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## **Institutions and Regionalisms: Constructing Metropolitan Space in Toronto**

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**Abstract:** The search for effective metropolitan or regional governance arrangements is an enduring theme in North American urban politics and public administration. While earlier postwar literature sought to specify ideal institutional frameworks, scholars have more recently turned their attention to the institutional and social dynamics of contemporary efforts at intraregional collaboration for various purposes, including economic development and promotion, social integration, and land use planning. By treating metropolitan regions as *a priori* territorial units and focusing on the contemporary period, however, the literature has diverted attention from the historical processes through which metropolitan political spaces have been constructed.

This paper advances four propositions to guide historical institutionalist and constructivist research on the process of political metropolitanization: (1) The spatial definition of a metropolitan region is not an *a priori* fact. Due to the unbounded nature of urbanization processes, it is produced, reproduced, and modified through political contestation. (2) How actors perceive policy problems shapes the choice of territorial scale at which to seek their solution. (3) These processes are conditioned (but not determined) by combinations of contextual factors which change over time: the natural and built environment, social and economic structures, and ideas. (4) How problems and their solutions are defined and “scaled” shapes subsequent actions in the same and potentially other policy domains.

Through an examination of metropolitan problem-solving in Toronto since 1924, the paper concludes that while the discourses mobilized around metropolitan problem-solving have changed, the fundamental problems associated with political and economic growth and the menu of potential solutions have changed little over time; that metropolitan institution-building and policymaking processes in Toronto cannot simply be “read off” of an account of macrostructural transformation; and that the coexistence of multiple historically constructed spatial definitions of the region calls into question the use of one-size-fits-all templates in regional research.

## **Institutions and Regionalisms: Constructing Metropolitan Space in Toronto**

Zack Taylor

Metropolitan regions are back. After decades of relative neglect, scholars, policymakers and planners, and policy entrepreneurs have rediscovered the metropolitan scale as an object of analysis and policy. Metropolitan regions (or *city-regions*<sup>1</sup>) are today variously seen by political geographers, economists, and sociologists as competitive “platforms” or “command posts” in a post-national globalized economy (Courchene 2006; Friedmann and Wolff 1982; Sassen 2000); by political economists and economic geographers as engines of knowledge creation and technological innovation (Scott and Storper 2003; Wolfe and Gertler 2001); by political scientists as appropriate spatial units for income redistribution (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom 2001; Orfield 1997; Rusk 1993); and by planners as effective territories for the comprehensive management of built and natural environments (Calthorpe and Fulton 2001).

This paper’s point of departure is the observation that much of the contemporary literature focuses on the present at the expense of the long-run historical development of institutional, social, economic, and physical structures at the metropolitan scale. The goals of this paper are, first, to explore and explain this emphasis on the contemporary period and to discuss its implications. Second, using Toronto as an example, this paper argues for sustained examination of the historical processes by which metropolitan regions are constructed by actors to achieve particular ends. As Harrison (2010: 18) argues:

Defined in economic terms ... all too often what is missing is how city-regions are constructed politically .... What is missing is due consideration of the political-economic struggle to spatially define, delimit and designate city-regions. Here city-regions are all too often scripted unreflectively, with little regard for how they have been historically constructed, culturally contested and politically charged.

Such an approach, which views the evolution of regionalism over time as a path-dependent iterative problem-solving process, has several conceptual and methodological benefits. Methodologically, it recognizes that the territorial boundaries of metropolitan regions are “fuzzy” and ever-changing through the process of urbanization. By focusing on historical development, it directs attention away from conceiving of metropolitan regions in abstract terms and toward study of actually instantiated regions. Conceptually, it acknowledges that “political metropolitanization” is a path-dependent process of social learning in which past events shape the subsequent choices by establishing the range of available options and their costs and benefits. This tempers the economism of globalization literature by emphasizing agency, albeit within constraints imposed by structural and institutional contexts. It also provokes careful evaluation of the claim that the contemporary relevance of the metropolitan region stems from recent macrostructural economic changes and therefore is fundamentally distinct from past events and processes.

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<sup>1</sup> These terms are flexible in their definitions. Echoing planning historian Robert Fishman’s (2000) distinction between “regionalism” and “metropolitanism,” “city-region” is sometimes used to refer to an urban core linked to a territorially extensive hinterland, while “metropolitan region” is most often used to refer to a more tightly defined area: the core urban agglomeration and associated fringe areas. See for example Barlow (1997) and Parr (2005).

## **‘Presentism,’ regionalism, and regional studies**

To begin, it is important to distinguish between *regional studies*, defined here as analyses that take the metropolitan region as their spatial focus, and *regionalism*, defined here as a region-scaled policy program designed to resolve perceived region-scaled problems. This is important because the “presentism” of contemporary regional studies stems in no small part from its close identification with particular policy prescriptions. For example, the study of how existing regional innovation systems work easily shades into the development of prescriptions for how to create new ones. Studies of the geopolitical processes by which a hierarchy of competing “global cities” or “world cities” have emerged and function have been converted by local policy entrepreneurs in second- or third-tier cities into a new discourse of boosterism, which has in turn been assailed by neo-Marxist critics as evidence of neoliberal globalization.

Similarly, the identification of increasing spatial concentration of economically and socially disadvantaged populations within metropolitan regions is closely related to policy proposals for their alleviation. So-called “new regionalists” have argued for “thin” collaborative relationships among public and private actors within metropolitan areas in order to reduce destructive competition and increase social equity (Rusk 1993; Savitch et al. 1993; Swanstrom 2001). In doing so, they have staked out a position distinct from both adherents of public choice, who argue that competition among multiple jurisdictions provides better aggregate utility for residents (Tiebout 1956), and the “old regionalists” who argued for “thick,” general-purpose metropolitan governments (Sharpe 1995).

There is of course nothing new about the connection between different forms of regional studies and various regionalisms. Going back a century, the intellectual history of regional studies shows a consistent give-and-take between theory and practice. In the first half of the twentieth century, observers of urbanization and technological change ranging from social reformers Ebenezer Howard and Lewis Mumford to architect-planners Clarence Stein and Le Corbusier to social scientist Charles Merriam all proposed regional policies designed to cure the industrial city’s ills, not least congestion and crowding, failures of public health, and moral degradation. It is fair to say that in the Depression and postwar periods, academic engagement with questions of metropolitan growth and governance was firmly embedded in the pragmatic quest for policy solutions to immediate problems. For President Roosevelt’s National Resource Planning Board (see Scott 1971: ch. 5), which developed a distinctly regional vision of policymaking for urbanization, and, later, the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR 1961, 1977), scholars of planning and public administration laboured to develop coherent programs for the management of metropolitan conurbations. Especially in the postwar period, the signature problem of the North American metropolitan area was understood as the generation of negative externalities associated with the growing mismatch between municipal boundaries and the functional extent of the region. The goal of policies was to internalize these externalities through institutional reforms and policymaking at the scale of the metropolitan region.

The contemporary regional studies literature’s focus on the present has another source: an interpretation of globalization and urbanization processes that emphasizes a temporally specific transformation of the structure of the international economy, with profound consequences for social and economic relations. This bundle of ideas, largely emanating from neo-Marxist political economy and geography, has several components. First, there is the observation that, especially since the beginning of the 1970s, urbanization was becoming more intensive and extensive — that is, that the growth of metropolitan areas was accelerating relative to other

locations in the space-economy leading to increasingly uneven development, and that urban-focused networks of production, consumption, and trade were multiplying and reaching over greater distances than ever before (Rodríguez-Pose 2008; Scott 2001). Second, the cause of these changes is attributed to a series of interrelated macrostructural transformations: from industrial Fordism to a post-Fordist service economy, from domestic Keynesianism to a global export-led economy, from materialist to post-materialist values, from modernism to postmodernism, and from a collectivist to an individualist state ideology. The latter is seen as especially pernicious by those who see the rise of city-region discourse as evidence of neoliberal restructuring of social and economic relations (Boudreau, Keil, and Young 2009; Harding 2007; Jonas and Ward 2007). Contemporary regional studies' focus on the present is understandable in the context of this presumption of an epochal divide between past and present.

How justified is this focus on the “now”? Is something lost by doing so? Can a more thoroughgoing analysis of the past help sharpen study of the present? What do contemporary regionalisms have in common with those in the past? To begin to answer these questions, it is first necessary to sketch out some of the implications of this focus on the present.

Most generally, there is a tendency in “snapshot” (i.e. synchronic) research to ignore the spatially elastic nature of urbanization. Static national census definitions of metropolitan areas, which are defined in terms of density thresholds, commuting relationships, and political boundaries, are often taken for granted in research methodologies (Beaverstock, Taylor, and Smith 1999; BOT 2010; Brookings 2010; OECD 2006; Spencer et al. 2009). However, the physical growth of cities and the extension and proliferation of their social and economic relationships over time suggests the need for a dynamic understanding of how the metropolitan scale is defined and how it changes. More specifically, it risks underplaying the degree to which past metropolitan institution-building and policymaking influence contemporary political processes. A long view also enables evaluation of how “new times” may differ from the past.

### **Historical institutionalism and the city**

This survey of implications points to the benefits of a historical institutionalist approach. Emerging out of institutional economics and political sociology, historical institutionalism situates “politics in time” by highlighting the effects of timing and sequence (Pierson 2000, 2004). At the same time, it works from the premise that institutions, whether construed as bricks-and-mortar organizations or social conventions, are path-dependent and independently pattern state-society and economic relations (North 1990; Pierson and Skocpol 2002; Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992). Earlier “punctuated equilibrium” models (Krasner 1984), which assumed that systems are naturally equilibrium-seeking and that periods of stability give way to crisis only when an exogenous shock intrudes, have been challenged by attention to modes of gradual yet transformative sources of change endogenous to institutions (Streeck and Thelen 2005), as well as to cumulative causes and long-run effects (Pierson 2004). The various strands of historical institutionalist analysis emerged from and continue to be applied almost exclusively at the national scale and tend to focus on the development of the welfare state and labour market regulation (Hacker 1998; Thelen 2004). However, there are signs that these concepts are readily applicable to subnational and urban dynamics, especially in the subfield of American Political Development (Dilworth 2009).

Application of this approach to urban processes demands an important modification: the operationalization of *scale* as a variable. As federalism scholars have long recognized, relationships between national and constitutionally entrenched subnational state entities are

important drivers of policy change. Different political and institutional logics can exist at each state scale, leading to creativity, conflict, or mutual adjustment of positions. The friction between dynamics operating at different scales opens windows of contingency during which paths can be reinforced or disrupted. The local or urban scale adds a new source of complexity, as municipalities and special purpose bodies are legally constituted by subnational governments. Not only are local governments institutions in their own right, subject to endogenous institutional dynamics, they also constitute policy choices by provinces or states. This calls for a more subtle reading of the permeability of nested and interdependent state containers, as well as the interplay of agency and structure (Swyngedouw 1997; Wood 2005).

### **Regionalisms as episodes of path-dependent iterative problem-solving**

The metropolitan scale of action should be understood as a contingent social and political construction. To form the basis of a policy or institution, political actors must agree on a common conception of metropolitan space and endow it with meaning and purpose. The high costs of creating a new scale and of reproducing it through time distinguishes metropolitan-level from institution-building and policymaking at the national or provincial levels, where the spatial framework of governance is established and highly durable by virtue of constitutional entrenchment. At the same time, the act of constructing metropolitan political space is distinct from action at the municipal scale because the metropolitan scale has little claim on local affections. The velocity of modern urbanization and the consequent territorial extensiveness and elasticity of the extended metropolis undermines the ability of regionalist programs to engender broad popular support. Simply put, localism (construed as membership in a tangible and meaningful community or the political consequence of the owner's interest in his or her property) exerts a more powerful force than regionalism, which is at best seen as an abstraction and at worst seen as a threat to local interests. The construction of metropolitan institutions and policies therefore tend to be driven by elites for technocratic reasons, rather than emerging out of some kind of mass sentiment. This of course has political consequences. Regardless of how metropolitan institutions or policies are created, their legitimacy is forever subject to challenge because they have no natural constituency to champion them.

New institutions and policies produce feedback (positive or negative) that influences subsequent action. In this way, every solution paves the way for new problems in the future. This is especially acute in the urban domain given the territorially elastic process of urbanization, which necessitates periodic revisiting not only of the policy content of regionalist programs, but also of the territorial definition of the metropolitan region itself. Considered over the long term, regionalism can be viewed as a process of iterative problem-solving that is bounded by what actors think is possible, which is in turn shaped by actors' awareness of ideas and models and past experiences, the balance of interests among them, and the availability of symbolic and material resources.

Flowing from this discussion, the review of Toronto is guided by four propositions. First, the spatial definition of a metropolitan region is not an *a priori* fact. Due to the unbounded nature of urbanization processes, it is produced, reproduced, and modified through political contestation. Second, how actors perceive policy problems shapes the choice of territorial scale at which to seek their solution. Third, these processes are conditioned by combinations of contextual factors which change over time: the natural and built environment, social and economic structures, and ideas. Fourth, how problems and their solutions are defined and "scaled" shapes subsequent actions in the same and potentially other policy domains. The focus

of the review of the Toronto story is on how relevant actors defined the problem to be solved and at what territorial scale, what possible solutions were identified, and which was chosen and why.

### **The Toronto story, 1924–2010**

Outside scholarship on the governance of the Toronto metropolitan region has emphasized the successes of Metro Toronto, established in 1954. Indeed, Metro continues to be lionized long after the end of its golden age in the 1950s and 1960s and, indeed, its dissolution in 1997.<sup>2</sup> This rosy image of Metro has an air of inevitability about it. A closer reading of history shows that Toronto's episodes of metropolitan construction were contingent. In each, there were a number of viable options on the table, only one of which was chosen. What follows is a narrative summary of particular episodes of metropolitan institution-building and policymaking for the Toronto metropolitan region. The story begins with a descriptive spatial analysis of population growth in relation to jurisdictional boundaries to identify periods of policy stress when efforts to develop metropolitan policies and institutions are expected to arise. This is followed by a summary of the debate in each episode over the definition of the metropolitan problem and the choice of solution. In the description, emphasis is placed on events that are less well known or events that are underplayed in the literature.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Periods of institutional and policy stress*

**Figure 1** maps county and regional municipality boundaries, and divides the greater region into four zones: the former (pre-1998) City of Toronto, Metro Toronto (now the City of Toronto; prior to 1954, this area was part of York County), the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and what is now called the Greater Golden Horseshoe.<sup>4</sup> Also shown is the area supervised by the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board (MTPB) between 1954 and 1971. **Figure 2** graphs the decennial census populations of each zone between 1901 and 1951. The GTA, Metro, and City of Toronto areas tracked each other very closely through to about 1911, indicating that most of the population of Toronto's metropolitan area was contained within the City of Toronto and its immediate fringe. The City undertook its last major annexation of adjacent territory in 1912 (Lemon 1985: 33–35) and almost immediately lost control over fringe growth. From the mid-1920s, the outer townships of what became Metro grew while the City's population leveled off. (The outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe, at this point functionally disconnected from Toronto's orbit, experienced very little population growth, and will only be discussed later on.) As the City ceased to annex, York and Etobicoke townships were subdivided by a series of town and village incorporations: Mimico in 1911, New Toronto and Leaside in 1913, North York in 1922, Forest Hill in 1923, East York in 1924, Swansea in 1926 and Long Branch in 1930. The outer area of what would become Metro — Etobicoke, York, and Scarborough Townships and the towns and villages embedded within them — doubled in population in the 1920s, from 88,000 to 190,000, grew a bit more slowly in the 1930s, but almost doubled again in the 1940s,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the latest edition of Strom and Mollenkopf's *Urban Politics Reader* (2007), which speaks of Metro in the present tense.

<sup>3</sup> The only contemporary book-length account of Toronto's metropolitan growth and change is Frisken (2008). This section is informed by her overview, as well as White's (2007) synopsis of the region's planning history.

<sup>4</sup> To avoid confusion, this paper uses contemporary names for county and regional municipality units. Periods of municipal restructuring in the 1960s–70s and again in the 1990s led to the division, consolidation, and renaming of a number of these units.

to 440,000 in 1951. The City's share of the total Metro area population dropped from over 90% in 1911 to 75% in 1931, and to 60% in 1951.

The two decades after the creation of Metro in 1953 were a time of explosive growth (see **Figure 3**). Metro took in the majority of GTA growth in this period, but after 1961 growth accelerated in surrounding the counties. Metro accounted for 80% of GTA growth between 1951 and 1961 but only 50% between 1961 and 1971. It was at this point that Metro ceased to be an effective regional government. Between 1971 and 2001, Metro's population leveled off while the rest of the GTA's rapidly expanded. At the same time, Hamilton and the Outer Ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe became increasingly pulled into Toronto's orbit.

On the basis of this sketch, four periods of growth-related policy stress and corresponding efforts to alleviate them are expected:

- the mid-1920s, after the City ceased annexation and suburban incorporations proliferated;
- the 1930s and 1940s, when the City's share of Metro area growth began to decline;
- the 1960s, when Metro's share of GTA growth first began to decline; and
- the post-recession 1980s, when growth in the GTA outside Metro accelerated.

As the following review illustrates, these expectations are borne out.

### *Episode 1, 1924: The end of annexation*

As mentioned, the early 1920s saw the incorporation of several new municipalities on Toronto's fringe. In some cases, including North York, this represented a defensive strategy to prevent eventual absorption into the City. Had they not been discouraged by the Ontario Railway and Municipal Board, other well-to-do suburban neighbourhoods in York Township such as Baby Point, Kingsway, Cedarvale, would have followed the example of Forest Hill and Swansea and incorporated as independent municipalities **(find cite)**. Even as the City lost its appetite to take on the costs of annexation, Scarborough, York, and East York obtained private legislation to prohibit annexation without a vote of township residents, who would surely turn it down.<sup>5</sup>

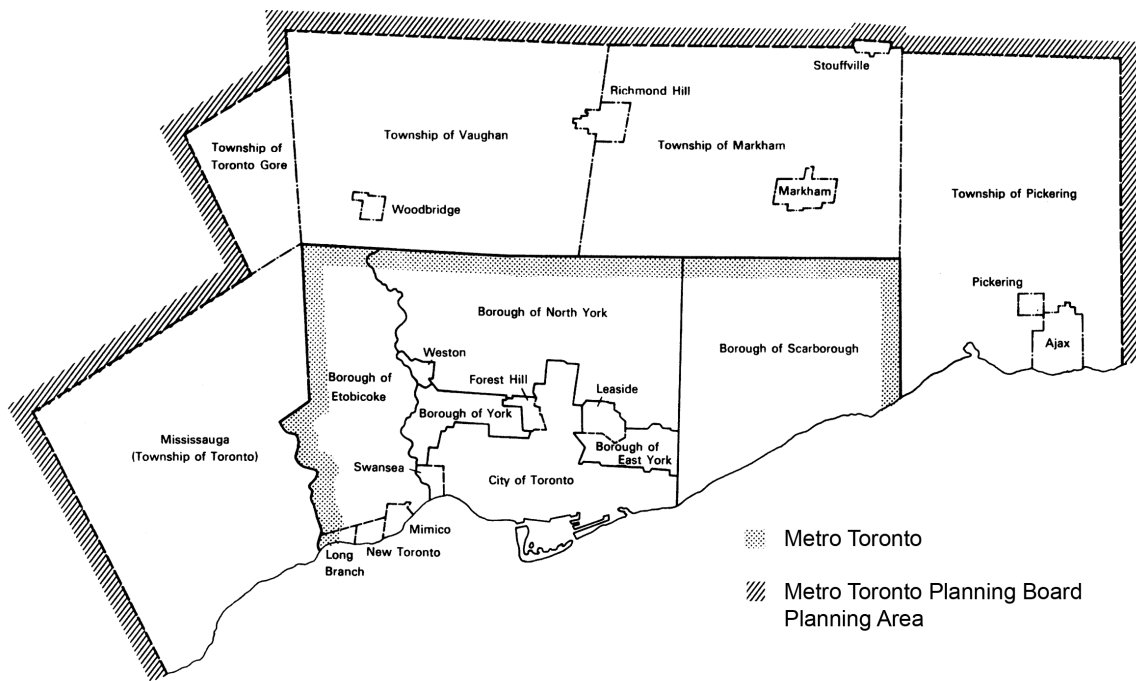
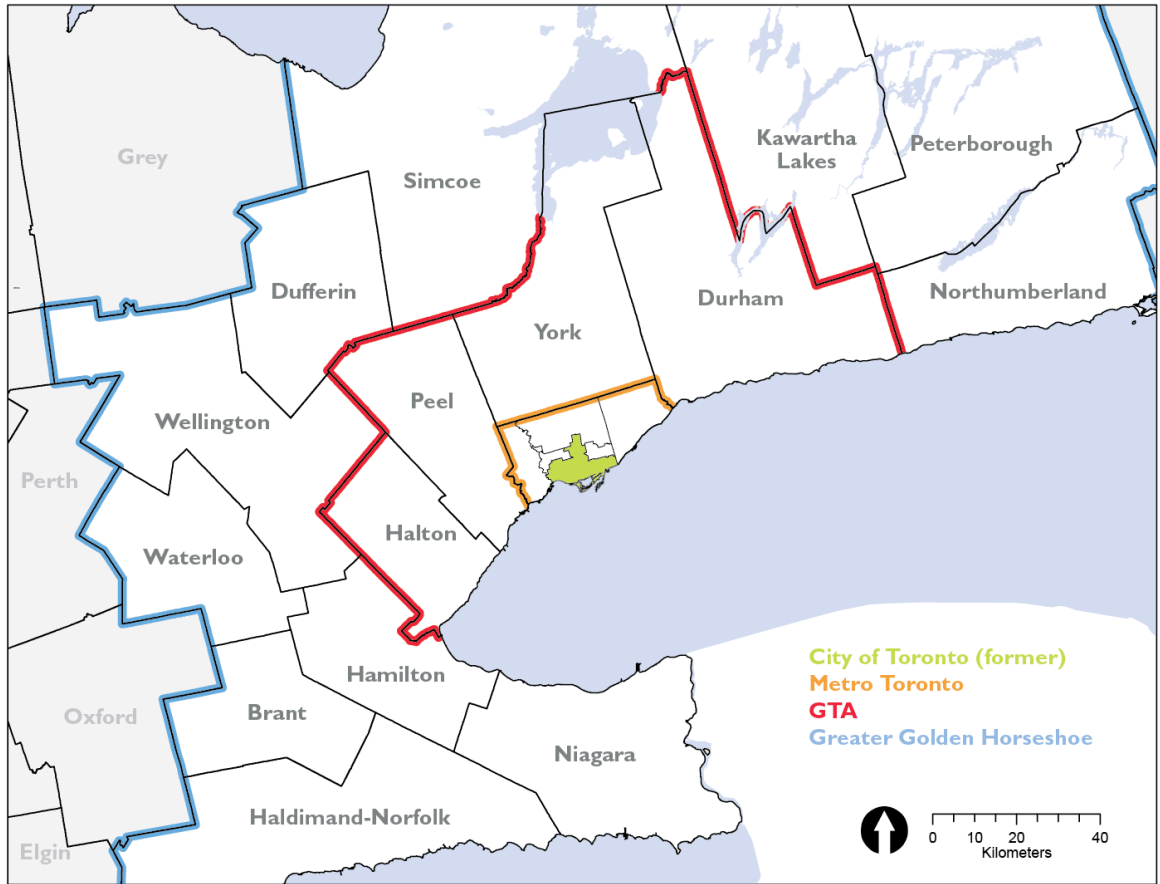
Early in 1924, Minister of Public Works and Highways George S. Henry proposed the establishment of a "metropolitan district" or "metropolitan county" that would take in Toronto and adjacent municipalities.<sup>6</sup> Henry argued that something had to be done to rectify inequities in public service provision between the City and its neighbours. Rapidly growing fringe municipalities could not provide adequate urban-style services to its residents, most of whom worked in the City. He drew special attention to schools, the provision of which was very uneven, and suggested that the creation of a metropolitan school board could be a test of the idea, with integration of other services to follow. He also proposed that Toronto's solution could be a model for Hamilton, Windsor, London, and the province's other growing metropolitan areas. While Henry had floated the idea in cabinet and with Premier Ferguson, he raised it on his own behalf, not as government policy.

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<sup>5</sup> See J.W.R. Carter, "Summary of Private Legislation Affecting Amalgamation or Annexation," Toronto Area Committee (n.d., but almost certainly 1950). Archives of Ontario, RG 19-147 Records of the Toronto Area Committee, Box 2, File "Toronto Area Committee 2."

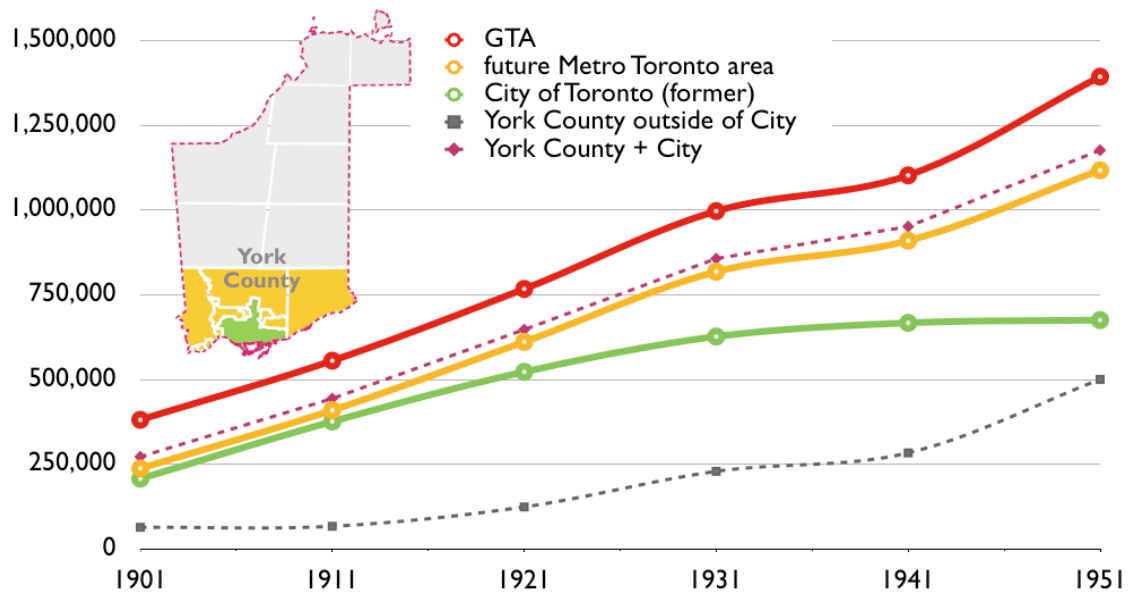
<sup>6</sup> "The Toronto Metropolitan District Act, 1924." Draft typescript. Archives of Ontario, RG 37-6-2 Record of the hearings into Toronto amalgamation, Records of the Ontario Municipal Board, Box 968, exhibit 28.

**Figure 1: Greater Golden Horseshoe context map (with MTPB Planning Area)**

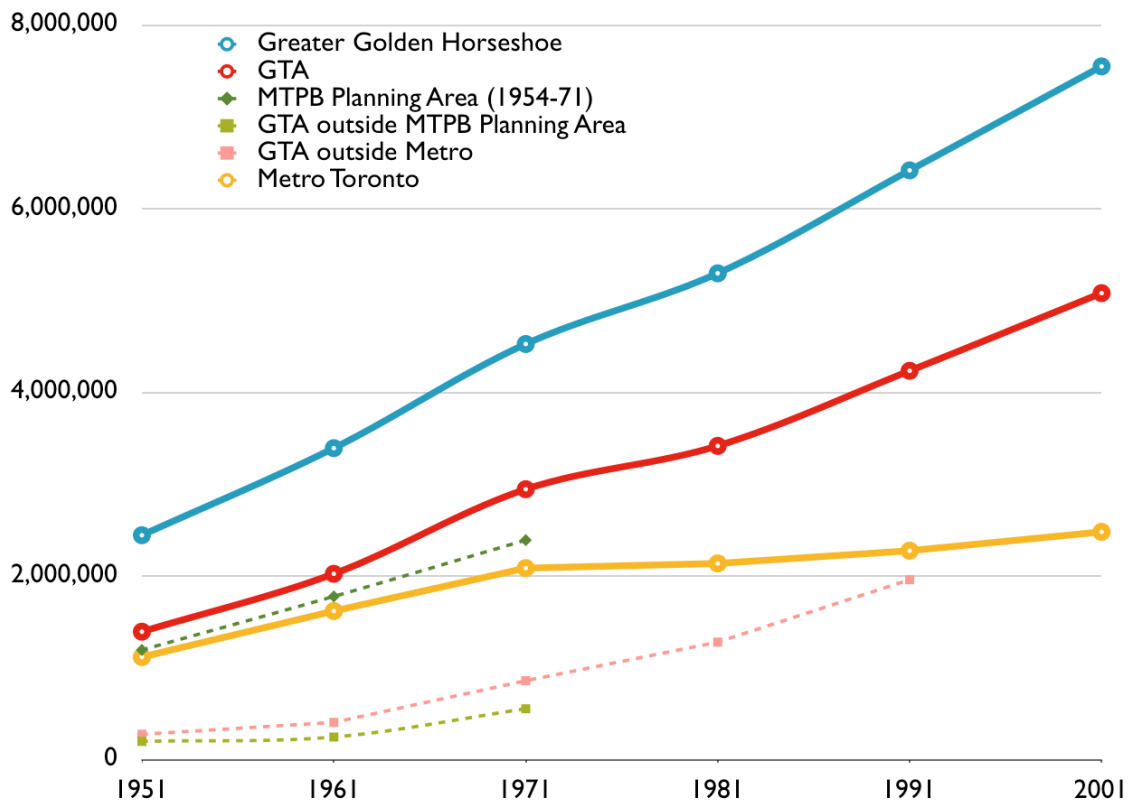




**Figure 2: Population growth, 1901–1951**



**Figure 3: Population Growth, 1951–2001**



Henry's "district" would be similar in structure to existing counties; in essence, the southern portion of York County south of Steeles Line — precisely the area covered by Metro after 1954 — would be severed and incorporated as a new county. There were, however, four innovations in the draft bill that distinguished it from the county system. First, the City of Toronto would cease to be a separated city. Under the Baldwin Act of 1849 and subsequent Municipal Acts, Ontario cities of a certain population could become administratively separate from their counties, taking on the functions of counties within their boundaries.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, it would exercise more powers than counties: over major roadways, the provision of water and sewer services, street railways, policing, town planning, and disposal of garbage. Although the City was to be part of the new district council and the primary contributor to its budget, the draft bill did not require the City to transfer its existing services to the district; the enumerated services were to be delivered only beyond the City's borders. Third, the metropolitan district was to be deemed a board of education, operating all schools within the area, including within the City. Finally, recognizing that about 80% of the metropolitan area's population was in the City, the proposed council departed from traditional county representation. Instead of equal delegated representation of townships on the council, the City would have 12 seats, York Township three, East York two, and the other six, one, for a total of 23. A warden, appointed by the province, would be the 24<sup>th</sup>. The draft bill also provided for the City having a permanent "floor" of half of the seats should new incorporations necessitate the council's expansion. The use of the term "metropolitan county" suggests that Henry was aware of the basic structure of the London County Council established in 1889, when portions of surrounding counties were transferred to a new two-tier structure that also included the City of London.<sup>8</sup>

While a majority of suburban municipalities cautiously endorsed the notion of a metropolitan school board, most opposed further integration. The City itself was initially noncommittal, and the Toronto Board of Education opposed the idea. The *Globe* probably summed up their position in a condemnatory editorial that characterized the unification of the City and suburban tax bases as a rural raid on the City's industrial assessment for expenditure beyond its borders.<sup>9</sup> From Henry's perspective this was precisely the point — to leverage the City's wealth for the greater good. An additional source of opposition emerged from beyond the region's borders. Hamilton's mayor denounced it as a scheme to impoverish the cities, as a group representing urban school board members. Nowhere in the newspaper accounts is there evidence of private organizations supporting or opposing the scheme.

In the end, the proposal came to nothing. Despite Henry's advocacy, which, coming from a senior cabinet minister and past candidate for the Conservative Party leadership, must have counted for something, it was never adopted as government policy and Henry does not appear to have introduced it in the legislature on his own. Nothing more was heard on the issue until the latter days of Henry's 1930–34 tenure as premier. Still, this largely forgotten episode is notable for several reasons. First, the geographical scope of the district either established or concretized

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<sup>7</sup> The separated city structure is a peculiarity unique in Canada to Ontario and Quebec. The impetus to separate urban and rural municipal administration reflects nineteenth-century British practice. The phenomenon is almost entirely absent from the United States, where cities are integral to counties.

<sup>8</sup> Another possible model is the Montreal Metropolitan District established in 1921. It was principally established as a means of pooling credit for the financing of works. Similar to Henry's scheme, the central city was given eight of the 15 seats on the Council.

<sup>9</sup> "Mr. Henry's Project," editorial, *Globe*, 12 Feb. 1924, p. 4.

an enduring spatial definition of the metropolitan area: the City and the portion of York County south of Steeles. Second, it provided an institutional template for subsequent proposals. Arguments for and against also prefigured those made later on. While fringe area municipalities would be more than happy to spend City money on local works and services, they also wanted to preserve a rural identity independent of the City. For its part, the City had no incentive to transfer the fruits of its industrial tax base beyond its borders.

### *Episode 2, 1933–54: Metro as the solution to the York County dilemma*

In late 1933, only months before his government's defeat, Premier Henry appointed a Select Committee of the legislature on metropolitan problems. Chaired by Minister of Lands and Resources William Finlayson, the committee operated for only a few months. The spur for the creation of the committee was political tension within York County — rural northern townships had no interest in aiding populous Toronto suburbs driven into insolvency by the Depression (Colton 1980: 56). Ten of 13 suburban municipalities went bankrupt due to a collapse in residential tax assessment and a sharp increase in poor relief expenditures, half of the cost of which was borne by municipalities. Lemon (1985: 59) reports that in East York, 45% of the population was on the dole in 1935. Also important was the 1931 census. The first to define metropolitan districts, it showed how much growth was occurring beyond the boundaries of central municipalities. The Select Committee was mandated to consider how best to address problems faced by the four census metropolitan districts: Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, and Windsor. Prior to the election, it recommended an overarching administration for metropolitan areas, though it was silent on what form it should take. The committee was dissolved by the Hepburn government. The Metropolitan Area Committee of York County Council, formed in 1932 in response to York and East York Townships' desire to be annexed by Toronto, was more specific (Lemon 1985: 74). It recommended a two-tier metropolitan county similar in principle to Henry's but territorially smaller, hiving off the outer rural portions of Etobicoke and Scarborough. Stepping beyond the Henry proposal, it also recommended that the City participate fully in metropolitan services.<sup>10</sup>

Newly minted Liberal Minister of Municipal Affairs and Public Welfare David Croll was a native of Windsor, which in 1935 had undertaken a large-scale annexation of its suburbs. Inspired by this, Croll commissioned a study from University of Toronto political science professor Arthur Plumptre on government for the metropolitan area (Plumptre 1935). In the report, which the government deemed too controversial to publish (Lemon 1985: 74), Plumptre rejected the metropolitan county option, recommending instead a provincially imposed amalgamation of all existing urban areas into one municipality followed by a policy of incremental annexation as the urban area grew. A draft bill was prepared along these lines, but the proposal was postponed under pressure from city businessmen, including Joseph Atkinson, the Liberal editor of the *Toronto Star*. Croll apparently hoped that an improvement in the fiscal condition of area municipalities would make annexation more palatable to the City (Colton 1980: 56). Before the issue could be taken up again, Croll resigned from cabinet over the 1937 Oshawa labour crisis.

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<sup>10</sup> Metropolitan Area Committee of the Council of the County of York, *Interim Report*, January 1934. Archives of Ontario, RG 19-145 Records of the Metropolitan Area Committee of the County of York, Box 1.

In 1938, after Forest Hill applied to the OMB to become a separated city from York County, Reeve A.J.B. Gray of York Township, who had chaired the earlier York County Committee, was appointed to lead a provincial Metropolitan Committee. The records of the group's hearings show almost universal opposition to Plumptre's forced annexation proposal.<sup>11</sup> The committee came to an agreement on a metropolitan county federation, but was disbanded by the province at the beginning of the Second World War, apparently before it submitted any formal recommendations, and nothing further came of it.<sup>12</sup>

The apparent deadlock between advocates of the two options — amalgamation of the developing fringe municipalities into an enlarged City of Toronto (the Croll-Plumptre model) versus some form of integration of the City into York County (the Henry-Gray model) — may go some way toward explaining why little happened between the mid-1930s and the late 1940s. Appetite for reform was also likely suppressed during the slow-growth Depression years.

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Only when economic and population growth returned at the end of the War did interest in Toronto metropolitan affairs re-emerge. The population of the suburban fringe grew slowly during the Depression decade: only about 36,000 residents were added in the five metropolitan townships between 1931 and 1941 (see **Table 1**). Growth accelerated between 1941 and 1951, especially in the three outer townships, creating new impetus for reform. Rapid growth exacerbated existing problems: shacktown construction and a shortage of quality housing, declining water quality and lack of sewage treatment leading to serious public health problems, a shortage of school and other community facilities, and a lack of transportation infrastructure to bring suburban workers to city jobs. After the lean years of the 1930s, the suburban townships lacked the capital to improve services and infrastructure on their own.

**Table 1: Population and population growth in the City and suburban townships, 1931–51**

	1931	1941	1951
City of Toronto	627,231	667,457	675,754
<i>Increase</i>		+ 6%	+ 1%
East York Twp	36,080	41,821	64,616
York Twp	69,593	81,052	101,582
<i>Inner suburbs</i>	<i>105,673</i>	<i>122,873</i>	<i>166,198</i>
<i>Increase</i>		+ 16%	+ 35%
North York Twp	13,210	22,908	85,897
Etobicoke Twp	13,769	18,973	53,779
Scarborough Twp	20,682	24,303	56,292
<i>Outer suburbs</i>	<i>47,661</i>	<i>66,184</i>	<i>195,968</i>
<i>Increase</i>		+ 39%	+ 196%

In 1946, the province passed the modern *Planning Act*, which included provision for intermunicipal planning boards. In addition, municipal legislation was amended to permit

<sup>11</sup> Archives of Ontario, RG 19-145 Records of the Metropolitan Area Committee of the County of York, Box 6, "Briefs 1938 and 1939."

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Minister Eric Cross to Committee Chair A.J.B. Gray, October 12, 1939. Archives of Ontario, RG 19-145 Records of the Metropolitan Area Committee of the County of York, Box 1. See also Colton (1980: 56).

municipalities to create joint service boards. A number of proposals came forward. In 1949, the Toronto and York Planning Board, established by the province and operated jointly by York County and the City, concluded that the City and all county municipalities south of Steeles — but excluding Scarborough, Etobicoke, and the three Lakeshore municipalities — should be “unified,” either by creating a joint services and planning board, a single city government divided into boroughs, or a two-tier metropolitan county.<sup>13</sup> A citizen Civic Advisory Council appointed by Toronto City Council reached similar conclusions, although they included 10 neighbouring townships in their metropolitan county proposal (Civic Advisory Council 1949). This report was the first to consider adjacent jurisdictions in Peel County and in York County north of Steeles to be part of Toronto’s metropolitan area. At this time, the City reversed its longstanding opposition to annexation and proposed to “amalgamate” in whole or in part with its neighbours.<sup>14</sup> For the next few decades, the City carried Plumptre’s annexation option.

Faced with a deadlock between the City’s insistence on total amalgamation, the urbanizing municipalities’ desire to continue existing with or without a metropolitan organization, and York County’s fear of having its fiscal base cut out from under it, the province felt compelled to act. In 1950, Premier Leslie Frost personally convened a Toronto Area Committee of mayor and reeves of York County south of Steeles in the hope that they would work out some kind of mutually acceptable accord among themselves. Although Frost gently threatened that in the absence of consensus a solution would be unilaterally imposed, the municipalities did not in the end come up with a unified proposal.<sup>15</sup> A majority report agreed to by all except for the City of Toronto and the Town of Mimico called for the enlargement of York County to include the City of Toronto. This new “metropolitan county” would be given authority to plan, construct, and operate water and sewer facilities, major roads and highways, public transportation, and garbage disposal. A minority report, penned by the mayor of Toronto and the Town of Mimico, called for complete amalgamation of all municipalities south of Steeles into a single City government, with the exception of the rural corners of Etobicoke and Scarborough.

Ultimately the OMB designed its own solution: Metro Toronto. It did so unilaterally,<sup>16</sup> though not without extensive consultation. Between June 1950 and May 1951, over 300 exhibits were received and 8,081 pages of hearings totaling over three million words were transcribed. OMB chair Lorne Cumming essentially modernized the Henry model, creating a new two-tier metropolitan county south of Steeles, leaving a rump York County made up of predominantly rural municipalities. Despite Cumming’s having been the mastermind of the Windsor annexation two decades earlier, he believed that a total Toronto-area amalgamation, whatever efficiency benefits it might provide, would produce a government too territorially large to be responsive to the community (OMB 1953: 27,29–32). At the same time, he argued that voluntary intermunicipal cooperation was unlikely to produce change quickly enough (OMB 1953: 25,39–

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<sup>13</sup> *Report of the Toronto and York Planning Board* (Dec. 1, 1949). Archives of Ontario RG 19-147 Toronto Area Committee files, Box 5.

<sup>14</sup> A May 18, 1950 *Toronto Star* editorial credits the City’s newfound appetite for bigness to a desire to compete with Montreal. It is more likely that the City was trying to avoid involuntary inclusion in a metropolitan county.

<sup>15</sup> “Report of the Toronto Area Committee,” (March 30, 1950). Archives of Ontario, RG 19-147 Toronto Area Committee files, Box 2, file “Toronto Area Committee 1.”

<sup>16</sup> To be clear, the OMB did not itself create Metro, but the *Metropolitan Toronto Act* passed in the legislature substantially conformed to the OMB’s decision. As Colton notes, Cumming and Premier Frost were in regular contact during the three-year duration of the hearing, and the drafting of the bill — introduced only one month after the OMB decision — must have occurred in tandem with that of the OMB decision (Colton 1980: 69–71).

41). A two-tier structure that preserved existing municipalities was a less politically costly option than a forcible annexation of existing municipalities to the City of Toronto.<sup>17</sup> The only immediate loser in the arrangement was York County, which lost 80–90% of its property assessment base at a stroke, though this was cushioned by provincial adjustment grants.<sup>18</sup>

Why did Cumming stop at Steeles? It appears that a combination of political pragmatism and force of habit was at work. The popular conceptualization of Steeles as the line of demarcation between the “traditional” metropolitan townships and hinterland of York County, apparently dating back to Henry’s time, appears repeatedly in the briefs, submissions, and newspaper accounts. This was given some official sanction by the fact that it corresponded to the 1951 census definition of Toronto’s metropolitan area, and also the planning area of the Toronto and York Planning Board. This territorial extent was also a convenient compromise between the larger areas advocated by the Toronto Area Committee in its majority report and the Civic Advisory Council, and the smaller area advocated by the Toronto and York Planning Board and City in the Toronto Area Committee minority report.

Recognizing that the fringe areas in adjacent counties would eventually come under development pressure, Cumming defined the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board’s (MTPB) Planning Area to include the 13 townships adjacent to Metro (see **Figure 1**) (OMB 1953: 72–74).<sup>19</sup> Under the *Planning Act*, planning boards were appointed by, but operated at arm’s length from municipal councils. It was not uncommon for planning boards to supervise planning areas beyond the boundaries of the municipal governments to which they were responsible. Indeed, the 1912 *City and Suburbs Act* had enabled cities of over 50,000 residents (in effect, Toronto, Hamilton, and Ottawa) to supervise subdivision activity five miles beyond their boundaries. Extraterritorial comprehensive planning and subdivision control was expanded to all cities (five miles), as well as towns and villages (three miles), in the 1917 *Planning and Development Act*.<sup>20</sup> The extraterritorial reach of the MRPB Planning Area was not an innovation in 1953; it was in fact an expansion of an existing practice. In his decision, Cumming also made it explicit that the boundaries of Metro and its Planning Area were not expected to be permanent. As the urban area grew outwards, so too would Metro (OMB 1953: 87–89).

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Several themes can be discerned in the period before Metro’s creation. First, it is important to emphasize that up to this point Toronto-related urbanization was almost entirely contained within York County. Between 1911 and 1941, 85% of population growth outside the City of Toronto, but within the GTA, was in York County. In this period, the metropolitan problem was seen as pertaining to York County; its solution lay in reorganizing the City-County relationship. With

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<sup>17</sup> The OMB decision notes the time-tested benefits of the federal principle in the Canadian political system (OMB 1953: 47) but makes no reference of other possible precedents, not least Henry’s 1924 draft act and the London County Council. A copy of Henry’s draft act is, however, in the OMB’s case file, suggesting that Cumming was aware of it. Archives of Ontario, RG 37-6-2 Record of hearings into Toronto amalgamation, Box 968, file 28.

<sup>18</sup> Cumming also notes that even with this reduction, the rump York County would still have one of the larger assessment bases and populations among Ontario counties: \$28 million and about 50,000 residents (OMB 1953: 68).

<sup>19</sup> A proposal for an extended planning area was made by the Greater Toronto Branch of the Community Planning Association of Canada in a June 9, 1950 deputation to the OMB. Archives of Ontario, RG 37-6-2 Records of hearings into Toronto amalgamation, Box 967, file 39, “4a. Misc. reports not filed as exhibits.”

<sup>20</sup> Gomme, E. *Municipal Planning in Ontario*, pp. 6, 11, 15–18. Undated typescript (stamped received by the Local Planning Policy Branch, Ministry of Municipal Affairs 1983). Archives of Ontario, RG 19-61-2, Records of the Metropolitan Toronto and Area Transportation Study, Box 12, file “MTARTS ’68.”

annexation off the table for most of the period, this took the form of dividing the county into two pieces, one urban (Metro), the other rural (the rump York County). The dividing line, Steeles, reflected a durable, historically evolved conceptualization of Toronto's metropolitan sphere of influence.

Second, the impetus to reform was consistent throughout the period: the City's abandonment of annexation coupled with suburban incorporations led to increasing inequities in services and infrastructure between City and suburb, and between suburban municipalities. The Depression drove many municipalities into bankruptcy, exacerbating these disparities, as did rapid postwar growth.

Third, the solution was always to be institutional change at the local, not the provincial level. The provincial government (regardless of the party in power) showed little interest in direct legislative or fiscal intervention in metropolitan affairs.<sup>21</sup> From Henry to Hepburn to Frost, the implicit policy was to empower local governments to resolve the regional problem on their own through voluntary annexation or, failing that, arrangements for the joint exercise of powers. The Metro settlement reconciled the different political interests operating at all levels: the province remained detached from day-to-day entanglements; the rump county received compensation for the loss of assessment; municipalities retained their existence and much of their autonomy within the two-tier structure; suburban areas received better services and infrastructure; and the City would have the dominant voice on the new metropolitan council.

### *Episode 3, 1963–74: A clash of objectives leads to policy failure*

Metro was successful at resolving the service and infrastructure gap. By the end of its first decade, virtually the entire urbanized area had been converted from well and septic systems to Lake Ontario-based, centralized water and sewage treatment (White 2003); regional arterial road and parks systems were well advanced; and the TTC, no longer confining its activities to the City, extended bus and streetcar lines into the suburban hinterland. The institutional foundation generated increasing returns in the form of a long housing boom and economic growth. However, population growth continued to intensify in the GTA outside Metro and also in the part of the GTA that lay outside the Metro Toronto Planning Area. By the mid-1960s, it was apparent that if Toronto metropolitan region's growth was to be managed by a single authority, either Metro, or the Metro Planning Area, or both, would have to have to be expanded. This remained a viable option in the early 1960s. The cabinet committee on metropolitan affairs agreed in 1962 that there should be no official upper limit on Metro's size, and that if any municipality were to ask to join Metro, it should be allowed.<sup>22</sup>

In 1963, Premier John Robarts appointed the one-man Royal Commission of Carl Goldenberg to study Metro and recommend changes. During extensive hearings, a variety of

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<sup>21</sup> The basic structure of municipal government had changed little in Ontario since the 1949 Baldwin Act. While the provincial government had virtually unlimited powers to intervene in municipal affairs, it was used sparingly. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs was created later than in most other provinces in 1932, when Depression-induced municipal bankruptcies necessitated greater provincial oversight.

<sup>22</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Cabinet Committee on Metropolitan Toronto," Dec. 18, 1962. Archives of Ontario, RG 18-147, Royal Commission on Metropolitan Toronto (1963-65), Box 9: "General Files." The negative wording of the statement suggests that the government had no interest in actively encouraging Metro's expansion. The cabinet committee minutes in 1962 and 1963 prior to the appointment of the Goldenberg Commission are largely concerned with debate over the internal structure of Metro: municipal representation on the Metro Council and processes for amalgamation of Metro municipalities.

respondents advanced different schemes for expansion of Metro or its Planning Area north into York County or west into Peel County.<sup>23</sup> Many were aware of the fresh example of Greater London, where territory from surrounding counties was rolled into the former London County Council. While most of Goldenberg's (1965) final report concerned the reorganization of municipalities and functions within Metro, he recommended that the northern and western boundaries of Metro should be reviewed and suggested that the Planning Area could be enlarged to the west, but only in the absence of a separate government reform in Peel and Halton.<sup>24</sup>

Given substantial support for the enlargement of Metro, the Planning Area, or both, from municipalities and other private and public sector actors, why did the provincial government reject it? Opposition appears to have come from at several sources. First, York County argued that further chipping away at its assessment base would undermine its ability to function. It also argued that the MTPB's extraterritorial reach was an affront to local autonomy and self-government, because suburban municipalities were not represented on the Board.<sup>25</sup> However, given the government's decision to override this perspective when Metro was created, this argument is unlikely to have been decisive. A second potential source of opposition may have been from the Conservative caucus, although minutes of a meeting at which Premier Robarts canvassed them for opinion on Goldenberg's recommendations show no attention to boundary extension. Either the question was already settled, or it was not a point of contention.<sup>26</sup>

The most persuasive reason for the rejection of Metro expansion is a gradual transformation of interests and motivations at the provincial level. During the 1960s, population growth accelerated in parts of the GTA that lay outside the Metro Toronto Planning Board's control. As **Table 2** shows, the townships inside the MTPB Planning Area but outside Metro (the MTPB fringe) doubled in population in each decade after 1941, growing from 40,562 to 305,535

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<sup>23</sup> In the absence of amalgamation, the City of Toronto endorsed the extension of the federation in to include urbanizing parts of Pickering and what would become Mississauga. York Township, Weston, and North York recommended annexing the land south of the Highway 407 alignment to North York. York Township also recommended adding part of Peel County. While Toronto Township in Peel County opposed being included in Metro proper, it welcomed inclusion in the Planning Area. Forest Hill called for review of the outer boundaries. New Toronto and Swansea opposed amalgamation because it would make Metro expansion impossible. The Metro Toronto Planning Board called for the province to add rapidly growing Brampton-Bramalea to its jurisdiction, as did the Ontario Water Resources Commission. Pickering, already within the jurisdiction of the Metro Planning Area, asked to be incorporated into the Metro Toronto School Board. The Urban Development Institute, the Metro Board of Trade, and the Community Planning Association of Canada each endorsed extension of the planning area. See Archives of Ontario, RG 18-147, Royal Commission on Metropolitan Toronto (1963-65), Boxes 4 and 5, "Briefs"; Box 12, "Comments Regarding Report," file "Summary of Comments."

<sup>24</sup> Goldenberg argued in favour of Metro expansion in a 1965 speech at the University of Toronto in which he opposed amalgamation of Metro into a single municipality (as the City of Toronto continued to advocate) on the basis that it would eliminate the flexibility of the two-tier system, which can easily accommodate territorial expansion. Archives of Ontario, RG 18-147, Royal Commission on Metropolitan Toronto (1963-65), Box 10 "General Files," file: "University of Toronto - Speech by Goldenberg at Centre for Urban Studies Seminar, Oct 1, 1965, Reorganization of Metropolitan Toronto: Problems and Proposals, Second Seminar on Problems of Metropolitan Reorganization."

<sup>25</sup> Archives of Ontario, RG 18-147, Royal Commission on Metropolitan Toronto (1963-65), Box 5, "Briefs."

<sup>26</sup> Confidential memorandum regarding an August 20, 1965 meeting of M.L.A.s attended by Premier Robarts and Minister of Municipal Affairs Spooner. Archives of Ontario, RG 18-147, Royal Commission on Metropolitan Toronto (1963-65), Box 11, "Comments regarding report," file "Goldenberg Report - M.L.A. Opinions." The file also contains an Aug. 23 letter from Forest Hill member Edward Dunlop to Spooner that implies that the Toronto area caucus endorsed extending Metro's boundaries to Highway 7, but this is not reflected in the meeting record.



people in 1971. The GTA outside the MTPB Planning Area grew relatively slowly from 1941 to 1961, but accelerated rapidly the following decade, outstripping the MTPB fringe in percentage and absolute terms. Halton County, which no one considered part of the Toronto metropolitan area prior to Metro’s creation, almost tripled in population between 1951 and 1961, and by half again between 1961 and 1971. In short, rapid population growth in the Hamilton-Oshawa corridor far beyond the boundaries of Metro — and far removed from popular conceptions of Toronto’s metropolitan sphere of influence — may have helped persuade provincial policymakers to consider more comprehensive reforms to municipal structures. In fact, the influential “father” of Metro, Lorne Cumming, abandoned his earlier endorsement of Metro’s territorial flexibility; in memoranda to the minister he now argued against expansion.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 2: Population and population growth in the Toronto region’s fringe, 1941–71**

	1941	1951	1961	1971
GTA outside MTPB Planning Area	152,046	198,614	246,503	554,145
<i>Increase</i>		+ 31%	+ 24%	+ 125%
MTPB Planning Area outside Metro	40,562	77,417	159,071	305,535
<i>Increase</i>		+ 91%	+ 105%	+ 92%
Metro Toronto	909,928	1,117,470	1,618,787	2,086,017
<i>Increase</i>		+ 23%	+ 45%	+ 29%

Note: Although numbers are shown for 1941 and 1951, Metro and the MTPB were established in 1954.

Ironically, provincial leaders’ perception of Metro as a success led directly to the decision against expansion. In 1965, on the heels of a legislative committee on municipal affairs chaired by Hollis Beckett, which recommended empowering counties and integrating separated cities into county structures,<sup>28</sup> the province initiated a process of local government review (LGR) and appointed Cumming to direct it. Commissions of inquiry were established to make recommendations on the reform of the governing structures of almost all major city-county areas in the province. The result of this process was the conversion of a number of counties into “mini-Metros” called “regional municipalities” (see Feldman 1974). In the GTA, York (1971), Halton (1974), and Peel (1974) Counties were made into regional municipalities without alteration of boundaries and Durham and Ontario Counties were merged into Durham Region (1974). The City of Ottawa and Carleton County were combined into a Metro-like Regional Municipality in 1969. Similar changes occurred in Thunder Bay and Niagara in 1970, Kitchener-Waterloo and Sudbury in 1973, and Hamilton-Wentworth in 1974.

Key to the story is how the municipal reform project was related to other policy changes. Under Robarts, the Ontario government shed its prior aversion to intervention and embarked on a variety of bold initiatives that cut across the full range of government activity. In 1962 the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Transportation Study (MTARTS) was launched to prepare a

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Cumming to Robarts, Dec. 20, 1965. Archives of Ontario, RG 18–147, Royal Commission on Metropolitan Toronto (1963–65), Box 11, “Comments Regarding Report,” file “Amendments to the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto Act.”

<sup>28</sup> The Select Committee on the Municipal and Related Acts was active from 1961 to 1965. While initially concerned with modernizing and rationalizing antiquated legislation, the committee had by 1963 become convinced of the need for structural reform to the county and municipal system. See Archives of Ontario, RG 49-146 Select Committee on the Municipal and Related Acts.

capital and operating transportation plan for an area stretching from Hamilton to east of Bowmanville. One of the only tangible products of MTARTS was the creation of the GO Transit regional rail and bus system, but it also produced the first scheme for the long-term planning and development of a region far larger than Metro and its Planning Area (MTARTS 1967).

Reporting in 1967 after four years of study, the Ontario Committee on Taxation chaired by Lancelot Smith saw the creation of a regional framework for provincial activity as an essential foundation for economic growth (Smith 1967). Going farther than Beckett, Smith called for a sweeping reorganization of local government into large “regional” units reflecting common historical, economic, social, and geographical realities. These regions would also be used as the spatial framework for provincial policy delivery. Combining counties into larger regions proved politically impossible and, moreover, some of the LGR studies were already underway or complete. Still, the notion of dividing the province into large-scale planning regions, potentially (but not necessarily) through restructuring local government, lived on in a regional economic development policy called “Design for Development” (Ontario 1966, 1970).<sup>29</sup> The regional development project swallowed whole the provincial land use planning project inaugurated by MTARTS, shifting the emphasis from one of planning for anticipated growth to one of fostering or redirecting growth to underdeveloped areas. The province was to be divided into five large regions, one of which was the “Toronto-Centred Region,” an area corresponding roughly to today’s the Greater Golden Horseshoe. For each, the province would create a policy plan to which local government activities would conform (Feldman 1974: 24–25).

By 1975, four years after the more cautious Bill Davis had taken over from Robarts, Design for Development had accomplished little and was effectively shelved. Later described by one of its architects as an “insubstantial pageant” (Richardson 1981), it had culminated in policy failure. The agenda hijacked by a technocratic province-wide regional development program that collapsed under its own weight, the province had neither empowered a single authority to manage the region’s growth nor taken on the role for itself. Metro was not expanded, nor was the MTPB’s planning area. In fact, the conversion of neighbouring counties into “regional municipalities,” each exercising planning authority over its territory, clipped the Metro Planning Area to the borders of Metro. In the absence of an overarching policy, increasingly autonomous local and regional governments in the Toronto metropolitan area went their own ways.

#### *Episode 4(a), 1987–95: A failed attempt to institutionalize the GTA*

Starting in the late 1980s, Metro and the surrounding regional municipalities of Halton, Peel, York, and Durham started to be referred to as the Greater Toronto Area, or GTA.<sup>30</sup> This shorthand remains a durable spatial framework in the public mind for Toronto’s metropolitan sphere of influence. Under Liberal and NDP governments, the 1987–95 period featured a sustained attempt by the province to craft a coherent policy for metropolitan growth. This ultimately failed, wrecked on the shoals of party politics.

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<sup>29</sup> Feldman (1974) describes how Design for Development’s regional development program, the MTARTS’s regional planning, and regional government reform began on separate tracks yet had by 1970 become fused.

<sup>30</sup> The origins of the GTA are unclear. It does not correspond to Statistics Canada’s definition of the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area. A search of the ProQuest Canadian Newsstand database reveals no use of the acronym “GTA” before 1989 and no use of “Greater Toronto Area” in the contemporary territorial meaning before 1987. Since the government began using the term in policy in 1987, it may be responsible for its popularization.

Despite the oil shocks and stagflation of the 1970s and the recession of the early 1980s, the GTA grew briskly between 1971 and 1991 (see **Table 3**). With little remaining rural land, Metro grew little. Peel boomed in the 1970s, almost doubling in population. The growth of York and Durham accelerated in the 1980s. Farther away from Toronto, Halton grew more slowly. Altogether, the population of the GTA outside Metro more than doubled between 1971 and 1991.

**Table 3: Population and population growth in the GTA, 1971–91**

	1971	1981	1991
Metro Toronto	2,086,017	2,137,395	2,275,771
<i>Increase</i>		+ 2%	+ 6%
York Region	166,060	252,063	504,981
<i>Increase</i>		+ 52%	+ 100%
Halton Region	190,470	253,883	313,136
<i>Increase</i>		+ 33%	+ 23%
Peel Region	259,400	490,731	732,798
<i>Increase</i>		+ 89%	+ 49%
Durham Region <sup>a</sup>	243,750	283,638	409,070
<i>Increase</i>		+ 16%	+ 44%
GTA outside Metro Toronto	859,680	1,280,317	1,959,987
<i>Increase</i>		+ 49%	+ 53%

Note: The 1971 value for Durham Region is the sum of Durham and Ontario Counties. This is an approximation because the creation of Durham Region in 1974 also involved small parts of Simcoe and Northumberland Counties.

In the 1987 Speech from the Throne,<sup>31</sup> the Liberal government led by David Peterson promised to respond to uncoordinated growth. That October, Peterson convened a Greater Toronto Coordinating Committee (GTCC) composed of municipal officials and, at the same time, an internal committee of 11 ministers.<sup>32</sup> A year later the government created a small Office of the Greater Toronto Area (OGTA). The OGTA's immediate concern was with rising transportation gridlock and the search for new landfill capacity; in the long term it was to guide the development of a regional plan. The government was at pains to stress that the OGTA was not and could not become a new level of metropolitan government. Its purpose was to coordinate and support municipal and provincial activities within the region. Its principal efforts before the NDP took power in 1990 were to produce region-wide detailed forecasts of population and employment (Clayton Research 1989; Hemson Consulting 1989) and to commission an "urban concepts study" (IBI Group 1990), both of which led to the articulation of a vision statement (Ontario 1991). These were important steps, as nothing similar had occurred since MTARTS and Design for Development. Other actions helped to cement the GTA as an appropriate spatial framework for policy development. The province produced a discussion paper on the creation of a GTA greenlands strategy (Kanter 1990), while the federal Royal Commission on the Future of

<sup>31</sup> Ontario Legislative Assembly Hansard, 34<sup>th</sup> Parl, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., Nov. 3, 1987, 15:10.

<sup>32</sup> Brochure, "What is the OGTA?" (n.d.). RG 19-162 Correspondence of the Office of the Greater Toronto Area, 1986–94, file B336366 "PER-01-2 GTA Organization / Role and Mandate of OGTA."

the Toronto Waterfront worked toward recommending comprehensive planning for protection of the regional ecosystem (Crombie 1991).

Activity intensified after the 1990 election. In the fall of 1991, the NDP government appointed six provincial-municipal working groups on social issues, economic development, urban form, the countryside, infrastructure needs, and infrastructure financing. The working groups' separate findings were summarized in a discussion paper (Ontario 1992), which in turn led to preparation of internal background reports in late 1993-early 1994.<sup>33</sup> These reports presented options for potential inclusion in a Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) for the GTA to be enacted under Section 3 of the *Planning Act*.<sup>34</sup> A draft PPS was prepared but not enacted before the NDP lost the June 1995 election to Mike Harris's resurgent Conservatives.

More research may reveal exactly why the GTA PPS was not enacted. The creation of the GTA Taskforce in April 1995, on the eve of the election, may be one reason. The Rae government may have decided that a more muscular solution — metropolitan institutional reform akin to the creation of Metro in 1954 — would be preferable to the articulation of a provincial policy. Poor economic conditions may be another. With the government mired in a record deficit and the province in deep recession, other issues commanded the political agenda. A third reason may be that GTA project was sidelined by a parallel process: reform of the land use planning system on the basis of the Commission on Planning and Development Reform (Penfold, Vigod, and Sewell 1993). The *Planning Act* was amended in May 1994 and a new Comprehensive Set of Policy Statements enacted under Section 3 (but not including a GTA-specific statement) came into effect in March 1995.

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The policy failures from the late 1960s to the early 1990s illustrate the centrality of provincial action to resolving Toronto's metropolitan problems (Friskin 1993, 2001). The province's tacit policy of empowering local governments to solve metropolitan problems produced Metro. When the territorial scale of Toronto-region urbanization overwhelmed Metro in the 1960s, the province was the only actor capable of tackling the issue. In choosing not to expand Metro, the province assumed direct ownership of the response to metropolitan challenges: the provision of water, sewer, and other public infrastructure to the urbanizing fringe, guided by a coordinated regional land use and transportation plan. In creating the regional municipalities and GO Transit, the province established mechanisms for the implementation of a coherent plan for growth in the greater metropolitan region. The collapse of Design for Development — which by the end had proven to be an overly ambitious technocratic fantasy — meant that the province failed to provide one. The next provincial attempt to create an institution and policy responsible for the region's development was relatively modest in scope. Although crafted with considerably more buy-in from municipalities, it also failed, done in by a change in government and recession.

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<sup>33</sup> RG 19-162 Correspondence of the Office of the Greater Toronto Area, 1986-94, file B336366 "CON48 GTA Policy Statement – Background Reports."

<sup>34</sup> The OGTA report *Shaping Growth in the GTA* (Ontario 1992) stated that the province's endgame was to create a "strategic action plan" for the region. The background reports make clear that this would be implemented through the planning system; at that time (May 1994-April 1996), municipalities and the province had to "be consistent with" Provincial Policy Statements when making planning decisions and constructing works.

*Episode 4(b), 2000–present: The province breaks the logjam*

Although smaller in percentage terms than in the 1980s, substantial growth occurred in the 1990s. Metro added 200,000 people through infill and redevelopment while the GTA regional municipalities added almost 700,000 people (see **Figure 4**). The Outer Ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe including Hamilton added about 300,000 people over the decade, roughly the same amount as in each of the previous two decades. By 2001, both the GTA outside the Toronto and the Outer Ring had populations larger than Toronto itself. The problems facing the region in the late 1990s were the same as in the late 1980s, albeit exacerbated by continued growth: transportation gridlock, diminishing landfill capacity, degradation of the natural environment, and the need for new investments in water and sewer infrastructure.

**Figure 4: Growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 1981–2001**

	1981	1991	2001
Metro Toronto (City after 1998)	2,137,395	2,275,771	2,481,494
<i>Increase</i>		+ 6%	+ 9%
GTA outside Metro Toronto	1,280,315	1,959,985	2,600,332
<i>Increase</i>		+ 53%	+ 33%
Outer Ring (including Hamilton)	2,291,459	2,635,086	2,960,529
<i>Increase</i>		+ 15%	+ 12%

When the Conservatives regained power in June 1995 they inherited the fruit of eight years of incremental provincial effort: a provincial office dedicated to metropolitan affairs reporting to a cabinet minister, a new spirit of intermunicipal cooperation (at least at the upper-tier level), a loose consensus among local actors on needs and goals for infrastructure and urban development, and a provincial task force in the process of studying GTA governance options.

Raising the spectre of falling behind in a competitive global economy, the GTA Task Force (1996) recommended replacing Metro Toronto and regional municipalities with a GTA-wide upper-tier government. Brought to power in a populist reaction to the perceived excesses of the Rae years, the Harris Conservatives rejected the Task Force’s conclusions. Instead, they established a short-lived multipurpose body with limited powers — the Greater Toronto Services Board — and amalgamated Metro and its six lower-tier municipalities into a new, single-tier City of Toronto in 1998. The GTA regional municipalities were left untouched and the OGTA was abolished, eliminating a regional voice within the provincial government. The prospects for regional institution-building and policymaking by the province appeared dim. The decision not to build a new institution reflected the government’s impulse toward deregulation, privatization, state retrenchment, and devolution. Competition for growth and resources would make municipalities more lean and entrepreneurial. In contrast to changes made by the previous two governments, the primary purpose of planning was to enable growth rather than control it.

Only in 1999 did regional problems become too politically costly for the province to ignore. Urban development on the fragile Oak Ridges Moraine became a hot-button issue, pushed aggressively by a sophisticated cadre of environmental NGOs. To defuse the controversy, the government established a territorially specific land use plan (Ontario 2002). The interlinked issues of GTA traffic congestion, garbage, and infrastructure to support growth demanded attention, but in the wake of the GTA Task Force rejection and Toronto’s forced amalgamation, the Conservative government was politically unable to generate a GTA-specific solution. Instead, borrowing the nebulous American concept of “Smart Growth,” it established a series of

panels made up of public and private sector stakeholders. As with Design for Development three decades earlier, the province was divided into five Smart Growth “regions.” Toronto was at the core of a region far larger than the GTA; the “Central Ontario” panel also included the adjacent ring of counties and regions. All five panels produced reports, but Central Ontario’s was the most detailed (Ontario 2003). In the mind of the minister of Municipal Affairs who started the process, Chris Hodgson, past failures had occurred because the province had imposed solutions from on high. He gambled that asking a wide range of stakeholders — including municipal officials, environmental groups, agricultural groups, housing developers, and benevolent societies, among others — to develop a policy consensus on their own would achieve a more durable compromise. The endgame was to be a multi-decade infrastructure investment strategy coupled to a land use and transportation plan.<sup>35</sup>

After the Conservatives lost the election in October 2003, the new Liberal government seized the new regional agenda and ran with it. The Conservative-created body for infrastructure planning and financing, SuperBuild, was combined with the Smart Growth Secretariat to form a new Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal. A stakeholder task force was appointed to make recommendations for protecting a “greenbelt” from urbanization; the Greenbelt Plan, which subsumes the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment and an additional 400,000 hectares, was created in 2005. Building on the Central Ontario Smart Growth Panel report, the province in 2006 enacted a Growth Plan for the “Greater Golden Horseshoe,” to which municipal land use plans and infrastructure decisions must conform (Ontario 2006). Thirty-five years later, an instrument analogous to the large-scale provincial plans that would have implemented the Toronto-Centred Region concept was finally created. Given the continuity of ideas and personnel (especially municipal leaders and consultants), this episode can be viewed as an extension, following an interruption, of the previous one.

## Conclusion

Several conclusions emerge from this examination of the historical evolution of Toronto’s regional governance. First, the institutional and policy choices made cannot be “read off” a simplistic economic reading of macrostructural change. While regionalist discourse has shifted from a focus on resolving inequities *within* the metropolitan region to one of maintaining competitiveness in a competition *between* regions, the underlying problems around which discourses have been mobilized have remained much the same since the very beginning: the need to provide adequate infrastructure and services to accommodate population and economic growth — in contemporary terms, enhancing the quality of place. The array of potential institutional and policy solutions has also remained much the same. The thirty-year-long debate between advocates of annexation versus a metropolitan county, each drawing on local and other precedents, was resolved in favour of the latter with the creation of Metro. (The GTA Task Force’s proposal for a GTA-wide two-tier system was the most recent expression of this institutional model. Affecting only Metro Toronto, the 1998 amalgamation of the City was not a regional reform at all, and so has no relation to the historical annexation option.) As the scale of urbanization increased in the 1960s, a new policy choice emerged: between local and provincial management of metropolitan policy. The creation of the regional municipalities and rejection of Metro expansion settled the question in favour of the provincial option.

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<sup>35</sup> Author interview with Chris Hodgson, April 1, 2010 for the Ontario Regional Planning Oral History Project.

The policy drift of the 1970s and 1980s is better explained in institutional rather than structural terms. The muddling of the municipal reform, regional planning, and regional development agendas led to overstretch and, ultimately, failure to enact a viable metropolitan growth policy. Although it continued to exist on paper into the mid-1970s, Design for Development was effectively dead, bereft of political sponsorship within the government, even before the fiscal lean years of the later 1970s and the later rise of ostensibly neoliberal “competitive cities” discourse. In addition, the reforms to the municipal system — the transformation of the GTA counties into regional municipalities — set in motion a path-dependent dynamic that raised the cost of provincial intervention. The more muscular and sophisticated the regional municipalities became, and the more they became used to their autonomy, the higher the cost of imposing a regional policy framework or, more radically, merging them into a single metropolitan institution. Only when the province’s and the regional municipalities’ interests became aligned in the late 1980s did a window open to jointly create a regional policy. The election of the Harris Conservatives, animated by a different philosophy of government, temporarily closed the window, but the fact of metropolitan growth led them to reopen it.

It is also clear that the definition of the region has always been fuzzy and contested and that, once entrenched in institutions or policies, regional definitions are difficult to dislodge. Today, in the putative age of the metropolitan region, Toronto region is like a matryoshka doll, the institutional legacy of each past regional episode nesting within the next. Although the “Greater Golden Horseshoe” area now exists in provincial public policy, it has yet to gain purchase in public discourse. Economic lobby groups, civic associations, and institutions of regional economic governance remain largely municipally focused. The Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance, which emerged from discussions convened by the OGTA in the early 1990s, was created to promote the GTA to foreign investors. Its activities, however, are often undermined by the activities of municipal economic development agencies. The Toronto Board of Trade has tried to speak for the region in its advocacy of integrated metropolitan transit and economic strategy, but it remains a federation of independent chambers of commerce within the amalgamated City of Toronto (BOT 2009). Influential interest groups such as BILD, which represents residential and commercial property developers and builders, the Toronto Real Estate Board, the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, and the United Way each represent subsets of the GTA. Some single- and multi-sector organizations such as the Toronto Region Research Alliance have defined the region on a larger scale, including Waterloo, Guelph, Hamilton, and Oshawa. As discussed in the paper’s introduction, the globalization literature stresses the contemporary relevance of metropolitan areas as nodes on transnational economic circuits, while the innovation systems literature emphasizes the interfirm relationships at the regional scale. If the new logic of globalization is calling city-regions into being as consequential terrains of economic activity (if not political actors in their own right), which “region” will it be in Toronto? Will the emergence of the Greater Golden Horseshoe (itself a revival of the 1970s Toronto-Centred Region) in planning and infrastructure lead to its ideational transference to other policy realms, including economic policy? The coexistence of multiple regional definitions through historical layering calls into question the utility of research strategies that rely on a one-size-fits-all model such as the Census Metropolitan Area.

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