

**The Elusive Regional Moment:  
Toronto's Search for Metropolitan Governance**

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## **1. Introduction**

I want to begin by emphasizing that this is a work in progress. I am about a year away from completion. My presentation today is a small slice of a much larger project.

I should note that my dissertation is not solely concerned with Toronto, nor is it a detailed historical treatment of the rise and fall of regional government here or elsewhere. If you want different takes on the Toronto region story covering various points in time, you would do better to consult Frances Frisken's recent book, *The Public Metropolis*.

Coming at this as a political scientist rather than as an historian, my empirical research agenda is in the service of contributing to theoretical debates about how institutions, policies, and plans are made in complex multi-level governance systems, and also how they change. I see the metropolitan scale as an especially intriguing domain in which to explore these questions.

I'm going to talk for about an hour, spending the first 15 minutes or so discussing the background and scope of my research. I promise I will get to the Toronto story soon enough.

## **2. Urbanization, metropolitanization, and metropolitan problems**

The core issue I am concerned with is the politics of *metropolitanization*. I want to distinguish this term from *urbanization*. By *urbanization*, I mean the historical process by which human habitation has become increasingly concentrated in ever larger agglomerations, or nodes of settlement: towns and cities as distinct from rural settlement based on agricultural production.

In 1815 there were only two urban agglomerations in the world with over 1 million inhabitants: London and Beijing. By 1900 there were about 15. By 1950, there were over 80. In 2000, there were over 400. Clearly there is a long-term global trend not just toward urbanization, but also concentration into ever-larger nodes of settlement.

I use the term *metropolitanization* to refer to the emergence of extended urban areas that span multiple political jurisdictions. This gives rise to a problem of collective action. When urban development spills over the borders of the central municipality into adjacent ones, the costs of pursuing a coherent scheme of urban development increase. As the number of agents in the system increases, so too do the costs of policy implementation. In many North American urban regions the cost has become prohibitive, leading to an absence of metropolitan or regional policy altogether.

Metropolitanization poses a distinct set of challenges to policymakers, the nature of which has changed over time:

The perennial challenge is institutional, or political: the problem of how to expand or work across municipal boundaries to solve issues of supra-municipal concern.

In the Depression and Second World War period and afterwards, the primary issue was infrastructural: the need for roads, potable water, sewers, and other infrastructure to accommodate population increase.

Later, with the rise of environmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s, people became concerned with damage to the natural environment through urbanization.

In recent years a new metropolitan challenge has emerged: the need for the interdependent parts of regions to pull together if the whole is to be competitive in a global economy.

### **3. The puzzle**

My interest in the metropolitan question is rooted in the proposition that the metropolitan scale of action has distinctive characteristics, which in turn have distinctive political consequences.

First, the metropolitan scale has the disadvantage of being new. Metropolitan governance is the most recent of all forms of state authority. In Western Europe and North America, the organic evolution of local government preceded the consolidation of the modern nation-state in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

It is only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, long after national, subnational, and local government institutions became entrenched, that metropolitanization posed a problem outside the very largest of the industrial cities like New York and London, whose populations had virtually exploded in the latter half of the 19th century.

As the new kid on the block, the metropolitan scale, and therefore institutions premised on it, often competes with these already existing components of the state.

It is also important to remember that local governments walk a tightrope between two legitimate but conflicting purposes. On the one hand, municipalities are seen as expressions of local self-government, deriving their legitimacy from local election and community choices. On the other hand, as creatures of senior governments, they function as deliverers or implementers of policies mandated from above.

The political conflict produced by this tension, which pits local autonomy against the senior government priorities, cannot be resolved. The introduction of a new institutional layer — the metropolitan — into the intergovernmental sandwich often exacerbates it, because, once entrenched, metropolitan authorities are seen to compete with both local governments and senior governments.

Second, following from the first point, the metropolitan scale has no claim on local affections. People identify with local government as an extension of a tangible and meaningful local community. They can relate to it. At best, the idea of being part of a metropolitan area is an abstraction. At worst, it is 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.

Finally, because urbanization is a fluid, ongoing process, the boundaries of a metropolitan sphere of influence are not static. If a metropolitan institution or policy is to remain effective over time, it must be able to adapt to changing spatial relationships.

My research works from the premise that a metropolitan area or metropolitan community should be understood as a 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 inventing a new scale of policy activity and of reproducing it through time distinguishes metropolitan-level from national- or provincial-level policymaking, where the spatial framework of governance is already fixed in place.

Politics has been called the art of the possible. The collective act of constructing metropolitan political space is limited by what relevant actors *think* is possible, which is in turn shaped by awareness of ideas and models, past experiences, the balance of interests, and the availability of resources.

Given the emerging recognition that globalization is reshaping, or “rescaling,” the activities of state and society, policymaking in complex multi-level and multi-scale governance environments will become more common, not less. The search for the elusive regional moment in our growing cities is a rich laboratory in which we can strive to better understand these dynamics.

The puzzle for me is threefold:

First, why exactly did attempts to establish new forms of metropolitan governance take different forms and occur at different times in similarly placed Canadian and American cities. This is all the more significant given that actors on both sides of the border were exposed to the same ideas and models of metropolitan planning and governance.

I reject the common notion that political culture is the primary driver of continental deviation. Rather, my goal is to examine the shifting constraints on thought and action imposed by different national and local institutional structures.

Second, looking more closely at the diffusion of ideas, how were models of planning and governance interpreted or misinterpreted in other places? I am especially interested in the influence in other settings of Metro Toronto, which has been described by one observer as “the jewel in the crown among metro authorities around the world.”

Finally, given today’s renewed interest in regionalism — though certainly not for the same purposes as 50 years ago — what can we learn from past regional moments?

One thing is certain: the search for metropolitan governance may rise or fall on the public agenda, but it will never go away for the simple reason that, as Andrew Sancton reminds us in his recent book, institutions can rarely keep up with the reality of urbanization, which is ongoing.

#### **4. Method**

To get at these puzzles, I decided to undertake a structured comparison, in national and international context, of the historical development of metropolitan institutions in four regions, two on each side of the border: Toronto, Vancouver, the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Portland. There are a number of reasons behind these choices, which I can elaborate on in the discussion if you like.

Briefly, the core idea driving case selection was to find pairs of regions that had similar populations, economic bases, and population growth rates in the middle of the century, when metropolitan problems first began to climb the public agenda. Toronto and the Twin Cities were very much alike until the late 1960s, while Vancouver and Portland have had much in common from the 1930s to the present.

Contextualized structured historical comparison has several advantages over the single-case studies that dominate the literature. These are often written by people deeply embedded in their local milieux. Comparison enables us to transcend the parochial preconceptions that stem from familiarity. Words mean different things in different places. What a county does, and how it is constituted, for example, is very different from state to state or province to province. Immersion in other cases can make the familiar seem strange, and illuminate historical processes and influences that are invisible to the local observer. It can make us ask “what if?” questions — questions about what would have happened if one or another factor had been different. Contingency is therefore very important to my analysis. While choice is always constrained, there is still choice, and it is worth figuring out what the constraints were.

Considering multiple cases in relation to each other has another positive effect: it enables us to see the workings of broader forces such as national legal frameworks, as well as the influence of ideas that travel across local and national boundaries.

For each of my four cases, I have conducted extensive archival research and interviews over the course of multi-week visits. I have also built large files of newspaper articles spanning the 1930 to 2000 period. Also in progress is an attempt to pair the historical work with original mapping and quantitative analysis, some of which you will see here.

Now, after this long introduction, I will turn to the Toronto case.

## 5. The Toronto story

We all think we know the Toronto story. The story of Metro, especially, has been mythologized, both locally and in the United States. In the usual telling of it, the creation of Metro and, later, the regional municipalities often appears to be inevitable. A closer reading of the history shows that Toronto's regional moments were contingent. In each case, there were a number of viable options on the table.

I'm going to spend the rest of my time today walking through the big events at a high level, posing "what if" questions along the way. Due to limited time and because I think it is more interesting and less known to us, I will focus on events before about 1975, and especially the lead-up to the creation of Metro

For some of you, this will be a review. For others, it may flesh out parts of the story you did not previously know about.

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### Figure 1: Context Map

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This map shows contemporary county and regional municipality boundaries. I'm going to follow accepted conventions when talking about particular geographic areas. I like to think of the region in terms of four concentric rings: the old City of Toronto, Metro, the GTA, and what is now called the Greater Golden Horseshoe. More recently, of course, we have come to fold Hamilton into the GTA, but I'm not going to do that here, because in the early years, Hamilton was very much separate from Toronto.

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### Figure 2: Growth 1901–2001

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I'm going to start by showing you population growth in the region over the whole of the twentieth century in order to identify when the pressures of metropolitanization emerged.

As you can see, the GTA, Metro, and City of Toronto areas tracked each other very closely through to about 1931, which is to say that most of the population of the Toronto's metropolitan area was contained within the City of Toronto and its immediate hinterland. The outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe, disconnected as it was from Toronto, experienced very little population growth in the early period.

From the middle 1920s, we start to see the outer areas of what became Metro grow, while the City's population levels off. The City undertook its last major annexation of adjacent territory in 1912. We can see how almost immediately the City lost control over its fringe.

The outer area of what would become Metro 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, 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, to 60% in 1951.

The two decades after the creation of Metro in 1953 were a time of explosive growth. Metro takes in the majority of GTA growth in this period, but as you can see, after 1961, the outer area of the GTA takes off. Metro accounted for 80% of GTA growth in the first decade, but only 50% in the second decade, 1961 to 1971. It was at this point that Metro ceased to be an effective regional government.

Between 1971 and 2001 we see Metro's population level off while the rest of the GTA explodes. At the same time, the Outer Ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe becomes increasingly pulled into Toronto's orbit, and its share of overall growth begins to grow as well.

So, to sum up, we can identify four main "regional moments" when we would expect problems associated with metropolitanization to climb the political agenda:

- The 1930s and 1940s, when the City's share of Metro area growth begins to decline.
- The 1960s, when Metro's share of GTA growth first begins to decline.
- The post-recession 1980s, when the GTA outside Metro really begins to take off.
- The late 1990s, when the GTA's share of GGH growth begins to decline.

And, indeed, this is what happened. I'll briefly talk about the each phase, focusing on the moments of choice: the options available and the constraints faced by relevant actors.

## **6. The Toronto region before the War**

We all know that Metro was created in 1953. What we know less about are the decades leading up to its creation. Let's zoom in closer on the 1901 to 1951 period.

One option would have been for the City of Toronto to keep annexing bits of its neighbours. This was foreclosed, however, by the City deciding that it had no interest in bearing the expense of servicing annexed fringe territory. The last major annexation occurred in 1912, though small ones occurred afterwards. Subsequent to this, York and Etobicoke (1850) townships were subdivided by a series of incorporations of towns and villages:

- Mimico (Village, 1911)
- New Toronto (Village, 1913)
- Leaside (Town, 1913)
- North York (Twp, 1922)
- Forest Hill (Village, 1923)
- East York (Twp, 1924)
- Swansea (Village, 1926)
- Long Branch (Town, 1930)

(Scarborough Township was untouched; Weston was incorporated as a Village in 1881.)

This creation of new municipalities in the urbanizing fringe was a product of the end of annexation. Had they not been discouraged from doing so, Baby Point, Kingsway, Cedarvale, and other well-to-do suburban neighbourhoods in York Township would have followed the example of Forest Hill and Swansea, and incorporated as independent municipalities.

In some cases this represented a defensive strategy to prevent eventual absorption into the City. North York seceded from York Township in order to escape the evils of the City. The Townships of Scarborough, York, and East York obtained private legislation to prohibit annexation by Toronto without a vote of residents, who would surely turn it down.

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### **Figure 3: Population Growth, 1901–1951**

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It is also important to recognize that in the 1930s and 1940s, Toronto-related urbanization was largely 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.

We can see here how the population of York County outside of the City of Toronto increased dramatically in fits and starts, doubling in the 1920s and, after the Depression, doubling again in the 1940s.

The adjoining counties of Peel, Ontario, and Durham were largely rural. (Recall that Ontario and Durham Counties were merged to form Durham Region in 1974.) Ontario County was an exception due to Oshawa. At no point did the City of Toronto touch any of the adjacent counties. The townships of Etobicoke, Scarborough, and North York had large quantities of rural land in them and the rest of York County was sparsely populated.

Perceptive American observers of Toronto that I have met always ask the same question: If Toronto was part of York County, why couldn't the County framework be used to solve the problem?

The answer, which no one has called attention to in the literature, is simple: Toronto was a *separated city*. Under the Baldwin Act of 1849 and subsequent Municipal Acts, Ontario cities of a certain population size could become administratively separate from their counties, taking on the functions of counties within their boundaries. The City of Toronto was not part of York County, which might otherwise have been an institutional bridge between the City, its immediate suburbs, and the rural fringe.

The contrast to the United States is clear. There are over 3,000 counties in the United States, but only 42 separated cities. 39 of these are in Virginia, whose law of municipal organization is, like Ontario's, derived from the medieval diocesan organization of the Church of England, separates all municipalities of city class from the counties that contain them.

In the U.S., county governments unite urban centres with their rural hinterlands. City people are directly represented in county decision-making, and city people pay taxes to the county. In Ontario, this is not the case. The premise is one of separation between urban and rural. This seems to have been borrowed from nineteenth-century thinking in Britain, which held that urban and rural areas have different needs and interests, and should be administratively separated from each other.

I believe that this institutional legacy — the existing structure of municipal organization in Greater Toronto — had important implications down the road, as I'll describe later on.

The first real attempt to grapple with the metropolitan problem was a Select Committee of the provincial legislature, appointed in January 1934 by lame duck Conservative premier George Henry and chaired by the Minister of Lands and Resources. This committee operated for only a few months before Henry's government was truncated by the landslide victory of Liberal Mitch Hepburn. The committee recommended the need for an overarching administration of the Metropolitan Area, though it did not recommend what form it should take.

It is of historical interest for two reasons. First, its secretary was a young Conservative lawyer by the name of Hollis Beckett. Evidently he believed strongly in the idea. Thirty years later, as chair of a legislative committee on local government law reform, he recommended the creation of regional governments based on the county system — in essence, what became the regional municipalities.

Second, it sought to look comprehensively at possible interventions to address the problems all metropolitan areas in the province: Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, and Windsor. The 1931 census, which the first to identify and collect data on metropolitan districts, was a real eye-opener for the government, as it showed how much growth was occurring beyond the boundaries of central municipalities. The desire to pursue a comprehensive strategy for all large cities is interesting — it would be 30 years before the province thought this comprehensively again.

The Metropolitan Area Committee of York County, which operated in concert with the Select Committee, was longer lasting and more productive. It recommended the creation of a two-tier Metropolitan County that would include Toronto, taking in the neighbouring towns and villages and the urban sections of the outer townships.



Early in Hepburn's first mandate, Minister of Municipal Affairs David Croll commissioned a study from U of T political science professor Arthur Plumptre on government for the metropolitan area. He rejected all options except provincially imposed amalgamation of all existing urban areas, followed by a policy of incremental annexation as the urban area grew. Nothing came of this proposal. Croll, who also held the Public Welfare portfolio at the height of Depression, resigned from cabinet two years later, in 1937, over the Oshawa autoworkers strike.

Metropolitan policy bubbled up again in 1938 and 1939 in Hepburn's second mandate. Reeve Grey of York, who had been chairman of the York County Committee, was appointed to lead a provincial Metropolitan Committee. The records of hearings by held this group show almost universal opposition to Plumptre's forced annexation proposal.

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**Figure 4: "The Ultimate Toronto?"**

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I love this 1939 map, which was published in relation to the debate at that time. Given what we know now, the characterization of this small area as the "ultimate Toronto" is almost laughable. Ultimately, the group was disbanded at the beginning of the War, apparently before submitting recommendations, and nothing further came of it.

The apparent deadlock between advocates of the two dominant options — amalgamation into a new unitary city versus the incorporation of the City into a metropolitan county — may go some way toward explaining why nothing much happened. Variations of these two options would appear many times in the coming decades. There also may have been little appetite for reform during the slow-growth Depression years. The principal metropolitan issue at that time was not coping with growth, but confronting the inequities in municipal poor relief programs and, indeed, the bankruptcies of 10 out of 13 municipalities in the Metro area.

Only at the end of the War, when economic and population growth returned, did interest in metropolitan affairs re-emerge in earnest. In 1946, the province passed the modern Planning Act, which included provision for intermunicipal planning boards. In addition, municipal legislation was amended to permit the creation by municipalities of joint service bodies on a voluntary basis.

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**Figure 5: T&YPB proposal**

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After some study, the Toronto and York Planning Board, which was established by the province but given to York County and the City to operate, concluded in 1949 that the City and all County municipalities south of Steeles — but excluding Etobicoke, the three Lakeshore municipalities, and Scarborough — should "unified", either by creating a joint services and planning board, a single City with boroughs, or a Metropolitan County.

At the same time, a Civic Advisory Council appointed by Toronto City Council reached similar conclusions in its own report, specifying a choice between a joint board, a borough system, or a Metropolitan County for the 13 municipalities in what would become Metro. This report seems to be the first time that adjacent townships in Peel and York Counties are mentioned.

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**Figure 6: Toronto's Amalgamation Proposal (1951)**

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The City of Toronto reversed its opposition to annexation by putting forward a proposal to “amalgamate” with its neighbours in whole or in part — in essence a giant annexation. For the next few decades, the City became the carrier of the Plumptre annexation option.

Facing 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, Premier Frost personally convened a Toronto Area Committee of local officials in 1950 with the hope that they would work out some kind of mutually acceptable accord.

Frost may have had a preferred option: he appointed A.E.K. Bunnell, consultant to the Community Planning Branch of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, who a year earlier had argued forcefully to the premier for complete amalgamation of the area from Port Credit in the west, Highway 7 in the north, and the outer border of Scarborough to the east.

Even though Frost gently threatened them with unilateral action by the OMB or possibly the legislature, the municipalities did not in the end come up with a unified proposal. A majority report agreed to by all members but the City of Toronto and the Town of Mimico called for the enlargement of York County to include the City of Toronto. The new Metropolitan County would be given authority to plan, construct, and operate water and sewer facilities, major roads and highways, public transportation, and garbage incineration.

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, as we all know, the OMB designed its own solution: Metro.

OMB chair Lorne Cumming basically adopted the Metropolitan County model proposed by York County, but chopped it off at Steeles, leaving a rump York County made up of rural municipalities. This led to a lengthy and rancorous fiscal debate, as York County was deprived of 80–90% of its assessment base at a stroke.

Cumming is clear in his decision that total amalgamation would produce a government too territorially large to be responsive to the community. Given the political cost associated with forcibly annexing existing municipalities to Toronto, the creation of an urban county was a politically appropriate option.

My question is, why didn't the government go with what would have been the path of least resistance: the inclusion of the City within York County? Surely it would have been administratively simpler to come out with one rather than two counties.

Looping back to an earlier point, I think an important ideational driver for severing the northern rural hinterland was the underlying British principle of separating urban and rural interests in municipal organization. In essence, Metro constitutes an enlarged separated city of York County, albeit one organized in a two-tier system. The language of “metropolitan county” used by various participants in the debate is important. In a number of the background documents dating back to the 1930s, there are references to the model of the London County Council established in 1889, which created an urban county from parts of the adjoining counties.

Another driver is the nature of the OMB’s decision-making process. The OMB was brought into the debate because Mimico and Toronto each submitted requests for its consideration. Mimico asked for creation of a Board of Management that would handle shared services for the 11 urban municipalities and the urban parts of Etobicoke and Scarborough. Toronto asked for amalgamation of a similar area into a single municipality. For whatever reason (and I hope more archival work will make this clear), York County did not submit its own request for the incorporation of Toronto into its two-tier framework. Working from the basis of the proposals put before it, there was no foundation for a York County-wide perspective. The deck was stacked in favour of a south-of-Steeles solution.

I’m not saying that the York County-wide solution would have been workable in the long term. What is worth asking is whether a Metropolitan York County incorporating the City of Toronto — whether it had always existed all along in an American-style county model or if it had been created in 1935 or 1939 or 1951 — would have altered future patterns of urban development and servicing. Had such an entity existed, Toronto’s urbanization might well have been contained within a single jurisdiction a decade or more longer than it did.

Another important factor to note is the very existence of the OMB. In other Canadian provinces at the time, the authority to approve or reject annexations and new incorporations more or less rested with the Minister of Municipal Affairs or the Cabinet. Due to a quirk of history, this power rested in Ontario in a semi-autonomous provincial board.

In the United States, annexation and incorporation could in principle be similarly regulated by the state, however many state constitutions and local government legislation provided for a regime of self-regulation: new municipal corporations could be created and territory annexed by approval of local electors. I think it important that the two states I happen to be looking at, Minnesota and Oregon, both established municipal boards after studying the Ontario model. What’s interesting is that they were created in response to a rash of small incorporations in the suburban fringe areas of their major cities, but not early enough to forestall a degree of governmental fragmentation beyond what occurred in Toronto. Had they had these bodies earlier, their own regional moments might have turned out differently.

What if Ontario did not have the OMB and there had been a lower threshold for municipal incorporation? First, we might have had another half dozen or dozen municipalities south of Steeles by 1950, which certainly would have complicated the picture.

Second, the Ontario government would have had to have undertaken even more extraordinary measures to create Metro. The OMB served two purposes in the process. It generated the policy proposal. This is something the government may not have been able to do itself, and it may not have had the appetite to appoint a one-off royal commission or equivalent to do the same.

Also, by operating at arm's length from the government, the OMB provided political cover and diffused dissent. In over two years of hearings it collected something like three million words of depositions and hundreds of written submissions. Nobody could say they weren't heard. The government could take the recommendations and run with them without enduring the political pain of putting them together.

## **7. The 1960s: Regional development and local government review**

As we move into the 1960s and 1970s, we see the pressure rise to expand Metro's sphere of influence. We can see again here how the population of the GTA outside Metro began to grow, especially after 1961.

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### **Figure 7: Metro Toronto Planning Board jurisdiction**

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At this point I should emphasize that the 1953 Metropolitan Toronto Act actually established two bodies: the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, whose boundaries are of course the same as today's amalgamated City of Toronto, and the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board, which has jurisdiction over the territory of Metro and also a band of adjacent townships in neighbouring counties. This Board, which reported to Metro Council, was charged with developing an official plan for the region, providing planning assistance to municipalities, and exercising control over rural subdivision. Its boundary was set through provincial regulation.

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### **Figure 8: Population growth 1951–2001**

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As you can see here, the MTPB Planning Area took in the majority of growth in the outer part of the GTA through 1961, but became less effective as time went on and more growth occurred outside its boundaries.

If a single authority was to continue to plan for growth in the Toronto region, either Metro, or the Metro Planning Area, or both, would have to have their territory expanded.

It is important to note that there was no magic in the two boundaries.

OMB chair Lorne Cumming concluded his 1953 decision with the observation that the boundary of the metropolitan area should be understood to be temporary given ongoing growth. Premiers Frost and Robarts made similar pronouncements.

Although a commission of inquiry led by Cumming in 1957 did not recommend one way or the other on boundary extension, 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.

In 1963, Premier John Robarts, who succeeded Leslie Frost in 1961, appointed the one-man Royal Commission of Carl Goldenberg to study Metro and recommend changes. Most of Goldenberg's report concerned the reorganization of municipalities and functions within Metro. But in the end, Goldenberg 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 comprehensive government solution for Peel and Halton.

He reiterated this point in a speech at the University of Toronto in October 1965, in which he argued against amalgamation of Metro into a single City, as the City of Toronto then advocated on the basis that it would eliminate the flexibility of the two-tier system, which can easily accommodate territorial expansion.

Digging through the records of the Commission's hearings, I have found a surprising appetite for boundary changes.

- As mentioned, the City of Toronto's preferred option was amalgamation of Metro's constituent parts into an enlarged Toronto, perhaps also including urbanizing parts of Pickering and what would become Mississauga. It also said that if the federation was to continue, it should certainly be expanded.
- York Township and Weston suggested annexing the land south of the 407 alignment to North York. York Township also recommended adding part of Peel County.
- North York itself similarly called for orderly annexation of south Vaughan and Markham.
- In its own submission, the Metro Toronto Planning Board called for the province to include rapidly growing Brampton-Bramalea in 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.

Given all of this support from municipalities and heavy-hitters in the private and public sector, why didn't the provincial government choose to enlarge Metro, the Planning Area, or both?

Important opposition appears to have come from at least two directions.

First, York County argued that further chipping away at its assessment base by hiving off the southern townships to Metro would undermine its ability to function. It also argued that the Metro Planning Board's extraterritorial reach was an affront to local autonomy and self-government, because suburban municipalities were not represented on the Board.

Second, Lorne Cumming, now acting as a special advisor to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, argued repeatedly in memoranda to the minister against extension. His motivations aren't clear. On the one hand, as the father of Metro, we might have expected him to advocate its expansion. On the other hand, as the father of the Metro *concept* in Ontario, we might have expected him to advocate the creation of as many mini-metros as possible.

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**Figure: Map of local government review areas**

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His appointment as special advisor to the minister for local government reviews — essentially, commissions of inquiry concerned with reforming the government structures of almost all major city-county areas in the province, of which there were 11 — gave him a platform to pursue the latter course. As Lionel Feldman noted in a 1974 monograph, recommendations to create single-tier authorities in the Ottawa and Peel-Halton areas were rejected in favour of replicating the Metro model.

A third source of opposition may have been area members of the Conservative caucus, though minutes of a meeting in which 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.

The bigger story, which is well documented from a variety of perspectives, is however the emergence of a regional economic development program which soon absorbed previously parallel processes of reform to local government organization and regional planning.

The original direction coming out of the report of the Smith Committee on Taxation in 1967 was to reorganize provincial economic policies and upper-tier local governments into areas larger than the existing counties — areas that reflected common historical, economic, social, and geographical realities. The parallel Beckett Committee on reforms to the Municipal Act recommended the strengthening of the county system.

This is what ended up happening through the local government review process. The regional municipalities created in the Greater Golden Horsehoe, Ottawa, and Sudbury were, in effect, pumped up counties with their separated cities reincorporated à la Metro. As the revised local government system was put into place between 1969 and 1974, the notion of dividing the province into a series of broader regions, of which an expanded Toronto Centred Region would have been one, for either planning or regional development purposes fell by the wayside.

The byproduct was the foreclosing of the option of expanding Metro, the clipping of the Metro Planning Area to the borders of Metro, and, as a result, the end of an effective metropolitan political space, while, at the same time, rapid growth continued.

I am still exploring the intersection of regional development policy, regional planning, and local government reform. In Ontario, it produced a muddle. In my other cases, something different seems to have happened. It is now clear to me that regional development was very much in vogue in the 1960s and early 1970s in states and provinces across the continent. Both Oregon and Minnesota divided themselves into regional development councils that were agglomerations of counties. Existing metropolitan councils of governments were incorporated into these systems. In British Columbia, the province flirted with but did not pursue a regional development policy similar to Ontario's.

The key factor seems to be timing and the sequence of events. In Ontario, the post-Metro search for a metropolitan-scaled solution to problems associated with Toronto's urban development collided with the attempt to develop a province-wide regional development scheme. In Minnesota and Oregon, regional development commissions were set up after the territorial extent of metropolitan planning and governance institutions reached its final form, so the two issues did not merge.

Local government reform only really occurred in Ontario. In the United States, counties are well-entrenched components of state government and, as I mentioned earlier, include large cities. In B.C. and the other western provinces, there are no counties. British Columbia's regional districts, established in 1965, were created to do what regional municipalities do in Ontario.

When looking at our American counterparts, I can't help but think that all of the political blood spilled to create Metro in 1953 and the Regional Municipalities in the 1960s and 1970s served largely to obtain what American counties already had: political and fiscal union of urban and rural areas at an intermediate scale, between the local municipality and the state or province.

Let's think about what might have happened. Metro and the Planning Area could have been expanded, either all at once or incrementally. The fresh example of the expansion of the London County Council area into Greater London in 1960 as a result of the Herbert Commission was well known to participants in the Goldenberg process. In this reform, territory was transferred from surrounding counties to the Greater London authority. Something analogous in Toronto might have bought another decade or two. Had the regional development and local government reform agendas been decoupled, this might have occurred.

## **8. Wrap-up**

I've gone on long enough. To unpack the politics of the rise and demise of Design for Development and the Toronto-Centred Region concept would take more than another hour.

The metropolitan regional agenda fell off the radar for 15 years, despite continuing population growth. The province involved itself in metropolitan affairs once again by establishing an Office for the GTA. Created by the Liberal Peterson government, this body encouraged collaboration among the regional governments of the GTA.

The GTA Taskforce appointed by Rae in 1995 recommended consolidating the upper-tier governments in the GTA. We all know what happened there. I think, though, we should see it for what it was: the last gasp of using the restructuring of local government institutions as a solution to metropolitan problems.

The inauguration of the Smart Growth process in the latter days of the Harris/Eves government, and which has been continued by the Liberals, shows that we have entered into a new phase, where metropolitan policy has conclusively shifted to the provincial level. I think we could have an interesting discussion about how the Places to Grow Act and the enactment of a Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe might represent the reincarnation of the Toronto-Centred Region Plan, thirty years after it was interred.

What conclusions can we draw from this line of inquiry?

First, although you have only caught glimpses of the comparative aspect of my project, I have found that a comparative historical approach has provoked interpretations that would not be possible if I were completely immersed only in the Toronto case.

My presentation of the Portland and Vancouver cases at the end of the month will be comparative from top to bottom, if you are interested.

Second, the persistence, or “stickiness,” of existing institutional frameworks clearly matters. For example, the separated city model of county organization differentiates Ontario from the American experience, with, I argue, important consequences. Much of the effort put into the Local Government Review process in the late 1970s might well have proved to be unnecessary had the county system been organized differently from the get-go.

The existence of the OMB is another example. Unique in North America, the OMB emerged as a catch-all organization created by the province to regulate street railways, supervise municipal finances, and, in the first half of the century, also had jurisdiction over automobile registration and local telephone systems. Its pivotal role in forestalling the rampant incorporation of suburban municipalities that occurred in the United States was almost a sideshow, but a crucial one in shaping subsequent events.

Third, the timing and sequencing of events is important. In the Toronto case, it may have been a disadvantage to consolidate metropolitan institutions so early in its growth trajectory. The territorial container chosen for metropolitan administration very quickly proved to be too small.

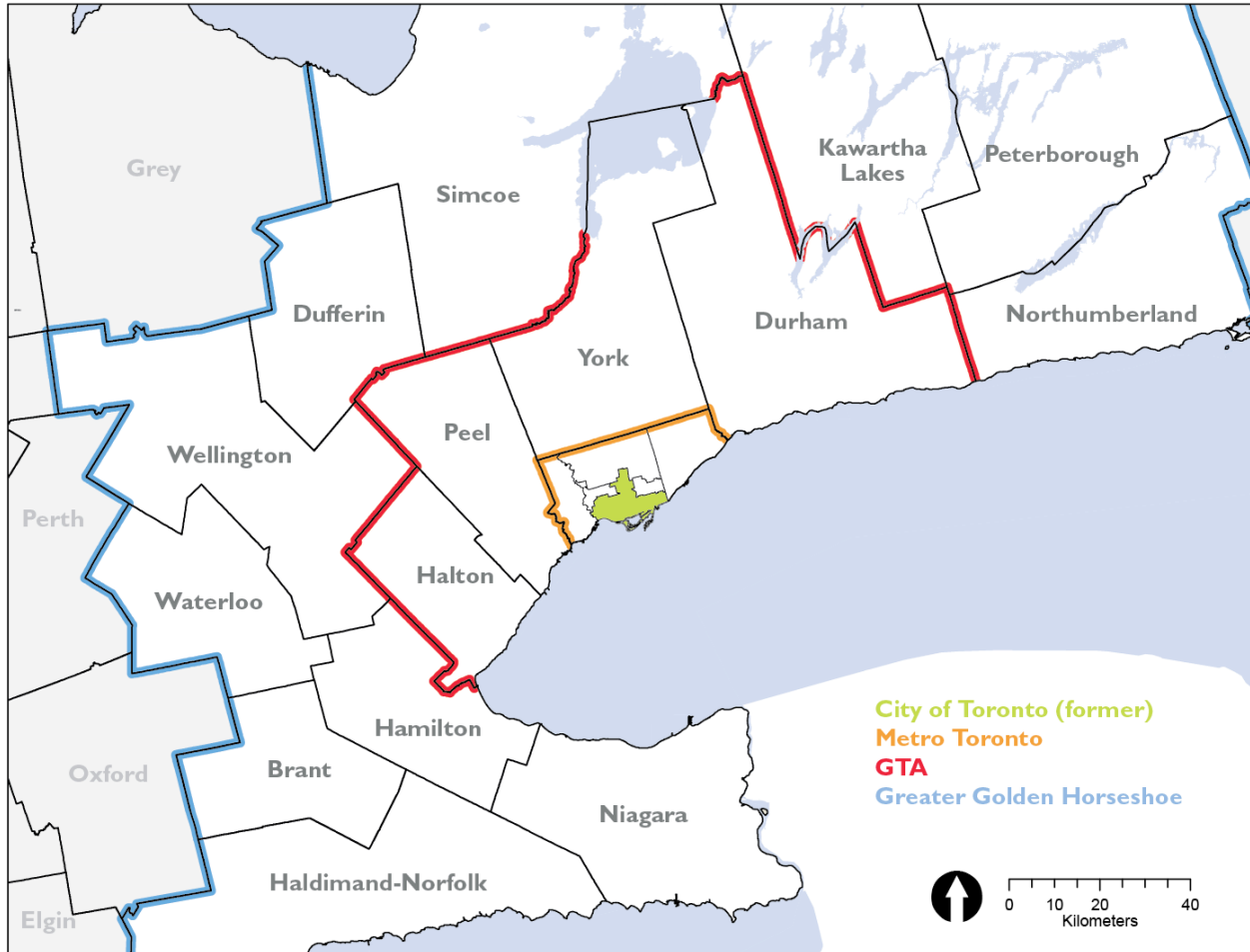
The collision of the regional development with agendas of metropolitan governance and local government restructuring had poor results in Ontario. In other places, where these processes occurred independently of each other, they didn't become muddled. Had the metropolitan boundary question been settled before the regional development agenda emerged, they would not have become mixed up with each other.



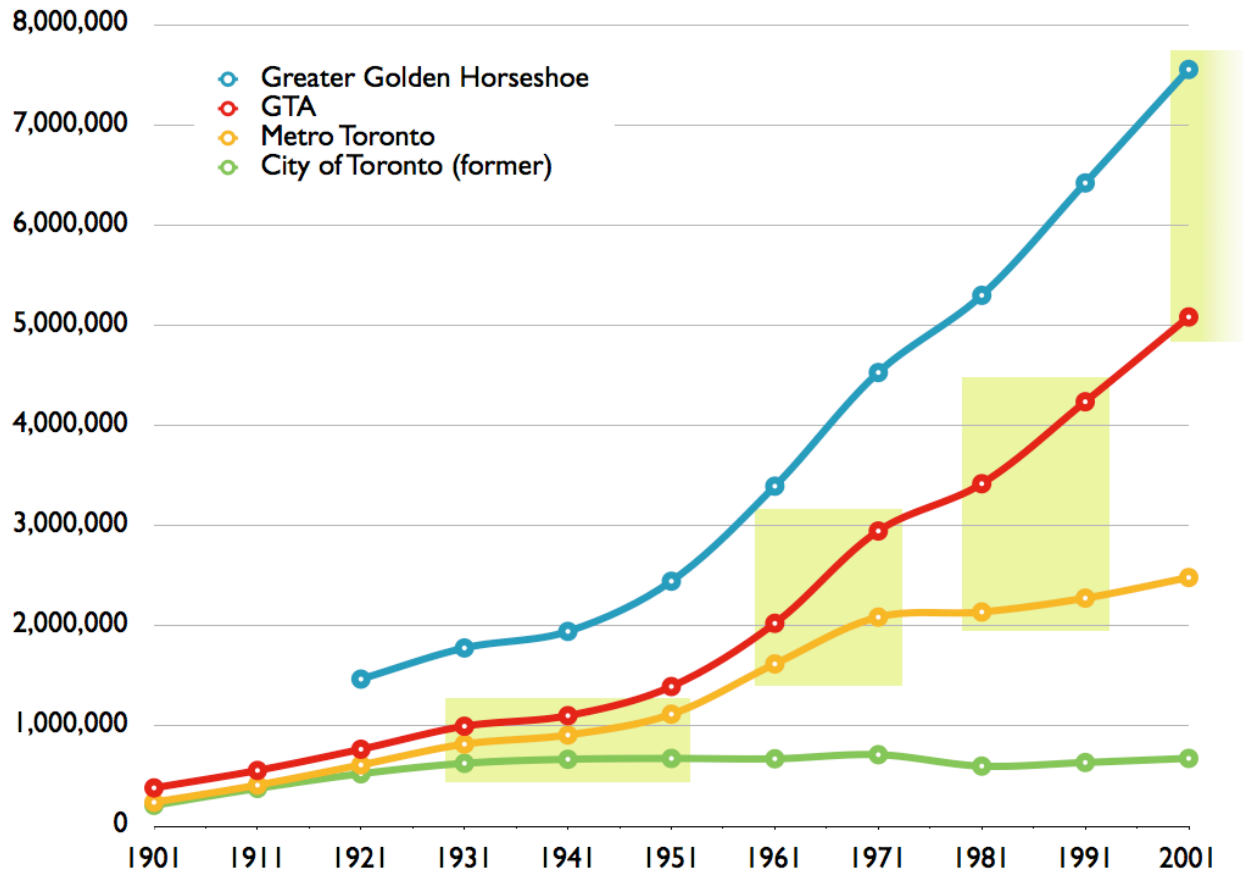
Fourth, and finally, the influence of exterior ideas and models is also important in shaping the framing of the metropolitan problem. In the early years the London County Council, established in 1889, influenced proponents of the metropolitan county option. The nineteenth-century British approach to municipal organization, which separated urban from rural areas, also played a tacit role. Later, the early-1960s reform of Greater London, which expanded the metropolitan county, hung in the background of the Goldenberg Commission.

I want to thank you for listening to this partial and narrow slice of my project. Let's now open it up to discussion.

**FIGURE 1: Greater Golden Horseshoe context map**



**FIGURE 2: Population Growth, 1901–2001, showing “regional moments”**



**FIGURE 3: Population growth, 1901–1951, showing York County**

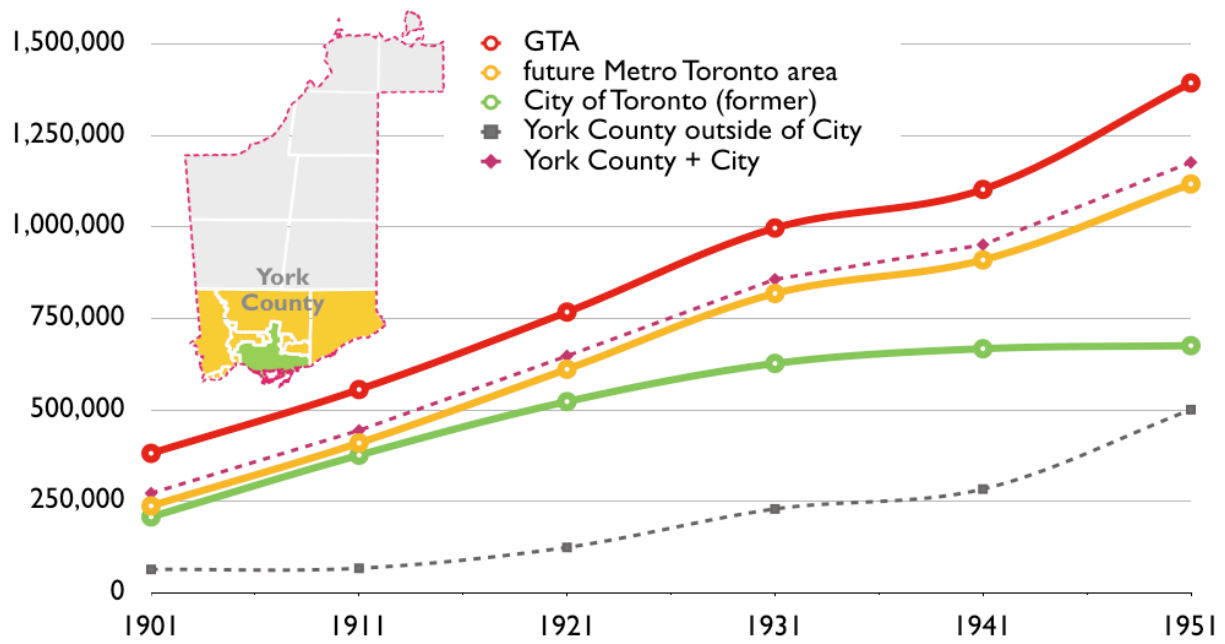


FIGURE 4: "The Ultimate Toronto?"

*History Area*  
*the intent*

# Toronto May Be Forced To "Adopt" Its Suburbs

Plan of Ontario Government to compel city to take in great metropolitan area presents series of critical tax and administration problems —Toronto taxpayer will be faced with an additional load.

By R. W. McCONNELL  
 Telegram Staff Writer

Toronto stands in danger of being compelled to annex a dozen neighboring municipalities.

The proposal is not a new one. It has been made in various forms for years past.

Growth of the suburbs with the city in a municipal entity has been proposed in the guise of amalgamation, under the cloak of a metropolitan area scheme and now as just plain annexation.

The name doesn't matter much. The idea is the same. And the result would be to create a city stretching from Scarborough Junction on the east to the Eglauke River on the west and from Toronto Island on the south to somewhere about Steele's Corners on the north.

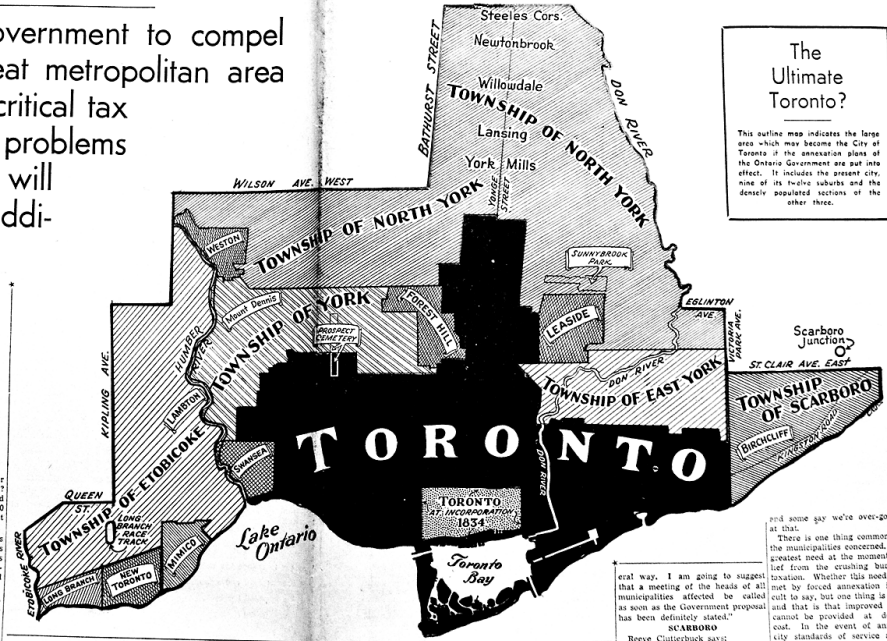
The metropolitan area now under consideration takes in Toronto, York Township, East York Township and the thickly populated sections of Scarborough, North York and Eglauke Townships, Forest Hill Village, New Toronto, Mimico, Swansea, Weston, Long Branch and Leaside.

Such a program of annexation would make the area of the city about five times what it now is and would increase the population by one-third. It would bring within the city limits two more race tracks, several golf clubs and two parks now owned by the city lying beyond the present city boundaries.

Here is the situation as it exists at the present time:

At the last session of the Ontario legislature private bills were introduced to incorporate the village of Forest Hill and the township of York into cities. The Government failed to approve of such measures till the whole problem presented the Toronto metropolitan area has been studied.

Accordingly, the Government appointed a committee, "for the study of municipal and related problems in the city and its neighboring municipalities" composed of A. J. B. Gray, mayor; Dr. G. F. Rogers, vice-mayor; and Chris J. Hume, J. J.



**The Ultimate Toronto?**

This outline map indicates the large area which may become the City of Toronto if the annexation plans of the Ontario Government are put into effect. It includes the present city, nine of its twelve suburbs and the densely populated sections of the other three.

heads would have to find places for officials holding corresponding positions in neighboring municipalities.

Assessment Commissioner Farley, however, is worried about whether he will get the necessary building which would be required to house his department if he were

efficient service. The present condition of disrepair of the pavements on many city streets is directly due to failure to spend adequate amounts on maintenance from year to year.

Further annexations would only aggravate the situation and the taxpayers of what is to-day the city of Toronto would be

SWANSEA  
 Reeve Downey says: "We are definitely opposed to the plan. Swansea has very little to gain and a whole lot to lose by it. For my mind, annexation would work only for the benefit of York Township."

Reeve Clatterbuck says: "Annexation should prove beneficial to the urban area if it is carried out fairly."

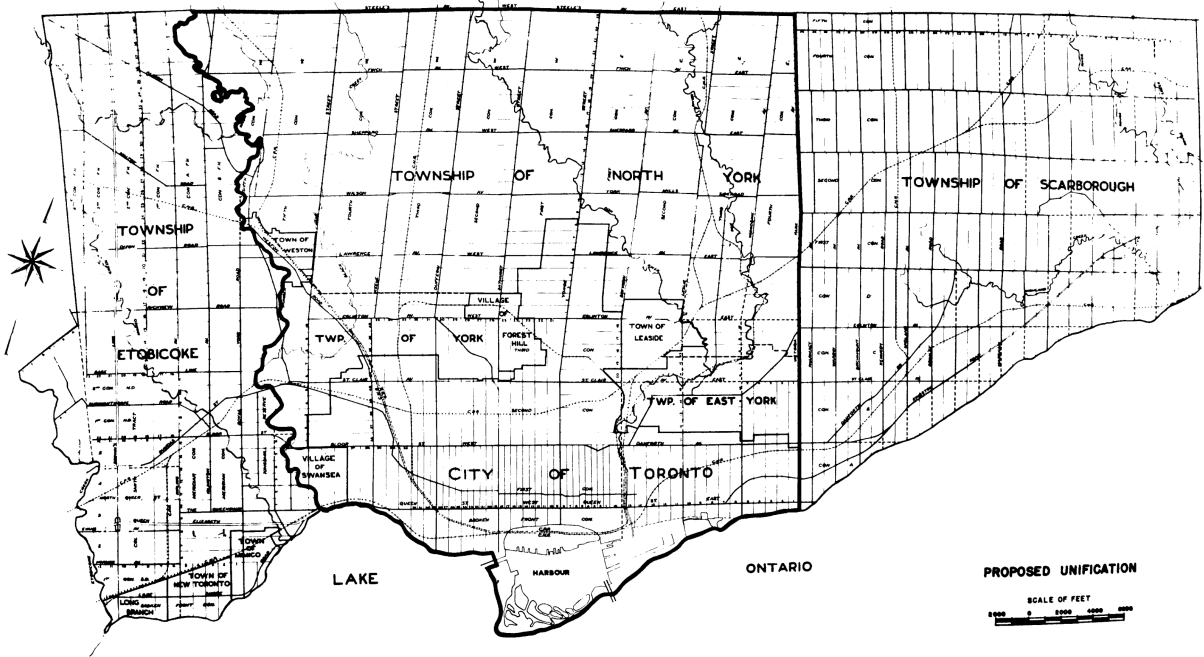
The municipalities of Mimico, New Toronto and Long Branch have more than once asked for permission to incorporate themselves into a city.

and some say we've over-governed at that.

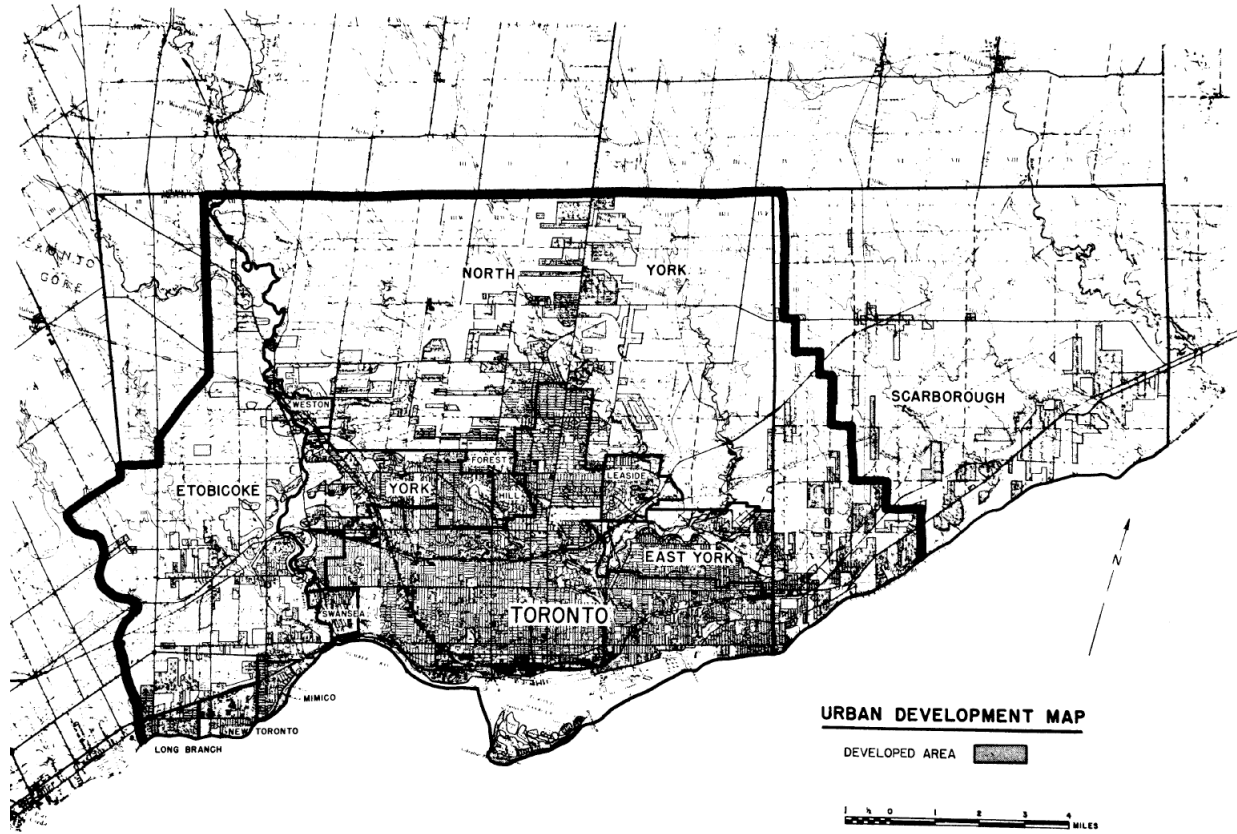
There is one thing common to all the municipalities concerned. Their greatest need at the moment is relief from the crushing burden of taxation. Whether this need can be met by forced annexation is difficult to say, but one thing is certain, and that is that improved services cannot be provided at decreased cost. In the event of annexation city standards of service and city rates of pay will be demanded and not how that will reduce the burden of taxation on real estate is not clear.

And, speaking of real estate, another aspect of the annexation business should be considered. It has already been pointed out that builders have been forced in recent

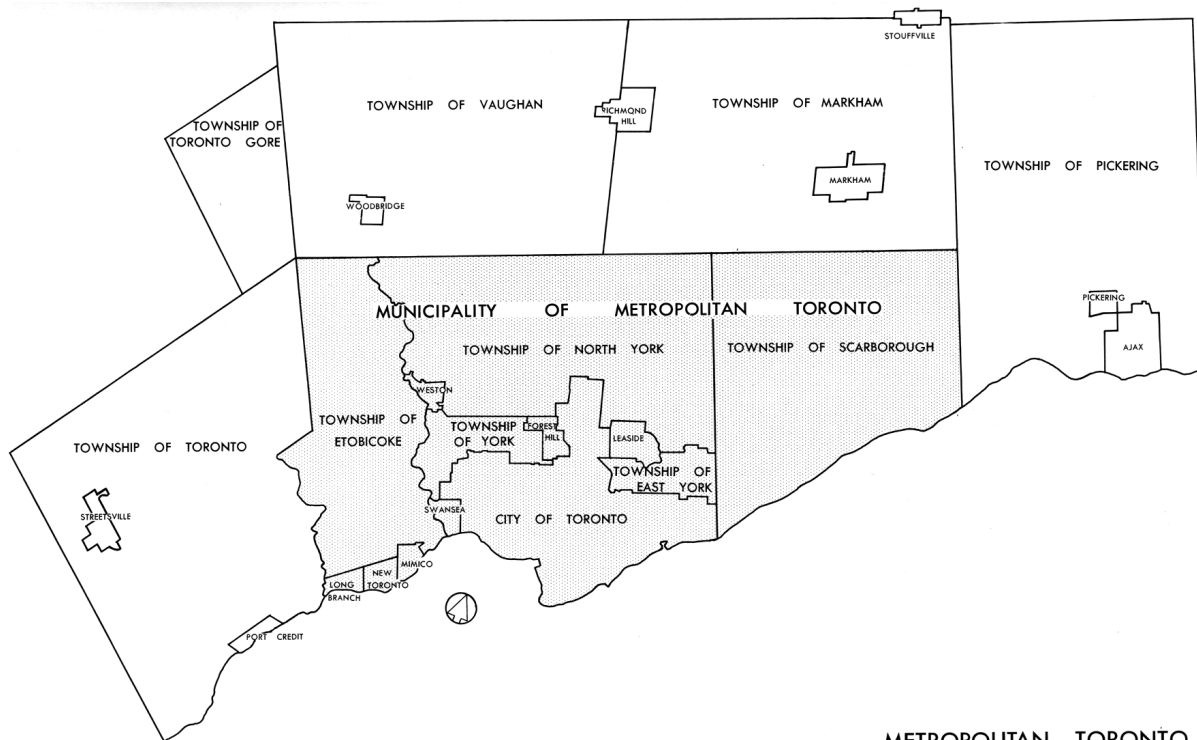
**FIGURE 5: Toronto & York Planning Board Proposal (1949)**



**FIGURE 6: A Version of Toronto's Amalgamation Proposal (1951)**



**FIGURE 7: Metro Toronto Planning Board jurisdiction**



OFFICIAL PLAN OF THE METROPOLITAN TORONTO PLANNING AREA  
METROPOLITAN TORONTO PLANNING BOARD SEPTEMBER, 1959

METROPOLITAN TORONTO  
PLANNING AREA



**FIGURE 8: Population Growth, 1951–2001, showing Metro Toronto Planning Board**

