The 'Consensual' Politics of Transit Infrastructure Policy in Kitchener, Ontario

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Introduction

This paper examines the role of ideas in the development of large public transit infrastructure projects. These projects have become features of a new generation of 'sustainable' development politics in Canadian cities and figure prominently in wider policy debates about sustainable planning and urban regeneration. As an object of governance, the 'sustainable city' in Canada has been associated with a number of important political and institutional changes, including the roll-out of intergovernmental spending programs, the articulation of new planning and infrastructure paradigms, and the reconfiguration of urban political coalitions and regimes. In an effort to develop a richer account of coalition and regime politics in the 'sustainable city' this paper focuses attention on the multi-scalar constitution of sustainable infrastructure policy and on the ideas and frames that actors draw on in their efforts to shape the city-building process. The central premise is that policies related to sustainable urban development in Canada reflect a particular understanding of the problems posed by 'unsustainability' and the relationship between sustainable planning and other social and economic policy objectives. The politics of public transit infrastructure policy, which are taking place simultaneously at federal, provincial, regional, and municipal scales, provides a powerful illustration of how discursive processes of problem framing, narrative construction, and issue linking shape local political contests and contribute to new patterns of coalition formation.

The re-engagement of the state in transit policy comes at a time when the post-war infrastructure and development paradigm, based on public subsidies for suburbanization, functionally segregated land-use planning, and automobility faces widespread criticism. The city form that grew out of this paradigm provided an urban 'spatial fix' for the post-war North American political-economy, creating a built platform for new patterns of production and consumption. However, this built environment, conceived as a spatial solution in the Fordist era, has now been reconceptualised as a problem in need of solution. Growing congestion, evolving concerns about urban metabolisms and climate change, rising public infrastructure costs, and new approaches to stimulating local economic development together pose a challenge to longstanding infrastructure planning practices. 'Smart growth' has emerged as an alternative infrastructure and development paradigm based on denser, more intensified development, mixed land-uses and the privileging of non-automobile modes of transportation. In this context, improved mass transit networks have become an integral part of planning the 'good' sustainable city, promising not only a better quality of life for residents, but also a more efficient path to prosperity and growth.

Importantly, however, the sustainable city movement cannot be read simply as a rational response to an objectively defined set of policy problems. It instead emerges out of a particular ideational context. The definition of the problem to be solved is framed within this ideational context and these frames in turn guide decision-makers in the process of institutional and policy development. The ideology of the 'sustainable city' has in fact become a topic of considerable academic interest with a growing body of research exploring the 'logic' of sustainable urban development. In particular, researchers have highlighted the challenges inherent in balancing the pillars of sustainable development, showing that in practice some values are necessarily traded off against others. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most common form of 'sustainability fix' is seen to involve the grafting of concepts like smart growth onto existing forms of entrepreneurial governance (Krueger and Savage 2007; While et al. 2004; McCann 2007; Bunce 2004; Raco 2005; Whitehead 2003; Brand 2007). This paper adds to this literature by centering the topic of sustainable infrastructure and mass transit. Specifically, it asks: what 'infrastructure logic' is

informing new investments in public transit, how does this logic reflect prevailing multi-scalar conceptions of the 'good city', and how has the contest over the definition of policy problems and solutions helped to shape urban coalition politics?

Following a recent article by Rob Krueger and Susan Buckingham, the paper argues that 'sustainable city' policy in Canada reflects a new form of 'consensual' urban politics based on the integration of sustainable planning and infrastructure development concepts with 'creative' strategies for urban regeneration and knowledge-based economic development (Krueger and Buckingham 2012). This 'consensual' vision of cities that are economically competitive, environmentally benign, and 'livable' is politically seductive and provides an ideational basis for new forms of economic development and revitalization coalitions. The strength of these local coalitions has been augmented as governments at federal and provincial scales have begun to reinforce these 'consensual' discourses and offer material supports. Under these conditions, oppositional forces have struggled to re-define the policy narrative and offer alternative prescriptions.

This paper examines the political debate around the development of a transit infrastructure mega-project in the region of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, focusing particular attention on dynamics in the municipality of Kitchener. The case of Kitchener is instructive in two key respects. First, it provides a powerful illustration of how development and planning politics manifest in the discursive realm as actors struggle to represent problems and solutions in particular ways and to convince other actors to support their narrative. Debates over transit policy in Kitchener show that the process of coalition building cannot be understood in narrowly rationalist or materialist terms. Instead, the dynamics of coalition formation depend on how actors understand the policy environment and how they construct their interests in relation to this environment. Second, the case of Kitchener illustrates the multi-scalar quality of framing and problem definition processes. Here, the transit policy debate has been influenced by federal and provincial actors who provide both material and discursive support to particular policy narratives or interpretations.

Kitchener-Waterloo, like many growing cities and regions in Canada, is experimenting with smart growth planning principles that envision a greatly expanded mass transit system. The region is currently in the process of developing an $818 million light rail mega-project, financed through a tri-level infrastructure partnership, which represents the focal point of the city's 'smart' transit-oriented development strategy. The contentious debate surrounding the development of this project provides insight into how the transition to a new infrastructure and development paradigm can create opportunities to redefine the composition of dominant local political coalitions. In the case of Kitchener, historically influential downtown renewal interests are looking to the regional government to invest in light-rail transit as an instrument for promoting central city redevelopment. At the same time, a local property tax ratepayer coalition has argued that the project is overly ambitious, speculative, and unlikely to yield the kinds of benefits promised by proponents. The power of the redevelopment coalition, however, has been augmented by support from representatives of the local high-tech sector, local and extra-local environmental organizations, and federal and provincial governments who are subsidizing infrastructure capital costs. Critically, this expanded coalition is held together by an ideational framework that draws connections between mass transit and a range of positive externalities, including increased land values, investments in knowledge-based sectors of the economy, more efficient land-use and transportation practices, and improved quality of life for privileged resident groups.

The paper proceeds in four parts. It begins with a discussion of the 'new politics of infrastructure' as an analytical lens for studying urban politics. Next it develops a critique of Stone's Urban Regime Approach, the dominant framework for understanding city-based coalition politics. It argues that this approach is limited by its localist and rationalist ontology, focusing too much attention on isolated local actors and their instrumental motives. A richer understanding of local coalition and regime politics can be developed by adopting a constructivist perspective that focuses both on the multi-scalar constitution of urban policy and the role of ideas in shaping the definition of policy problems and solutions. The paper then goes on to explain the ideational framework in which public transit infrastructure policy came onto federal and provincial agendas in the 2000s. Finally, it develops a short case study of the political debate surrounding the development of Kitchener-Waterloo's light-rail transit project.

The 'New Politics' of Infrastructure

The insight that large infrastructure systems are an integral part of the evolution of urban governance lies at the heart of what might be termed a 'new politics of infrastructure' (Young and Keil 2010). While technological infrastructure networks are typically treated as apolitical artifacts, an infrastructure lens allows us to open up this 'black box' and uncover political-economic questions that are often overlooked (Graham and Marvin 2001; Winner 1980; McFarlane and Rutherford 2008). For example, while urban studies have often discussed infrastructure as an aspect of local politics, debates over infrastructure are rarely centered. This, in turn, obscures the nature of political conflict over technology and infrastructure in the city.

This literature conceptualizes the city as a socio-technical system, focusing on the interaction between the technologies that underpin modern urban life and the social and political context in which these technologies are embedded. The evolution of energy, water, telecommunication and transportation networks make possible sectoral shifts in urban economies, the extension of new consumption norms, and new patterns of everyday household reproduction. The institutionalization of 'automobility', for example, clearly illustrates the role that infrastructure and technology systems play in underwriting broader social and economic changes. Automobile technology and the production of a public road system were essential infrastructural conditions for the institutionalization of post-war Fordism. Mass production and freight-based distribution, along with suburban lifestyle and consumption norms would not have been possible without the invention and roll-out of this technological network (Aglietta 1979; Freund and Martin 1996; Florida and Jonas 1991). Importantly, however, technological transformations of urban systems are not themselves technologically determined. While the state of technology may set certain conditions, the application and development of technology is always a political process grounded in a particular social and economic context (Tarr 1984). Agency, in other words, is still critical in both grafting infrastructure technologies into the built environment and in regulating the conditions of their use.

The study of ideas has been central to this work on urban infrastructures and the socio-technology of the city in two respects. First, technological infrastructure networks have figured prominently in the evolution of modern conceptions of what constitutes a 'good city'. The development of infrastructure has been integral to the pursuit of a built environment that reflects societal aspirations and prevailing conceptions of 'progress' (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000; Melosi 1999). Second, and relatedly, ideas about the proper orientation of infrastructure policy have changed over time as a result of shifting normative frameworks, political-economic restructuring, and perceived failures of existing practices. Phillip O'Neill, for example, has

argued that the logic underlying state re-engagement in the provision of large public infrastructures is different from the logic that informed the period of post-war development. The infrastructure 'instinct' which prevailed in the 1950s and 60s was based on the idea that the collective provision of infrastructure was an essential public good that formed the foundation of modern urban life. There was an expectation that as populations grew and cities expanded government would continue to roll-out sufficient network capacity to accommodate new residents on an equal basis (O'Neill 2010). Now, however, as governments respond to a perceived crisis and begin the process of developing a new generation of urban infrastructure, they are guided by a different set of ideological beliefs. The post-war ideal of universality that encouraged the use of infrastructure networks as a tool for integrating territories has been effectively displaced by a more selective focus on projects that promise to deliver clear benefits in terms of competitiveness, productivity and growth (Graham and Marvin 2001; O'Neill 2010).

The project of building a 'sustainable city' has become closely bound up with questions of infrastructure development and the built environment. As criticism of the post-war infrastructure and development paradigm has become more pointed, the idea that 'good planning' entails a commitment to the pursuit of more sustainable built environments has become almost taken-for-granted (Gunder 2006). There is an emerging consensus that as governments turn their attention to renewing the stock of post-war infrastructure, the focus should be on investing in infrastructure systems that help to create more efficient, compact, and 'livable' urban environments. Importantly, however, while there are a number of basic elements that are common to most sustainable city projects, including expanded investment in mass transit, there are also a range of pathways to institutionalizing urban sustainability (Evans et al.2001). These pathways are distinguished by the ideational or logical connections that are seen to exist between sustainability and other policy areas. The ambiguity inherent in a term like 'sustainability' and the range of policies that can be represented as consistent with its principles allows actors to conceptualize the 'sustainable city' in many different ways. Investments in transit infrastructure and the pursuit of compact development are illustrative. These policies can be conceptualized as tools for improving the circulation of capital through urban space and improving competitiveness, for supporting new middle class urban lifestyles, for stimulating land development, for reducing government infrastructure costs, or as instruments for creating more accessible, inclusive built environments that distribute 'spatial capital' more equitably (Evans et al. 2001; see also Kaufman et al. 2004). The critical question, then, is as governments turn their attention to the project of developing sustainable cities, how is the logic of sustainability being articulated in relation to other policy spheres and political objectives?

Ideas, Urban Regimes, and a Political Economy of Scale

Ideas and a 'social construction model' of coalition building
For the last two decades, the dominant framework for analysing the dynamics of urban coalition politics, particularly with respect to economic development policy, has been Clarence Stone's Urban Regime Approach. The Regime Approach offered an alternative to pluralist accounts of urban politics which held unrealistic assumptions about the distribution of power and resources, and to Marxist and non-Marxist accounts which tended to read urban politics off of broader economic logics and thus deny any real scope for local choice. The Regime Approach allowed for more nuanced accounts that preserved a privileged role for business interests, but which also stressed the contingency of local outcomes. For Stone, local politics is understood as

the 'art of arranging' – it is the process through which public and private actors come together to match policy objectives with the resources needed to implement them (Stone 1989; 2005). The composition of the coalition and the resources that they bring to bear will depend on the given policy objective, but different actors are able to contribute different kinds of resources, including capital, political authority, or community influence.

The Regime Approach, then, analyzes the ways in which actors come together to pursue common objectives through negotiation and the sharing of resources (see Leo 2003; Mossberger and Stoker 2001). This social production model of coalition building has been enormously fruitful in terms of improving our understanding of local politics, particularly with respect to economic development policy. However, there are two key shortcomings that limit Regime's explanatory power in important ways. The first has to do with the approach's rationalist ontology and methodology (see Painter 1997). For Stone, the arrangement of coalitions depends primarily on the distribution of 'selective incentives', or in other words on the use of material inducements to encourage other actors to lend their support and resources to a particular cause. This model treats actors as rational utility-maximizers who collaborate with other coalition partners because it is in their material interest to do so. While the use of negotiated side-payments as an instrument for soliciting political support is a common feature of politics at any scale, the notion that actors are rational in this kind of straightforward way is problematic. In fact, Stone himself has suggested that his original formulation underemphasized the importance of 'large purposes' or broad civic visions in motivating actors (Stone 2005). There is, then, an acknowledged need for a fuller understanding of the role of ideas in structuring local politics and shaping coalitions.

The importance of paying more attention to ideas and discourse in relation to urban coalition politics has been highlighted by a number of authors. Joe Painter, for example, has suggested a modified regime approach that focuses more on how actors make practical sense of their world. Here, collaboration and coalition building is seen to depend on the construction of shared understandings of the problems actors face and shared understandings of what should be done to solve them (Painter 1997). Eugene McCann has put forward a similar argument focusing on the 'cultural politics of local economic development'. He argues that local processes of collaboration and contestation often center on the representation of ideas, and that it is through this cultural politics that concepts like 'quality of life' and 'sustainability', which increasingly inform local economic development strategies, are defined and given concrete policy form (McCann 2002)

The analysis of ideas in political science has gained considerable momentum in recent years, but this work has yet to seriously influence the study of local politics. While this lack of cross-fertilization between urban political studies and other areas of the discipline may be typical (see Sapotichne et al. 2007), the literature on ideas and politics has much to offer the study of urban coalitions and regimes. A starting point for constructivist approaches to politics is the notion that ideas shape how actors understand political problems and influence how they define their policy objectives and strategies (Beland 2005; Beland and Cox 2011). This leads to a very different conception of 'interests' than is usually accepted by most materialists, including regime theorists. Rather than treat interests as pre-defined and stable, ideational approaches focus on how interests are constructed and defined. Interests are themselves seen as one type of idea and reflect a subjective interpretation of an actor's environment (Beland and Cox 2011).

Ideas play a critical role in the policy process in terms of setting the agenda, defining the nature and scope of societal problems, and marking potential solutions as either appropriate or inappropriate. Here it is useful to think in terms of 'frames'. The theory of policy frames holds

that issues can be viewed from a number of different perspectives. A frame is a particular way of conceptualizing a problem, and by constructing issue frames actors not only orient their own thinking about a policy issue but also try to alter how other actors' understand and interpret their environment (Chong and Druckman 2007). Framing dynamics are important because many policy concepts have 'polysemic' qualities, meaning that they are ambiguous, flexible, and open to multiple interpretations (Jenson 2010). Ambiguous concepts like 'sustainability' can thus be framed in a variety of ways, creating myriad opportunities for actors to propose particular readings or interpretations.

The openness and flexibility of the 'sustainable city' concept suggests that an ideational approach that focuses analytical attention on processes of problem definition and framing can improve our understanding of local coalition and regime politics. A number of authors have argued that while 'sustainability' has become an over-arching narrative for urban policy, as a policy framework it remains under specified, allowing actors to fill it in with various kinds of content (Gunder and Hillier 2009; Davidson 2010). I would argue that this process of 'filling-in' is a critical dimension of coalition building in the sustainable city. For example, the problem of 'unsustainability' can be variously conceived as a problem related to urban metabolism and climate change, a problem of economic development, growth and competitiveness, or as a problem of social integration and inclusiveness. What is more, these dimensions can be related to one another in different ways. Each problem definition implies different types of policy intervention, different possibilities for collaboration, and different types of coalition.

This can be understood as a 'social construction model' of coalition building. Ideas and frames are used by actors to define urban policy problems. Particular framings and conceptualizations necessarily privilege some interests over others, and thus the struggle over issue definition is a power-laden process. However, the viability of a frame will depend on the degree to which other actors whose cooperation is required see their interests as represented. The 'social construction model', then, assumes that both forms of power, (power over and power to), are simultaneously at work. That certain issues are privileged and that some framings win out reflects the fact that relatively powerful actors have a greater capacity to shape the policy process. At the same time, successful frames are often ones that encourage others to see their interests as aligned and thus to collaborate in the pursuit of shared objectives. For example, the framing of inner-area decline as a problem of unsustainable planning practices has allowed traditional 'corporate' regimes to expand their base of support to include environmental advocates and new resident groups.

The case study shows that the sustainable city as an object of governance in Canada is being framed within a 'consensual' narrative that emphasizes the relationship between sustainable planning, economic revitalization, and 'creative class' human capital strategies. As the case of Kitchener shows, this vision of the city has created conditions for the development of a broad-based coalition around the city's new light-rail mega-project. The traditional downtown centered corporate regime, long concerned with the revitalization of the central city, sees rail-based transit-oriented development as a new opportunity to stimulate reinvestment in the undervalorized core. However, this downtown redevelopment initiative is now framed in more inclusive terms than in the past. The emphasis on rapid transit and smart growth has secured the support of progressive groups concerned with growth management and sustainability, while the prospect of creating more livable and vibrant neighbourhoods has attracted support from the local high-tech sector and elements of the new urban gentry. Locally, this coalition has managed

to resist ratepayer opposition, despite the fact that opponents have done much to challenge the project's underlying assumptions.

Ideas and a Political Economy of Scale

The second limitation of traditional regime analysis is its localist perspective. This localism, meaning a narrow concern with municipal or regional politics, is ingrained in the approach's *raison d'être*. The Regime Approach was developed in part as a response to theories like Paul Peterson's and others which assumed that local actors' scope of decision-making was profoundly limited by the logic of economic competition. Regime analyses aimed to show that 'local politics matter' by highlighting the contingency of urban governance and the very real consequences of policies carried out by different configurations of local interests. While the insistence that local politics are not determined by exogenous political or structural economic forces is welcome, Regime's spatial ontology has in practice obscured the scalar complexity of urban politics. To be sure, some regime analyses are better than others at incorporating the influence of extra-local forces on local politics. For example, some have emphasized the way in which economic restructuring may alter the relative power of certain local interests. In this vein, Leo, in his analysis of regime politics in Edmonton, argued that changes in the macro-economic environment empowered local developers whose investments became relatively more important in a context of economic decline (Leo 1995). However, even where the influence of extra-local forces is emphasized, there is still a tendency see the local as ontologically distinct from other sites of politics. The local is treated as a container in which its own distinct politics play out, rather than as a space where politics constituted at multiple scales come to ground (Jessop et al. 1999).

A number of authors have acknowledged the need to improve our understanding of the influence of extra-local factors on local politics, often arguing that greater attention to the broader institutional context of urban governance yields richer and more satisfying explanations (see Sellers 2005; Digaetano and Lawless 1999). While there are a number of theories and analytical frameworks that can be used to capture the spatial complexity of urban governance and coalition politics, scale theory has proven to be particularly powerful. Scale theory holds that the restructuring of economy and society manifests in and through changing institutional hierarchies and changing conceptions of how the geography of political-economies should be organized (see Mahon and Keil 2009). One benefit of a scaled analysis is that it allows us to see the state as a spatial entity whose internal organization is malleable (Hudson 2001). As policy paradigms and logics evolve in relation to a changing environment, (and changing conceptions of this environment), the geography of the policymaking process can also change.

Scale theory emphasizes the role of agents both in constructing scales and in strategic attempts to alter the patterns of spatial regulation. First, scales are understood to be socially constructed sites. This involves, among other things, the representation of a particular scale as important. The reasons and conceptualizations that actors draw on to frame the importance of, for example, the city, help to define the objectives of policymaking and rationalize particular forms of intervention (Brenner et al. 2003). Second, and relatedly, the representation of scales and the act of attaching to them particular regulatory powers can be seen as dimensions of strategies which actors mobilize in their effort to create favourable institutional environments. By selectively distributing resources and regulatory authority across scales, actors are able to channel spending in particular ways (see Swyngedouw 2004).

The evolution of infrastructure and transit policy in Canada is illustrative. First, the emergence of the municipal infrastructure deficit was an outcome of a long term process of downloading. Beginning in the early 1960s, federal and provincial governments combined reductions in infrastructure spending with the transfer of responsibility for public capital stocks to municipal governments (Roy 2007). This process helped to institutionalize austerity agendas in the infrastructure sector by transferring responsibility to a scale of government that lacked commensurate fiscal resources. As a result, total government investment in infrastructure declined dramatically (Vander Ploeg 2003).

This period of disinvestment gave rise to a municipal infrastructure 'crisis'. Municipalities had become responsible for close to 60% of the public capital stock but lacked the fiscal capacity to maintain and reinvest in this stock. As a result, a variety of local infrastructure systems, including mass transit, had become degraded and strained by age and growth-related pressures. In 2003, for example, Mirza and Haider estimated that the municipal transit infrastructure deficit was approximately $23 billion, reflecting years of deferred spending (Mirza and Haider 2003). However, notable as this deficit was in quantitative terms, the attachment of real policy significance to transit infrastructure has depended on debates about its *qualitative* dimensions. In other words, why is the state of transit infrastructure an important policy concern for government?

Between 2001 and 2010 governments in Canada increased subsidies for mass transit from less than $3 billion to nearly $8 billion. The question, then, is what policy objectives have governments set for this spending and what kind of policy vision is guiding investments? In Canada, the resolution of these questions has been a scaled process. First, the rise of infrastructure policy on the agenda has depended on the roll-out of new ideas about the importance of cities as sites for economic, environmental and social governance. Second, the institutionalization of this new generation of transit policy has involved various forms of multi-scalar negotiation and collaboration. Most impactful has been the use of tri-level infrastructure partnerships as a vehicle for the development of large strategic projects. The use of collaborative funding models requires governments to develop a degree of shared understanding about the objectives of spending. With respect to local development politics, the power and influence of actors who share this multi-scalar understanding of the policy environment will be enhanced because their narrative about the logic of city-building will be supported in both a discursive and material sense by other scales of government. What the next section will show is that the (re)engagement of federal and provincial governments in transit infrastructure policy has been guided by a 'consensual' political vision that emphasizes the relationship between sustainable urban planning and 'creative' or human capital-oriented strategies for knowledge-based economic development.

The Ideational Politics of Federal and Provincial Transit Policy in Ontario

In Canada, the definition of the 'sustainable city' and its articulation in relation to other policy areas emerged as part of the development of a broader urban agenda. In the early 2000s debate about the state of municipal infrastructure began to receive increased attention with the release of a spate of reports documenting a mounting infrastructure deficit (Mirza and Haider 2003; Vander Ploeg 2003). While municipal representatives had been drawing attention to infrastructure financing challenges since the 1970s, the issue found its way onto federal and provincial policy agendas as part of a wider discussion about the importance of cities as loci for

economic, social, and environmental policymaking. This discussion was itself part of a larger transnational intellectual movement arguing that in light of demographic shifts, the nature of productivity in leading economic sectors, and new environmental realities cities were becoming key sites of 21st century governance. Concerns about the municipal infrastructure 'crisis' thus took place within a particular intellectual and discursive context that developed through a broader debate about why the condition of Canadian cities was an important public policy issue.

The Canadian urban policy community became particularly active in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Influential reports and policy analyses were produced and debated by the Canadian Policy Research Network, the Conference Board, the Canada West Foundation, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the National Roundtable on the Economy and Environment. These analyses, which ultimately set the terms for government re-engagement with transit infrastructure policy, cohered into a policy paradigm that Neil Bradford later termed 'innovative liberalism' (Bradford 2008). The innovative liberal or progressive-competitive paradigm offers an urbanized third-way position between the policies of the post-war welfare state and the fiscal austerity and social policy retrenchment that characterized governance for much of the 1980s and 90s. This paradigm begins by accepting the exigencies of intensifying inter-spatial competition for investment and export share, but it argues that enhanced competitiveness can be reconciled with environmental sustainability and greater social inclusion or equality.

The city or city-region is conceptualized as the ideal scale for developing these policy synergies for two reasons. First, it is the site where many of the social and material processes that policymakers want to affect take place. For example, a 2007 Conference Board report, which involved contributions from, or consultations with, many of the leading urban policy thinkers in Canada, argued that not only were cities the drivers of prosperity in a 'knowledge-based economy', they were also sites where failures of social integration found their clearest expression and where myriad forms of environmentally damaging activity originated (Golden and Brender 2007). Thus if policymakers aspired to a more competitive, inclusive, and sustainable society it was important to focus attention where relevant processes came to ground. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the city or city-region is seen to be a scale where social and environmental sustainability policies can be effectively reconciled with the requirements of competitiveness. In other words, social and environmental policies pose less of an economic risk at the urban scale because properly conceived they can complement efforts to cultivate structural or systemic competitiveness (see Jessop 2002; Kamal-Chaoui 2009). For example, while 'smart growth' encourages less energy intensive lifestyles and is thus a key element in making cities more environmentally sustainable, this planning paradigm has also been discursively linked to new metropolitan growth projects and economic development strategies based on interactive learning, cluster development, and talent attraction (see Gertler 2004; Krueger and Buckingham 2012).

Investments in transit infrastructure have become an important constituent part of this agenda. As an economic development tool, mass transit is increasingly seen as an 'infrastructural fix' to pervasive problems of growth management. Whereas the post-war infrastructure and development paradigm relied heavily on road-based infrastructure to accommodate growth, this strategy is now seen by many planners to be ineffective, (because new road capacity tends to activate latent demand) (Goodwin et al. 1991). As the economic threat of congestion has intensified, investments in 'sustainable' transit solutions have come to be seen as critical to improving the efficiency and speed of circulation, reducing turnover time, and improving labour market productivity (Goodwin 2001; Hanson 2004). At the same time, there are social benefits that are also supposed to attach to these investments. First, smart growth and coordinated

planning make cities more 'livable' in the sense that daily reproduction is easier, less time consuming and more satisfying. This improvement of everyday lived experience is particularly important where 'quality of life' is seen to be an economic asset that helps to attract 'creative' talent and investment. Second, investments in sustainable mass transit infrastructure often promise to improve the mobility of vulnerable residents who depend on collective transportation to access jobs, services, and recreation.

Taken together, the expansion of transit networks offers an elegant and holistic solution to concerns about economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. The 'good city' has become one that is competitive, inclusive, and planned according to 'smart' and transit-oriented principles. Within this paradigm, however, the pillars of sustainable development are articulated in a particular way, such that there is an implied hierarchy of values and prioritization of policy objectives. Transit infrastructure has been conceptualized first and foremost as a tool for supporting growth and enhancing competitiveness in a context of intensifying inter-spatial competition. The primary objective of transit is thus to reduce congestion, promote strategic redevelopment, and to support the lifestyle ambitions of a 'creative class' (Golden and Brender 2007; Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2007).

Transit Policy and a Federal New Deal

Prior to 2001 the federal government was not meaningfully engaged in the transit policy arena. This reflected both limited federal infrastructure spending in general and also a more specific belief that transit and urban policy were properly areas of provincial jurisdiction. Beginning in the 1970s, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities began to raise concerns about municipalities' capacity to finance local infrastructure, including transit, within the confines of a limited revenue base (FCM 1976). Calls for greater federal investment gained little traction at a time when the federal government was trying to disengage from its experiments with integrated urban policy. Concerns about municipal infrastructure, however, did begin to rise on the federal agenda in the 1990s. At first, the advent of omnibus federal infrastructure programs was seen as a way to provide counter-cyclical public stimulus (Andrew and Morrison 1995). By the early 2000s, however, infrastructure spending had become a component of a wider debate about the prospects of federal urban policy. This debate was itself a reflection of a broader transnational discussion about the role of cities and regions in 21st century political economies. The translation of these ideas into the Canadian context included calls for a more robust federal urban agenda, both in order to flow more resources into urban-related fields and to bring greater coherence to existing policies.

Paul Martin's 'New Deal' was the eventual outcome of the debate and this policy framework reinforced the conceptual move towards defining the 'sustainable city' as the object of urban policy in Canada. The fiscal centrepiece of the 'New Deal' was a series of infrastructure spending measures that focused specifically on investing in sustainable municipal infrastructure, including the dedication of portion of the federal fuel excise tax and enhanced spending through omnibus infrastructure programs. The federal commitment to municipal infrastructure spending, particularly after 2003, acknowledged a role for the federal government in addressing the municipal infrastructure deficit, and this has included significant new investments in urban mass transit. Between 2003 and 2011, and despite a partisan shift, the federal government committed over $6 billion in transit capital spending. Money has flowed through a number of instruments, but large strategic projects have been pursued primarily through cost-shared multi-level

infrastructure partnerships (see Steinberg forthcoming). The use of a partnership model has in turn elevated the importance of developing shared policy understandings across scales.

The Liberals' commitment to renewal was clearly grounded in an intellectual framework that focused special attention on the economic policy significance of sustainable infrastructure. While the 'New Deal' was very much framed in the kind of post-political language of sustainable or progressive urbanism, Stoney has argued that as a policy program it represented a distinctly business-oriented economic agenda. He shows that while the urban agenda discussed the diversity of challenges faced by municipalities, including integration and inequality, crumbling physical and social infrastructure, and degraded environments, it was economic concerns about the relationship between competitiveness and the health of cities that propelled federal policy (Stoney 2006). Bradford echoes this analysis in arguing that Martin's urban agenda was strongly influenced by the brand of 'innovative liberalism' disseminated by institutions like the OECD. This policy paradigm took as its starting point the idea that the health of cities depended on their ability to engage in successful competition with other cities and regions. This distinctly neoliberal assumption was then flanked by discourses and policy ideas that worked to reconcile the exigencies of competitiveness with greater social inclusion and environmental sustainability (Bradford 2008).

The transit infrastructure 'crisis' was ascribed real policy significance through the development of a series of research reports that helped to set the federal urban agenda. Significantly, these policy reports were all rhetorically committed to 'triple-bottom-line' conceptions of urban sustainability. For example, the Liberals' Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues argued that investments in transit infrastructure were central to a vision of urban sustainability premised on "…integrating and balancing economic competitiveness, social harmony, a sustainable environment, and a high quality of life for all Canadians" (Caucus Task Force 2002). The National Roundtable on the Economy and the Environment used similar language when it argued that there were many compelling reasons for the federal government to invest in transit, including the advancement of climate change policy, the improvement of trade and productivity, the attraction of creative talent, and the promotion of opportunities for low income residents (NRTEE 2003; see also Brender 2007 and EACC 2006). Yet despite these rhetorical commitments, it was clear that ideas about how transit might improve trade and productivity and stimulate redevelopment were far more developed than ideas about how transit might contribute to more inclusive and accessible cities. This was reflected in the fact that recommendations tended to focus on capital investments in rapid transit infrastructure, which promised to improve modal share, reduce congestion and promote the development 'vibrant' and amenity-rich communities. Little thought, on the other hand, was given to strategies for how to improve network access in areas of concentrated poverty, how to insulate residents from rising user fees, how to ensure that new infrastructure did not lead to regressive forms of 'transit-oriented gentrification', or how to promote transit as a form of social (rather than simply physical) infrastructure.

Jeanne Wolfe argues that 21st century federal urban policy has been driven by the perception that unhealthy cities undermine efforts to cultivate economic competitiveness. While issues of poverty and environmental degradation remain on the agenda, these problems have been considered subordinate to overriding economic concerns (Wolfe 2003). The conceptualization of sustainable infrastructure and transit policy is consistent with this reading, but also offers a clearer picture of the policy vision that is guiding federal interventions. The problem of 'unsustainable' cities is first and foremost that they undermine economic

development objectives by enabling inefficient land-use and transportation patterns. These patterns not only lead to congestion and poor circulation, but they undermine the vitality of inner-city areas that have become integral to the live-work dynamics of knowledge-based economic sectors (see EACC 2006; Caucus Task Force 2001; NRTEE 2003). This framing is important for a number of reasons. First, it has encouraged the wider dissemination of a conception of the 'good' sustainable city as one based on vibrant central cities oriented to the lifestyle preferences of a 'creative class'. In practical terms, this has meant that federal policymakers have been more receptive to projects that espouse these goals, even when they fail to meet cost-benefit criteria. For example, while Kitchener-Waterloo's light-rail project failed a traditional cost-benefit analysis, it was able to receive funding on the basis of an alternative metric that incorporated more of the intangible and speculative elements that were emphasized by local boosters. Secondly, the development of large transit infrastructure projects through cost-shared infrastructure partnerships significantly enhances the power of local coalitions who share an understanding of the problem posed by 'unsustainability' and share a belief about the role of transit in terms of redevelopment and fostering competitiveness.

The Roll-out of Transit Policy in Ontario
While federal engagement in transit policy has been integral to the development of a new generation of urban transit infrastructure, as principal regulator and funding agent, the ebb and flow of provincial policy has perhaps been most significant. Over the last 15 years, renewed interest in transit policy has figured prominently in debates about the logic of a new 'sustainable' infrastructure and development paradigm in Ontario. While the seeds of change were actually planted by Harris era Conservatives, the provincial transit policy landscape changed most dramatically with the election of the McGuinty Liberals in 2003. The Liberals were carried into office in part on the basis of an infrastructure and regional planning policy platform that promised a more aggressive approach to containing sprawl, moderating congestion and creating conditions for urban-based prosperity (see Eidelman 2010; Macdonald and Keil 2012). In keeping with this platform, the Liberals have shown a commitment to planning concepts like 'smart growth' and have been willing to channel significant resources into transit infrastructure development.

The Liberal approach to smart growth is reflected most clearly in the Places to Grow Act, a growth plan developed for the Greater Golden Horseshoe Area (which includes Kitchener-Waterloo). The plan laid out a series of land-use and development regulations that emphasized 'smart' planning practices based on land-use intensification, mixed development, and a transit-oriented urban and regional transportation system (Places to Grow 2006). An analysis of the growth plan, however, suggests that the government's approach to smart growth is based on a very particular reading of the problem of 'unsustainability'. For example, the Ministry of Infrastructure explained that:

> The Growth Plan is not just an urban planning document. It is fundamentally an economic development tool. Cities and urban regions are fundamental to national and international prosperity.

Furthermore,

> To attract the best and brightest individuals in this increasingly knowledge-based economy, it is crucial that this region offer a high quality of life, good transportation

options and a healthy environment. Increasingly, these are the urban qualities that attract entrepreneurs and innovators. (Ministry of Infrastructure 2011).

This new infrastructure and development paradigm reflected the Liberals' brand of 'third way' politics (Coulter 2009). For the Liberals, growing congestion and declining cities were taken as evidence of the failures of a generation of 'roll-back' neoliberalism. Instead the government argued that strategic public investments were necessary to stimulate and manage growth, to create jobs, to safeguard the environment, and to preserve citizens' quality of life (Building a Better Tomorrow 2004). Growth management and infrastructure development policies, however, were strongly conditioned by prevailing new regionalist economic theory, and in particular those versions which emphasized the relationship between knowledge-based economic development and the cultivation of the lifestyles, consumption patterns and aspirations of 'creative' workers (Florida 2002). Thus while the Liberals stressed the importance of an expanded role for the public sector in infrastructure development, the agenda remained firmly grounded in the logic of 'entrepreneurial urbanism' (see Harvey 1989).

This infrastructure logic has been reflected in the way that the government has defined the failure of the postwar paradigm and the way that they have conceptualized transit as a policy solution. Since 2003 the Liberals have invested over $13 billion in mass transit infrastructure, with large projects under development in the Greater Toronto Area, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Ottawa. At a rhetorical level, these investments have been presented in 'win-win-win' terms typical of sustainable development discourses; they promise to reduce commute times, dramatically cut greenhouse gas emissions, make life more affordable, and improve population health (Building Together 2011). This kind of post-political framing has become common in the transit sector and reinforces depictions of 'good' cities that are simultaneously economically competitive, socially inclusive, and environmentally benign. In practice however, certain objectives have been given priority. In analyzing the Liberals' various infrastructure programs and growth management plans it is clear that transit policy has been oriented around two primary objectives. The first has been to invest in transit as a solution to growing concerns about congestion, which poses an economic threat in both a narrow sense (by slowing circulation), and in a less tangible way by reducing quality of life in the region. A second objective has been to use mass transit infrastructure as a tool to structure land use and the built environment. Here, transit infrastructure is valued as an instrument that can stimulate private develop in strategic locations like downtowns and new suburban city centers.

The Politics of Light Rail Transit in Kitchener

In 2011, the regional government of Kitchener-Waterloo approved a plan for an $818 million light-rail mega-project that spans the municipalities of Kitchener and Waterloo and extends bus-rapid-transit service into Cambridge. The project is financed through a cost-shared tri level infrastructure partnership and thus represents a collaborative effort between municipal, regional, provincial and federal governments. The complexity of this collaboration should not be understated. First, in order to access funding, the regional government had to demonstrate the merits of the project to its funding partners. While this was not an entirely smooth process, the plan ultimately secured $565 million from federal and provincial governments who came to share an understanding about the potential benefits of the project to members of the Kitchener-

Waterloo community. Second, the plan had to secure local support in order to finance the region's $253 million contribution. This proved to be a politically divisive process that brought various actors together to debate the logic of a new transit-oriented infrastructure and development paradigm. While transportation planning is typically a technocratic matter that is hidden from public view, the LRT debate focused attention on the strategic implications of transportation infrastructure policy. For one set of actors, the LRT became an object of shared purpose, creating a new form of local 'sustainable' development coalition. For these actors, LRT was seen as a transformational investment that would improve local quality of life and make the region more sustainable and competitive. For opponents, however, the light-rail project represented the worst kind of speculative development politics, with investments based on wildly inflated expectations and promises.

History of Downtown Redevelopment Efforts

The long running trend towards the decentralization of commercial and residential activity in the Kitchener-Waterloo region has, as in many mid-sized cities, been critical in establishing the context in which current development politics play out. In Kitchener, decentralization has been driven by the interaction of socio-economic restructuring, changing planning paradigms, and the technological evolution of the transportation system. In the early post-war years, the city's relative dependence on manufacturing industries left central areas particularly vulnerable to the threat of commercial suburbanization. The introduction of mass production techniques and freight-based distribution altered the land-use requirements of manufacturers, encouraging many to locate on less costly suburban greenfield sites. In more recent decades, the effects of deindustrialization have also had a profound effect on Kitchener's built environment (Bunting and Filion 1999). While in the post-war era there were a range of light industries located around the Kitchener downtown, including textiles, small electronics manufacturing, and food processing, these industries have now been largely replaced by education, service, and high technology industries that have taken root in the suburbs.

The technological evolution of the transportation network has worked to reinforce these trends. In Kitchener-Waterloo, only 5% of residents use mass transit for the journey to work. This level of transit use is extremely low, even when compared to other mid-sized cities like Quebec and Winnipeg, where modal shares are 12 and 14% (Statistics Canada 2011). The underdevelopment of the transit system is significant because the battle over the metropolitan distribution of economic activity has been intimately bound up with strategic decisions about transportation infrastructure technology (Henderson 2004). The deep institutionalization of automobility has been a critical factor in enabling commercial and residential suburbanization. Because space constraints in central cities limit automobile access, the health of downtowns typically depends on the extension of mass transit networks (which in turn helps to explain why transit infrastructure projects often figure prominently in renewal efforts) (Roberston 1995; Altshuler 2003).

In light of this secular trend towards decentralization and suburbanization, downtown redevelopment efforts in Kitchener have long been prominent on the local agenda. In the early 1960s, CBD merchants and the local chamber of commerce became preoccupied with the growing threat of competition from suburban shopping centers and the wider suburbanization of metropolitan commercial activity. An ambitious downtown renewal project was put forward as a way to try to maintain the CBD share of regional retail activity. The municipal government, in collaboration with central city commercial interests, proposed a classic 1960's era renewal

scheme based on the redevelopment of 450 acres of the downtown built environment. At a public cost of $80 million, the proposal depended on $40 million in federal renewal funds. However, when the popularity of the renewal concept faded in the wake of local opposition across the country, federal funding evaporated and the plan was scaled back accordingly (Filion and Bunting 1993).

In the early 1970s, renewal was back on the agenda when council approved a new plan developed by a public-private committee dominated by downtown commercial interests. The plan involved the use of public lands to develop a central city shopping center to compete with suburban retailers. The project won out against serious community opposition and vocal criticisms of the insular nature of local regime politics (Pasternak 1975). Notably, at this time redevelopment plans were tied to the expansion of parking facilities and the development of a ring road designed to improve automobile access. This strategy ultimately failed, however, as even with improved access, central retailers struggled to compete with the accessibility advantages of suburban commercial sites (Filion and Bunting 1993). Government supported efforts to draw commercial and residential development downtown continued, albeit on a smaller scale, through the 80s and 90s with various proposals to use public real estate development as a lever for commercial expansion. These efforts have born little fruit, however, and the goal of revalorizing land in the core remains prominent on city's agenda.

The most recent incarnation of downtown redevelopment efforts have been inspired by successes in the neighbouring municipality of Waterloo. Elites in Kitchener are now tying downtown redevelopment not to shopping malls and ring roads, but instead to university campuses, the high technology sector, and new forms of residential development. Importantly, the economic base of this redevelopment strategy has been tied to a new technological infrastructure paradigm that looks to rail-based mass transit technology as an instrument for improving accessibility and encouraging investment. This ideational shift has altered the political landscape in the city and region by creating conditions for a new kind of 'consensual' politics. This 'consensual' politics of transit infrastructure development integrates sustainable planning strategies with 'creative' regeneration and knowledge-based economic development initiatives, and as a result it has opened up space for a broader and more inclusive political coalition that combines knowledge sector industries and local progressive movements with traditional central city interests.

Smart Growth, Light Rail, and Downtown Redevelopment

A long running concern of Kitchener's corporate regime has been to improve the downtown's share of regional economic activity. The attachment of many elites to growth management, sustainable planning, and transit-oriented development concepts can be read as the latest iteration of these efforts. The turn to 'smart growth' as a planning concept is significant because it has the potential to redefine the spatial balance of power by changing how growth is distributed. The post-war infrastructure and development paradigm privileged suburban landowners and commercial interests by subsidizing development in a variety of ways, including through the expansion of the public road system, the extension of trunk networks, land assembly, and various forms of tax incentive. In addition to direct and indirect subsidies, governments institutionalized a planning and development framework that gave developers, homebuyers, and businesses unimpeded access to new greenfield sites. From the perspective of central city interests what is most significant about new growth management frameworks is that they assume a sharp reduction in greenfield development. Instead, they aim to channel development into

existing built-up areas through various forms of intensification, including brownfield development, infill, and the repurposing of undervalorized uses.

In Kitchener-Waterloo, the turn to a smart growth planning framework began in earnest with the adoption of a report titled *Smart Growth and the Region of Waterloo: Planning our Future.* This strategy reflected new thinking about how to cope with the challenges implied by rapid population growth. With a population of less than 440 000 in 2001, planners estimated that the population would swell to over 700 000 by 2031. To accommodate this rapid population growth politicians and planners needed to make a strategic decision about how and where to channel development. A singular focus on greenfield development was considered undesirable. The accommodation of another 300 000 residents would place enormous pressure on local agricultural and recreational lands, would impose significant public costs in terms of infrastructure development, and would be inconsistent with the normative logic of sustainability (Region of Waterloo 2003; on the latter see Gunder 2006). The growth management paradigm was given added momentum in 2006 when the provincial government passed the Places to Grow Act which set intensification targets for region. From this point forward, planning staff emphasized the need to adapt local practices to meet new provincial rules.

From the perspective of Kitchener's corporate regime, there were two specific policies embedded in this growth management framework that were of particular significance. First, the regional government, in collaboration with individual municipalities, articulated a clear goal of revitalizing downtowns. In order to channel residential and employment growth into existing built-up areas, governments wanted to focus on creating vibrant and attractive communities in which people would want to 'live, work, and play'. In addition to arts and heritage planning, this involved a policy of development charge exemptions for investments in core areas. Second, the region committed through its growth and transportation master plans to develop light-rail transit along the central transit corridor linking the municipalities of Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge (Region of Waterloo 2003; 2011). The emphasis on rail technology, as opposed to bus rapid transit, was significant because the value of rail was seen to lie in its ability to stimulate reinvestment and support residential and employment intensification objectives (Region of Waterloo 2011).

The 'Consensual' Coalition Politics of Transit Infrastructure Development
Downtown development interests in Kitchener seized on this turn in planning and infrastructure development logics. They began to incorporate the ideas of sustainable planning and transit-oriented development into wider economic development strategies that were based on sectoral upgrading and the attraction of knowledge-based industries. In effect, the corporate regime took this sustainable planning discourse and melded it with a new economic development strategy. In adopting this strategic frame, the traditional downtown renewal coalition was able to attach itself to a much broader base of political support, including elements of the region's middle-class progressive movements. Local environmental organizations, for example, had long been vocal supporters of the idea of light rail transit, believing that this was the most promising technology for promoting meaningful changes in land use and transportation patterns. Equally important was the fact that the 'consensual' narrative saw sustainable (re)development as part and parcel of building a 'creative' city powered by technology sector workers. This, in turn, allowed downtown-oriented elites to make common cause with powerful regional economic interests who had not historically seen their future as bound up with the fate of Kitchener's central city.

The 'consensual' strategy linking sustainable planning to knowledge-based economic development is clearly embedded in the city's economic development strategy and downtown action plan, (which was developed in conjunction with the downtown BIA). The 2011 economic development strategy identifies five areas of focus. Four are based on encouraging knowledge-based economic development, including fostering start-ups, encouraging cluster formation, and attracting talent. The fifth area focuses on creating a dynamic downtown as a built space for this economic development model (City of Kitchener 2011). It is this need to create a suitable built environment for the city's new knowledge economy that has brought sustainable planning and transit-oriented development to the fore. Thus there is a strong emphasis on redeveloping city owned lands, encouraging developers to convert old industrial buildings into 'live-work' space, attracting retailers, and promoting vibrant street experiences. The goal is to encourage the construction of a downtown space that suits the needs of knowledge-based industries and their employees (City of Kitchener 2011; 2012).

The regional plan for an $818 million light rail mega-project is now seen as one of the prime spurs that will encourage the development of this built environment. The role of LRT as a component of a wider redevelopment and rejuvenation project has been emphasized by councillors who note that transit development is becoming about much more than how people move about the city and region. According to Kitchener councillor Jim Widemen, the new light rail line is in fact "…not primarily a people-mover. It's a way for us to attract redevelopment into the downtown area" (quoted in Outhit 2011). The relationship between LRT, downtown redevelopment, and the city's new knowledge-based economic development strategy finds its clearest expression in plans for a new 'innovation district'. The downtown intersection of King and Victoria Streets has been identified as the location of a new multi-modal transit station that will connect the LRT line with regional GO Transit services. The city has developed a detailed plan for the development of the area around the station into an 'innovation district'. The goal is to develop over 5 million square feet of office, residential, and retail space to house 15000 new knowledge-sector jobs and 4000 new residents (Region of Waterloo 2012). According to Rod Regier, Kitchener's executive director of economic development, the transit-oriented development of the innovation district will create "one of the most significant concentrations of creative talent anywhere in Canada. We think it's a game changer in terms of economic development potential" (quoted in Pender 2011).

Importantly, the link between transit-oriented development, downtown revitalization, and knowledge-based economic regeneration goes far beyond a strategy for land upgrading. It also focuses explicitly on the cultivation of new urban lifestyles as a tool for 'attracting talent'. This discourse around talent attraction has been critical to expanding the base of the downtown redevelopment coalition, allowing it to garner support from representatives of the technology sector, (which has not always been focused on the quality of central city environments). Organizations representing the regional tech sector have become strong proponents of the light-rail plan, arguing that these investments are critical to engaging in the increasingly intense competition for talent. For example, after surveying its members, Iain Klugmen, the president and CEO of Communitech, a prominent voice for the sector, argued that "as one of Canada's leading tech clusters, this community needs to support existing workers and attract new talent by implementing fast, clean, green and affordable transit solutions…The proposed LRT option is the best option for creative talent attraction…" (Communitech 2011). Expressing a similar argument, Canada's Technology Triangle, (the regional public-private marketing organization), threw its support behind LRT, arguing that "there is intense international competition for talent,

and we need to offer great infrastructure and lifestyle to remain competitive" (quoted in the Record 2011).

The Politics of Ratepayer Opposition

Opponents of the light-rail project struggled to counteract this 'consensual' narrative. The most prominent opponent of LRT was a ratepayer coalition that organized under the banner of Taxpayers for Sensible Transit (T4ST). T4ST became a dissenting voice in a context where many other influential interests had accepted the speculative logic of the LRT project. T4ST represented the large, but organizationally diffuse, bloc of residents who, while responsible for financing the capital expenditure, did not believe that they would derive any real benefit from the project. They argued that planners, regional elites, and economic development staff had overestimated the potential benefits of light rail transit technology and as a result the dramatic transformations envisioned by boosters were unlikely to be realized.

T4ST worked to transform the terms of the debate by shifting discussions away from some of the aspirational discourses and instead focused on narrow and more direct cost-benefit calculations. For example, Peter Shawn Taylor, an editor at Maclean's magazine and a prominent public face of T4ST argued that planners in Waterloo were suffering from what he called 'light rail transit syndrome:

> Light rail transit is beloved by bureaucrats and planners for its sleek and modern look that provides the aura of a big-city amenity. Those susceptible to LRTS claim it can transform modest cities into booming metropolises by instantly boosting transit usage, curbing congestion, spurring rapid downtown development and attracting young mobile workers of the Richard Florida ilk (Taylor 2011).

From this perspective, city and regional elites had succumbed to a speculative fantasy. In reality, the scale of the project and choice of technology was entirely inappropriate for the *transportation* needs of the region. Another member of T4ST and frequent public commentator, John Shortreed, argued before Council and in regional newspapers that a bus based system was far more appropriate given the region's size and the scope of existing transit service. Rather than assume the costs and risks of a rail-based mega-project, the region should prioritize express buses which, while not yielding the same level of land-value uplift, would provide a greater ratio of benefits to costs (Shortreed 2012).

Finally, T4ST also raised an equity argument. They suggested that transit service was primarily of value to students and low income dependent-users, and thus the 90% of residents who depended on automobiles to coordinate their daily routines of reproduction would derive little benefit from the project. In effect, the ratepayer coalition came to represent those residents whose daily lives had become grounded in the logic of the post-war infrastructure and development paradigm. As governments began to rethink these planning and development premises, spending projections were reoriented in order to channel spending away from auto-based infrastructure and towards transit. Projections suggested that the regional government would spend more on transit than on roads over a 20 year horizon, marking a radical reallocation of resources (Region of Waterloo 2012). The light rail project became a site, then, where those residents who were disempowered by the unsettling of the postwar paradigm were able to express their opposition.

The influence of this ratepayer opposition peaked during the 2010 municipal elections when it appeared that many councillors were moderating their support for the light rail proposal.

T4ST was influential here as well, drawing attention in the media to rising property tax burdens, showing that rates would rise 10% in order to cover the principle and debt costs of transit expansion. As the debate over property tax rates intensified, public opinion appeared to turn against the project (Ipsos-Reid 2011). This resulted in campaign debates in which proponents were either forced onto the defensive or had to equivocate on their position.

The Visionaries Triumph

Yet despite the fact that public opinion remained divided, regional council ultimately voted solidly in favour of the LRT project in 2011. In the end, ratepayer opposition was not able to overcome or sufficiently discredit the 'consensual' narrative. To be sure, this reflected the continuing political strength of Kitchener's corporate regime. However, it would be a mistake to ignore the role of ideational conflict as a basis for solidifying coalition support around the sustainable revitalization of downtown Kitchener or as an instrument for marginalizing opponents. There were two elements to this. First, proponents often pointed to the fact that the local share of the capital costs was only $250 million. Not only would this funding disappear if council opted out of the project, but concerns about costs and benefits were being misrepresented because the region stood to reap the benefits of an $800 million investment for the cost of only $250 million. In this way, material and ideological support from senior scales of government helped local boosters to marginalize opponents who criticized the project as too expensive, ambitious, or speculative.

Second, supporters consistently worked to frame concerns about costs as the parochial fears of people who lacked vision and failed to see the potential long-term benefits. For example, Avvey Peters of Communitech argued:

> People are fixated on the price tag…Price tag aside, there are two other dimensions that are equally critical to the future prosperity of the community. There's the environmental element [and] there's also the cultural dimension. Critics of LRT think the conversation the community is having is about transportation infrastructure. It isn't. It's about people. Where they work, how they live, and our ability as a community to attract and retain them. Without modern public transportation infrastructure, we are simply going to forego the advantage in the war for talent. Let's face it – tech workers aren't moving to Waterloo Region for the great weather and the spectacular mountain view. For the tech community, Light Rail Transit is about far more than moving people up and down the King Street corridor. It's about improving our ability to attract and retain talent…LRT may not be the preferred option for a third of our current population in Waterloo Region. But it will overwhelmingly be the preferred option for the next generation of people who choose to live here.

For the visionaries, a narrow concern with cost-benefit ratios misses the intangible and long term benefits. Opponents are depicted as lacking the courage to make the kinds of bold decisions that can transform the city-building process. In an editorial in the Record, the board wrote:

> There are times when people refuse to passively sit back and let the future happen to them. Instead they reach out and decisively grab it. They create the future for themselves and those around them. And they make history…If this rail system lives up to the hopes of its advocates, it will unite the cities of Waterloo, Kitchener and Cambride as never

before. It will harness the energies of growth and development that are already here and make they work better than ever. It will proclaim to the world that this region is a place that understands and embraces the new technologies that improve life and protect the environment. And it will attract new talent, new investment and new, but smarter, growth (the Record 2011).

By framing the debate in this way, proponents were able to turn the LRT project into the kind of 'large purpose' that Clarence Stone acknowledges can motivate coalition building above and beyond what could be accomplished simply through the distribution of 'selective incentives'.

Conclusion

The object of this paper has been to examine the role of ideas in the development of large transit infrastructure projects. In focusing on transit policy, the goal is to analyze the shifting landscape of coalition politics in the 'sustainable city'. The sustainable city is here treated as an object of governance, but one which has polysemic qualities that allow actors to 'fill it in' with various kinds of content. What I have argued here is that this process of 'filling in' is a critical moment in the development of urban coalitions. By defining societal problems in particular ways, actors set the possibilities for collaboration and coalition building. It is by constructing a shared understanding of problems and a shared understanding of what should be done to solve them that actors are able to articulate a common agenda that they can collaborate on.

In Canada, 'sustainable' urban development policy in general, and transit infrastructure policy in particular, has been framed by a 'consensual' policy narrative. This policy narrative integrates sustainable planning and infrastructure development concepts with 'creative' strategies for urban regeneration and knowledge-based economic development. In the case of Kitchener, this consensual narrative formed the basis for a new 'sustainable' development coalition that tied together the interests of the traditional downtown-centered corporate regime with those of the regional high tech sector and middle-class progressive movements.

What the paper also emphasizes is that these narratives, discourses and policy frames emerge across scales of action and interact with the institutional apparatus of policymaking. Transit came onto the agenda at both federal and provincial scales embedded within this same 'consensual' framework. Federal and provincial policymakers have largely accepted that the importance of the city as an object of policymaking is first and foremost as a site for cultivating competitiveness, particularly in knowledge-based sectors. As a result, sustainable planning and transit infrastructure policies have been oriented towards improving circulation and developing or revitalizing urban built environments in a way that supports knowledge-based economic development. The construction of a common problem definition across scales, and the attachment of material resources to this policy frame, augments the power of local actors who share in this understanding. In the case of Kitchener, this multi-scalar policy consensus proved too powerful for local opponents to overcome.

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