governments of 1984 and 1988 the government party average is lower than the parliamentary average, indicating the non-urban character of these governments. The fact that since 1993 the governing party average is above that for the parliament indicates the urban nature of the Liberal party. Even in opposition, it remained more urban than the Tory governing party. This pattern is reflected in the measure for cabinet, which becomes much more urban after 1993. The gap between the governing party and the parliamentary average also widens, suggesting the Alliance opposition post 1993 was profoundly non-urban.

Despite differences in partisan makeup, the relationship between cabinet ministers and urban factors remains. Indeed, Figure Two illustrates that cabinet is increasingly more urban than its party caucus.

Figure Two: Ratio of Cabinet Urban Index to Government Party Urban Index



One final indication of the increasingly urban character of cabinet can be seen in comparing the likelihood of being appointed to a cabinet position as an MP from the ten

most urban ridings versus that of all other ridings. As Table Four indicates the probability of being selected for a cabinet position from these ridings typically ranges from 20 to 40%. Whereas all other MPs only have a 10-12% likelihood of being promoted to cabinet. The relationship is even more striking when controlling for whether the governing party is actually able to appoint people from these ridings. For example, in 1984, the Tories elected members to four of the ten ridings, and yet of these ridings three were selected for Cabinet positions.

Table 4: Cabinet Representation of Top Ten City Ridings v. Remaining Ridings

	All Ridings		Government Ridings	
	Non-City	City	Non-City	City
2000	11%	30%	19.9%	30%
1997	10.7%	40%	21.5%	40%
1993	10.2%	0%	17.3%	0%
1988	12.3%	20%	21.2%	40%
1984	12.5%	30%	16.3%	75%

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that MPs from city ridings are more likely to find their way into cabinet than their non-city counterparts. This reinforces earlier research that argues that the character of riding politics has far-reaching implications for candidate types and governance in general (Sayers, 1999). For instance, a disproportionately urban cabinet may more readily engage with the concerns of city folk. That is, against the recent trend to bemoan the influence of cities on policymaking, urban concerns may be receiving the attention due them. Overrepresentation of rural Canada in the federal parliament may be less important to political outcomes than the degree of urban representation in cabinet. Consideration of the impact of urban, suburban and rural concerns on policymaking

should take account of the representation of these interests within the various branches of government.

This study also suggests that to the degree cabinet membership is important to career advancement, ambitious candidates or MPs are likely to seek out urban ridings. Tony Valeri's behaviour in Hamilton may be one recent example of this dynamic. As well, instances of leaders parachuting candidates into ridings in the hope of shaping the membership of cabinet are likely to be found disproportionately in urban ridings. Glenn Murray in Winnipeg and Bev Longstaff in Calgary are examples of this phenomenon.

Finally, close examination of the role of local politics in cabinet formation may provide a distinctive take on recent theorizing regarding the role of regional ministers. To the degree that an urban dynamic has replaced the traditional regional calculus in the formation of cabinet, we should expect to see a decline in the salience of models that rely on the former to explain cabinet membership. If prime ministers are using city ministers as regional powerbrokers, their choices may be constrained in new ways. Moreover, such ministers are likely to see their tasks – both in terms of representing the government to the region and the interests of the region to the government – in a manner distinctive from those of previous eras who were appointed directly on the strength of their regional connections.

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Appendix A: Ten Most Urban Ridings for Each Election Year

2000	1997	1993	1988	1984
Don Valley East	Don Valley East	Davenport	Don Valley West	Laurier
Don Valley West	Outremont	Don Valley West	Mont Royal	Outremont
Scarborough Agincourt	Papineau – Saint Denis	Outremont	Outremont	Parkdale – High Park
St. Paul’s	Scarborough Agincourt	Parkdale – High Park	Parkdale – High Park	Toronto – Rosedale
Toronto – Rosedale	St. Paul’s	Toronto - Rosedale	Toronto - Rosedale	Saint Denis
Trinity Spadina	Toronto – Rosedale	Rosemont	Saint Denis	Saint Henri – Westmount
Vancouver Kingsway	Trinity Spadina	Saint-Henri Westmount	Saint Henri-Westmount	Spadina
Vancouver Quadra	Vancouver Kingsway	St. Paul’s	St. Paul’s	St. Paul’s
Westmount Ville-Marie	Vancouver Quadra	Trinity Spadina	Trinity Spadina	Trinity
Willowdale	Westmount Ville-Marie	Vancouver Centre	Vancouver Centre	Vancouver Centre