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Theme and Variations: Metropolitan Governance in Canada

Zack Taylor



UNIVERSITY OF
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By
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About IMFG

The Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance (IMFG) is an academic research hub and non-partisan think tank based in the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto.

IMFG focuses on the fiscal health and governance challenges facing large cities and city-regions. Its objective is to spark and inform public debate, and to engage the academic and policy communities around important issues of municipal finance and governance. The Institute conducts original research on issues facing cities in Canada and around the world; promotes high-level discussion among Canada's government, academic, corporate, and community leaders through conferences and roundtables; and supports graduate and post-graduate students to build Canada's cadre of municipal finance and governance experts. It is the only institute in Canada that focuses solely on municipal finance issues in large cities and city-regions.

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Theme and Variations: Metropolitan Governance in Canada

Zack Taylor

Abstract

This paper takes stock of current practices of metropolitan governance in Canada to identify patterns of institutional and policy development. While Canada was best known in the postwar decades for innovating two-tier metropolitan local governments in Toronto, Montréal, Winnipeg, and other cities, this model no longer exists at the metropolitan scale anywhere in the country. Instead, we see five distinct models in operation, sometimes in combination with one another: the “unicity,” or single-tier municipal model; the compulsory regional intergovernmental organization; the voluntary intermunicipal partnership; the metropolitan single-purpose body; and the provincial policy overlay. This diversity of institutional forms found across Canada reflects variation in both provincial systems of local government and geographies of urban settlement. It also points to both the flexibility of Canadian governance and policy making and the central role provincial governments play in establishing these systems.

Keywords: Metropolitan governance, Canada, local government, intergovernmental relations

JEL codes: H10, H70 H73

Perspectives on Regional Governance: Global, National, Local

This is the third paper in the IMFG series, “Perspectives on Regional Governance: Global, National, and Local.” The series examines how different jurisdictions in Canada and around the world have implemented regional governance models to help cities tackle longstanding challenges that cross municipal boundaries. It also looks at how regional governance could be implemented locally. Papers by global experts will analyze international and national case studies, and propose how city-regions such as the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area could engage in voluntary regional governance. The first paper in the series is *Collaborative Regional Governance: Lessons from Greater Manchester*, by Alan Harding. The second paper in the series is *A Playbook for Voluntary Regional Governance in Greater Toronto*, by André Côté, Gabriel Eidelman, and Michael Fenn.

Theme and Variations: Metropolitan Governance in Canada

I. Introduction

Canada is a large country, but most Canadians live in just a few large urban regions. More than 70 percent of Canadians live in 35 Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), defined by Statistics Canada as commuter zones with populations greater than 100,000 (see Table 1). The nine census metropolitan areas (CMAs) within the Greater Golden Horseshoe megaregion centred on Toronto (see Box) are home to almost 8.6 million people, 24.4 percent of the Canadian population. A further 11.7 percent of the Canadian population lives in Greater Montréal, 7.4 percent in British Columbia's Lower Mainland, and 27.1 percent in the other 23 CMAs. The remainder live in smaller cities, towns, and rural areas. While Canada's rural and northern hinterland is vast, Canada is a metropolitan society.

Most provinces have metropolitan majorities (see Table 2). Outside Atlantic Canada, which is less urbanized overall, the largest CMA or megaregion contains more than 50 percent of the population in four provinces – British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and Québec – and all Alberta CMAs combined make up a majority in that province. This suggests that a major task for provincial governments is the governing of metropolitan areas and helps explain why some provinces have engaged in institutional restructuring in, and policy making targeted at, large metropolitan areas.

CMAs and Megaregions

Statistics Canada defines Census Metropolitan Areas as clusters of contiguous municipalities with a population greater than 100,000 people. The CMA must have one or more core municipalities with a population greater than 50,000. Adjacent municipalities are included based on their commuting relationship to the core. Unlike the United States Census Bureau, Statistics Canada does not define broader urban regions comprising adjacent CMAs. In this report, the nine CMAs within the broader Toronto region are grouped together as a Greater Golden Horseshoe megaregion, and the Vancouver and Abbotsford–Mission CMAs are grouped together as the B.C. Lower Mainland megaregion.

Table 1: Canadian census metropolitan areas

CMA groups by megaregion	Population	% of national population	Cumulative % of national population
Greater Golden Horseshoe Megaregion	8,588,686	24.4	24.4
Toronto	5,928,040	16.9	
Hamilton	747,545	2.1	
Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo	523,894	1.5	
St. Catharines–Niagara	406,074	1.2	
Oshawa	379,848	1.1	
Barrie	197,059	0.6	
Guelph	151,984	0.4	
Brantford	134,203	0.4	
Peterborough	121,721	0.3	
Montréal	4,098,927	11.7	36.1
B.C. Lower Mainland Megaregion	2,618,475	7.4	43.6
Vancouver	2,463,431	7.0	
Abbotsford-Mission	180,518	0.5	
Calgary	1,390,966	4.0	47.6
Ottawa-Gatineau	1,323,783	3.8	51.3
Edmonton	1,317,015	3.7	55.1
Québec City	798,162	2.3	57.4
Winnipeg	777,973	2.2	59.6
London	494,069	1.4	61.0
Halifax	403,131	1.1	62.1
Victoria	367,770	1.0	63.2
Windsor	329,144	0.9	64.1
Saskatoon	295,095	0.8	64.9
Regina	236,481	0.7	65.6
Sherbrooke	212,105	0.6	66.2
St. John's	205,955	0.6	66.8
Kelowna	194,882	0.6	67.4
Greater Sudbury	164,689	0.5	67.8
Kingston	161,175	0.5	68.3
Saguenay	160,980	0.5	68.8
Trois-Rivières	156,042	0.4	69.2
Moncton	144,810	0.4	69.6
Saint John	126,202	0.4	70.0
Thunder Bay	121,621	0.3	70.3
Lethbridge	117,394	0.3	70.6
Belleville	103,472	0.3	70.9
Census metropolitan areas	24,923,292	70.9	
Non-metropolitan areas	10,228,436	29.1	100.0
Canada	35,151,728	100.0	

Source: All data are from Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2016.

Table 2: CMA and megaregion populations as percentage of provincial populations

Province	Number of CMAs	Largest CMA	Largest megaregion	All CMA population	Total population
British Columbia	4	2,463,431 (53.0%) Vancouver	2,618,475 (56.3%) Lower Mainland	3,206,601 (69.0%)	4,648,055
Alberta	3	1,390,966 (34.2%) Calgary		2,825,375 (69.5%)	4,067,175
Saskatchewan	2	295,095 (26.9%) Saskatoon		531,576 (48.4%)	1,098,352
Manitoba	1	777,973 (60.9%) Winnipeg		777,973 (60.9%)	1,278,365
Ontario	16	5,928,040 (44.1%) Toronto	8,588,686 (63.9%) Greater Golden Horseshoe	10,956,264 (81.5%)	13,448,494
Québec	6	4,098,927 (50.2%) Montréal		5,758,273 (70.5%)	8,164,361
New Brunswick	2	144,810 (19.4%) Moncton		271,012 (36.3%)	747,101
Nova Scotia	1	403,390 (43.7%) Halifax		403,390 (43.7%)	923,598
Newfoundland & Labrador	1	205,955 (39.6%) St. John's		205,955 (39.6%)	519,716

Notes: P.E.I. does not have a CMA. The Ontario and Québec parts of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA are counted separately. All data are from Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2016.

How best to govern metropolitan areas is a perennial dilemma in Canada and other countries. As cities grow and change, so too does the need to efficiently provide infrastructure and services in urban and urbanizing spaces. In established urban areas, water pipes, sewers, and roads must be periodically renewed and land uses adapted to a changing economy and society. Roads, water and sewer pipes, parks and community centres, and space for schools, hospitals, housing, shops, and other private amenities must be provided at the urban fringe. Human and property-related services, from education to fire protection, and from policing to garbage disposal, must be provided to residents no matter where they live. All these must be paid for and, ideally, organized and managed by public authorities according

to some kind of intentional logic that is comprehensible and democratically responsible to citizens. Allocating costs and benefits across urban space is an essential task of metropolitan governance.

The governance of metropolitan areas has taken on added importance as city-regions are recognized as nodes where global flows of ideas, capital, and labour come together, making them the drivers of national prosperity and globalization (OECD 2006; Polèse 2009; Scott 2001; Wolfe and Gertler 2016). Urban regions as wholes – not just central cities and their downtowns, or individual municipalities – are the relevant geographical unit in economic policy making for investment attraction, export promotion, and knowledge creation and commercialization (Cooke and Morgan 1998; Wolfe 2009). Globalization and the shift to a post-industrial service economy have put pressure on municipalities, individual firms and business associations, academic institutions, and other actors in metropolitan areas to collaborate across municipal boundaries in the interest of collective competitiveness (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom 2014; Pastor, Lester, and Scoggins 2009, Peirce 1993).

These forces have reshaped provincial and national governance in two ways. The first is what Brenner (2004) and others have called the “rescaling” of governing authority, the shifting of functional responsibilities and fiscal resources between levels of government to create new governing capacities for metropolitan areas. Over the past two decades, France, Spain, the U.K., and other countries have reorganized or established new metropolitan-scale institutions focused on economic development, environmental planning, and infrastructure planning and provision.

The second is “multi-level urban governance”: targeted policy attention by national and subnational governments toward distinctly urban challenges such as unaffordable housing, homelessness, immigrant integration, and inadequate transportation infrastructure to mobilize governmental and nongovernmental expertise and resources across levels (Graham and Andrew 2014; Horak 2013; Horak and Young 2012; Leo and Andres 2008). As a Conference Board of Canada report argues, “The difficulty of coordinating local and regional – and even provincial and federal – activities and policies is one of the most critical challenges facing all our major cities” (Brender, Cappe, and Golden 2007, 68). Rescaling and multi-level urban governance together challenge established patterns of fiscal federalism and the constitutional division of power between the federal and provincial governments. Nevertheless, Canada’s urbanization and metropolitanization have drawn national and provincial authorities, as well as municipalities, toward developing new governance capacities at the metropolitan scale.

These capacities can take many forms. Canada was once admired internationally for a particular form of metropolitan governance that never bore much fruit in the United States: a highly integrated, two-tier local government system, such as that of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, established in 1954. Variations of the two-tier metropolitan municipality model were instituted elsewhere in Ontario and across Canada between the 1960s and the 1980s.

Few two-tier models survive in the 21st century, however, most having been replaced by single-tier municipalities (as in Winnipeg and Ottawa). Some two-tier municipalities – Metro Toronto and the Montréal Urban Community – became obsolete as truly metropolitan entities as urbanization spilled beyond their borders, decades before they were amalgamated into single-tier municipalities. Two-tier “regional municipalities” remain in the suburban belt surrounding Toronto, as do the regional county municipalities surrounding Montréal, but these were never intended to be metropolitan authorities in the sense of encompassing a metropolitan commutershed. The Regional Municipality of Waterloo may be the only two-tier metropolitan-scale local government left in Canada; however, the autonomy of its housing and labour market is diminishing as it becomes more integrated with nearby Guelph and with the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

Indeed, more than a decade ago, Sancton (2009, 213) wrote that “the term ‘metropolitan governance’ [understood as two-tier metropolitan municipal government] now has virtually no political salience in Canada,” arguing that annexations and amalgamations had made single municipalities effective metropolitan governments in some larger urban regions, including Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, London, Hamilton, and Halifax. This pattern is changing, however, as the boundaries of some municipalities no longer correspond to their functional housing and labour markets. In some cases, these trends are leading provinces to create and strengthen intermunicipal coordination mechanisms.

Canada’s largest metropolitan areas – Toronto, Montréal, and Vancouver – have evolved distinct systems of metropolitan governance.

- The Toronto region, whether defined as the Toronto CMA, the larger Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, or the even more encompassing Greater Golden Horseshoe, has no overarching governing institution or authority – unless we count Metrolinx, the provincial transit agency, or the provincial government itself. Ontario’s regional planning framework for the Greater Golden Horseshoe is not conventionally understood as a form of metropolitan governance, yet it has far-reaching implications for the development of the broader region.
- The Québec government has created several new metropolitan institutions for the Greater Montréal region since 2000, although these developments have received little attention in English-speaking Canada.
- Established in 1967, Metro Vancouver is perhaps the best known and most celebrated Canadian metropolitan institution, both domestically and internationally (Tomalty and Mallach 2016; Wolman 2017).

It is time to take stock of Canadian metropolitan governance by surveying what arrangements exist and how they may be changing. Drawing on a mix of secondary and primary research, this report examines selected metropolitan governance institutions and policies in operation across the country to identify trends and directions for future research.

The objective is not to systematically catalogue arrangements in all Canadian metropolitan areas. Rather, it is to classify distinct models using representative examples. The diverse institutional forms across Canada reflect variation in both provincial municipal government systems and urban settlement patterns and point to the flexibility of Canadian governance and policy making and to the centrality of provincial governments in establishing these systems. Before reviewing cases and identifying models, however, it is useful to briefly survey how the mostly American body of theory regarding metropolitan governance has evolved and how it may help us interpret Canadian and American practice.

2. Metropolitan governance in theory and practice

There is considerable disagreement in the academic literature on how metropolitan areas should be governed (see Stephens and Wikstrom 2000).

Those who emphasize *efficiency* – that is, low marginal costs for services and therefore low tax burdens – propose a competitive market of local service providers which may or may not be public in nature (Ostrom, Tiebout, and Warren 1961; Tiebout 1956). A multiplicity of autonomous local jurisdictions in proximity to one another enables metropolitan residents to “vote with their feet” by locating themselves where they can receive the services they want at a cost they are willing to pay. This approach is closely identified with the public choice school in economics.

Those who emphasize *equity* – access to similar levels of service at similar cost no matter where one lives in a metropolitan area, and the redistribution of resources across space this entails – tend to favour more consolidated public governance forms: single- or general-purpose bodies of metropolitan scope (Pastor and Benner 2011; Rusk 2013).

Overlaid on the equity-efficiency debate is an enduring concern with *democratic accountability*. On the one hand, public choice economists argue that a strong, localized connection between taxes paid and services received is in itself an accountability mechanism. If residents think they can get a better deal elsewhere, they will move to another jurisdiction. As a result, service providers (public or private) have an important incentive to please their customers.

On the other hand, critics have argued that substantive democratic accountability is undermined in “fragmented” metropolitan areas, those whose residents are served by many small general-purpose local governments, special-purpose bodies, and private companies whose service territories may overlap (Bollens 1957; Burns 1994; Foster 1997). An advantage of general-purpose municipalities, especially large ones, is that their political decision-makers are visible and therefore subject to public scrutiny. Setting a common budget for multiple services administered across a broad area, they can also make trade-offs across space and different policy domains. The larger the metropolitan area they encompass, the greater the potential for redistribution and harmonization of service standards. Two-tier systems that reconcile local municipal autonomy with area-wide planning and service provision have been viewed as a means of having it both ways (Sharpe 1995).

In general, the more fragmented local governments in U.S. metropolitan areas have evolved to resemble the public choice ideal, while in Canada local government is considerably more consolidated. Virtually all residents of large Canadian cities live under the jurisdiction of general-purpose local governments, while a substantial minority of American metropolitan-area residents live in unincorporated territory, receiving services from special-purpose bodies, private entities, and in some cases the counties in which they are located (Taylor 2019b, 9–13).

Perhaps because of these different national patterns, American researchers have largely taken local government fragmentation in metropolitan areas for granted, instead focusing on the conditions under which local governments (principally central cities and suburbs divided by race and class) are likely to collaborate voluntarily on common objectives, usually without much encouragement from state governments (Feiock 2007; Foster 2000; Visser 2002; Wallis 1993). American research on “institutional collective action” (see Feiock 2004, 2009, 2013) finds that voluntary collaboration in metropolitan areas is more likely when participants share common values and objectives and trust one another; such relationships evolve only over time through ongoing interaction. They also find that supportive external legal and fiscal arrangements can promote collaborative problem-solving.

Miller and Nelles (2019) identify a species of such bottom-up collaboration: regional intergovernmental organizations, or RIGOs – generally voluntary federations of municipalities that perform multiple functions, most of which are delegated to them by federal and state governments, and sometimes by local governments as well. In part because many were initially established to satisfy federal mandates and funding conditions, there is remarkable consistency across the country in their characteristics and organization.

In Canada, continuing involvement by provincial governments (and very limited involvement by the federal government) in municipal affairs, including comprehensive reforms to local government institutions and their boundaries in several provinces, has shifted national urban governance debates toward other topics. Indeed, the question of how best to reconcile the benefits of local government autonomy with provincial engagement is currently the subject of debate in Ontario, Alberta, and other provinces (Good et al. 2020). Given Canadian provinces’ unrestrained constitutional authority over local government, the form and function of metropolitan governance arrangements is mostly determined by provincial governments through legal mandates and incentives rather than by municipal initiative.¹ For this reason, we must not lose sight of the structuring role of provinces in metropolitan affairs – in essence, viewing provincial policies targeted at metropolitan areas as a form of metropolitan governance.

1. The National Capital Commission, a federal agency created in 1959 with limited planning authority spanning the Ontario and Québec sides of the Ottawa-Gatineau region, is unique and is not discussed here (see Sancton 2009, 227–228).

Intergovernmental relations in metropolitan governance therefore play out along two dimensions: horizontal and vertical. The more consolidated the metropolitan area, the more political conflict plays out within rather than between municipalities. At the extreme, conflicts over planning and service provision occur entirely within one municipality in a single-municipality metropolitan area. The more municipalities in a metropolitan area, and the less that any one municipality dominates in its share of population, the more likely that meaningful conflicts will play out between municipalities.

Voluntary collaboration among self-interested local governments is unlikely to produce decisions that impose localized losses in pursuit of collective benefits, however – a dynamic that Scharpf (1988, 2006) calls the “joint-decision trap” (see also Taylor 2019a). This is where the vertical dimension of intergovernmental relations comes in. Provinces can use their authority to overcome intermunicipal joint-decision traps. Nevertheless, the degree to which provinces impose their will on municipalities – by establishing, empowering, and mandating municipal participation in metropolitan institutions, or by enacting metropolitan policy directions binding on municipalities – depends on their willingness to incur political costs associated with overriding municipal autonomy.

3. Canadian models of metropolitan governance

In this context, this report surveys the current organization and practice of metropolitan governance in large Canadian cities. The portrait that emerges is very different from the one produced by Miller and Nelles’s analysis of American RIGOs. The voluntary, metropolitan-scale, multi-purpose federation of municipalities is the exception rather than the norm, although some examples would qualify as RIGOs according to their criteria.

The remainder of this paper outlines five distinct models and associated examples, presented in order from the most to the least institutionally integrated and authoritative. In the conclusion I discuss how they work in combination with one another.

1. **The unicity model:** A single-tier municipality that includes all, or almost all, of the functional region’s population. Examples include Calgary and Halifax.
2. **Compulsory regional intergovernmental organizations:** Their core features are compulsory municipal membership and municipal representation on a decision-making board that makes decisions binding on member municipalities. These bodies are created through provincial legislation or regulation. While some are policy-making bodies, some also operate infrastructure systems or provide services. Examples include British Columbia’s regional districts (Victoria and Vancouver), Alberta’s metropolitan region boards (Calgary and Edmonton), Québec’s metropolitan communities (Montréal and Québec City), and New Brunswick’s regional service commissions.
3. **Voluntary intermunicipal partnerships:** These are looser arrangements, primarily talking shops, that have no authority to make policy. Examples

include the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region, formerly the Partnership of the Manitoba Capital Region, and the now-dissolved Calgary Region Partnership.

4. **Metropolitan single-purpose bodies:** Examples include regional transit planning and operating authorities in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal, as well as investment attraction and tourism promotion bodies in these cities.
5. **Provincial policy overlays for metropolitan areas:** In Ontario, the provincial government has taken on a directive metropolitan governing role for itself through several geographically specific pieces of legislation and regulation. Toronto-region examples include the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Greenbelt Plan, the Niagara Escarpment Plan, and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. In Alberta, regional plans adopted under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* are potentially powerful provincial instruments, but their content is less directive than the Ontario plans.

This survey reveals significant institutional variation across the country, given decentralized Canadian federalism, the flexible nature of Canadian governance and policy making, and the centrality of provincial governments in establishing these systems. Different responses by provincial governments to metropolitan growth dilemmas reflect the idiosyncratic historical development of provincial administrative systems and local government systems, as well as distinct geographies of urban settlement. For these reasons, a model developed in one setting may not be readily transferrable to another. Nevertheless, we can learn from local examples of interjurisdictional cooperation and conflict.

4. Unicity

The least institutionally complex urban governance model is the “unicity”: a single authority with jurisdiction over an entire metropolitan area. The principal advantage of the unicity model is that land-use regulation and servicing can be integrated, enabling what American planners call “concurrent” development. Integrated land-use and infrastructure becomes the means through which a proactive, long-term metropolitan urban development policy is implemented.

Unicities are rare. To maintain a unicity, the municipality’s outer boundary must be enlarged through periodic annexation as surrounding rural areas are urbanized. This requires a monocentric settlement pattern – that is, no outlying settlements whose residents oppose being annexed. In most American states, annexation requires an affirmative vote of residents in both the annexing and annexed jurisdiction. As a result, annexation proposals are rarely successful in the United States. While most Canadian municipal statutes require some form of approval for municipally initiated annexations and amalgamations, unilateral provincial comprehensive restructurings of local governments in Ontario, Québec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick have altered local government structures for many Canadians (Taylor and Dobson 2019, s. 4.1).

4.1 Profile: City of Calgary

Historical background. Calgary is perhaps the most successful example of the unicentric approach in North America. Expanding from a small fort and trading post at the beginning of the 20th century to today's metropolis of 1.3 million people spread over 826 km², the City of Calgary has consistently annexed surrounding territory (see Figure 1). Pursued on an ad hoc basis before the Second World War, annexations became an official policy after the report of the 1956 Royal Commission on the Metropolitan Development of Calgary and Edmonton (Alberta 1956; Sandalack and Nicolai 2006, 88). Calgary developed a highly integrated land development process, whereby annexation was required prior to the extension of public infrastructure, and it occurred only after a comprehensive master plan for the new neighbourhood was in place. While criticized by some for facilitating low-density suburbs while cementing the influence of a handful of powerful developer firms who could assemble large landholdings (Foran 2009), this approach has resulted in the City of Calgary's jurisdiction encompassing virtually the entire metropolitan housing and labour market.

Current challenges. The City of Calgary's influence over metropolitan urban development has diminished in recent years as more distant settlements have come into the city's commuter orbit. With rapid growth in nearby Airdrie, Chestermere, High River, and Okotoks, the regional population outside the City of Calgary has more than tripled since 1991, from 67,000 to 236,500 in 2019. The central city's proportion of the regional population has declined from 91 percent in 1991 to 84 percent in 2019.²

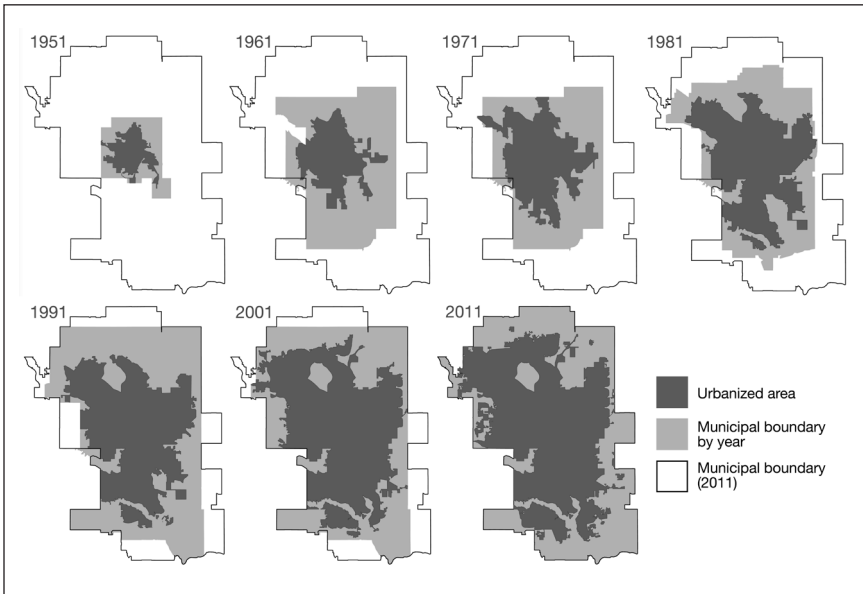
Annexing these separately incorporated municipalities is not an option, as Calgary has effectively acknowledged in recent iterations of its general plan. The 2009 plan calls for 50 percent of population growth over the next 60 to 70 years to occur through the intensification of existing urban areas, with an interim target of 33 percent by 2039, making further annexations unnecessary (Calgary 2009, s. 5.2.2(c–d)). A recent monitoring report, however, states that the City is not on track to meet this target (City of Calgary 2018, 8–13).

The Alberta government has responded to metropolitan growth outside the City of Calgary in two ways. First, it established a legal mandate for contiguous municipalities to collaboratively develop Intermunicipal Development Plans. Plans jointly adopted by the City and its immediate neighbours, the Municipal District of Foothills (1996) and Rocky View County (2012), contain policies to limit premature subdivision on active farmland and discourage large-lot “country residential” development outside authorized areas. Second, the province established

2. The region for the purposes of this calculation comprises the City of Calgary, Rocky View County, and the Municipal District of Foothills and associated municipalities. This is larger than Statistics Canada's CMA definition, which does not include the Municipal District of Foothills and the associated cities of Okotoks, High River, Black Diamond, and Turner Valley, which have a total population of more than 71,000.

and empowered a metropolitan institution to coordinate urban development: the voluntary Calgary Region Partnership, later replaced by the compulsory Calgary Metropolitan Planning Board. As discussed later on this report, both provincial interventions have proved controversial.

Figure 1: Urbanized area and municipal boundaries, Calgary, 1951–2011



Calgary has systematically annexed land in advance of urbanization. Adapted from City of Calgary (2013, 56).

4.2 Profile: Halifax Regional Municipality

Historical background. Urban settlement in the Halifax area has long been polycentric, with numerous settlements around the harbour and Bedford Basin. Several annexations during the 1960s consolidated Halifax and Dartmouth as the two major settlements within Halifax County, but other incorporated and unincorporated settlements within commuting distance remained.

As part of a province-wide reform, the Nova Scotia government unilaterally amalgamated the City of Halifax, the City of Dartmouth, the Town of Bedford, and the rest of Halifax County into the new, single-tier Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) in 1996. The HRM is effectively a unicity, encompassing a large proportion of the metropolitan labour and housing market. Statistics Canada defines the Census Metropolitan Area as HRM; however, a recent planning study reports that less than 20 percent of daily commuting trips into and within HRM come from outside the

municipality (McPhail 2017, 10). Reflecting commuter growth, Statistics Canada will add the Municipal District of East Hants, a mostly rural area to the north of HRM, to the CMA in 2021 (Murphy, Ng, and Roy 2019).

Current challenges. Internalizing such a vast territory – almost 5,500 km² – within a single municipality has generated conflict between the urban core, where most people live, and residents of the rural hinterland that makes up most of the land area, who have periodically called for secession from the HRM.

It remains to be seen whether Halifax's boundaries, inherited from the former Halifax County chartered in 1908, will accommodate metropolitan growth over the long term. The boundary to the east is too loose, leading to simmering debate over services to a no-growth hinterland, while the boundary to the west and north, where growth is occurring, may be too tight. Unlike in Calgary, there is no mechanism for adjusting boundaries to accommodate metropolitan growth. Indeed, the 1996 amalgamation was not designed with adjustments in mind. There is also no provincial mandate for intermunicipal planning coordination, and Halifax's comprehensive plan, the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy, is silent on coordination with neighbouring municipalities (Halifax Regional Council 2014).

4.3 Lessons

The Calgary experience illustrates how an intentional unicity policy may produce a master-planned and fully serviced pattern of contiguous urbanization. Nevertheless, it represents a rare combination of historical factors and is unlikely to be replicated in other contexts. The unicity model was made possible by Calgary's monocentric metropolitan housing and labour markets and its historical isolation from other settlements.

In recent years, the unicity's area of influence has collided with those of other settlements, producing a polycentric region whose development must be coordinated by other means. Calgary is now grappling with what occurred a century earlier in most North American cities. While annexation as a precondition of servicing contiguous urbanizing areas remains part of fast-growing Calgary's toolkit, it is no longer sufficient to coordinate development at the metropolitan scale. Winnipeg and Edmonton face the same dilemma and have done so for much longer because of the earlier development of nearby separate urban settlements. In both cases, provincial governments have responded by establishing metropolitan-scale coordinating organizations.

Halifax's unicity emerged from different priorities. With great controversy, the unicity was created primarily to reduce local administration costs rather than to provide for more integrated urban planning and development. It remains to be seen how the HRM will coordinate relationships with neighbouring jurisdictions as its population grows and its commutershed expands, and what role the provincial government will play.

5. Compulsory regional intergovernmental organization

The two-tier municipality was once considered the most effective alternative to the unicity. Patterned on the historical county form of government, but with a powerful upper-tier authority spanning the entire commuter zone, the metropolitan level could make binding policy decisions for and redistribute revenues across the region as a whole, while preserving the lower-tier units' ability to manage local affairs.

The model fell out of favour, however, as two-tier governments proved politically difficult to create, given strong support for local autonomy. Even when created, they proved difficult to modify in response to changing conditions and needs. In part this was because the key to their effectiveness – their institutional sophistication and complexity – made it difficult to enlarge their territorial boundaries and add new tasks.

Given the eclipse of the metropolitan two-tier municipality model, attention has turned to “thinner” institutions that facilitate joint planning and municipal policy coordination, although some also operate infrastructure systems and provide services directly to households. Such institutions may be multi-purpose – what in the American context Miller and Nelles (2019) call regional intergovernmental organizations (RIGOs) and Wolman (2017) calls multi-purpose special districts (MPSDs) – although single-purpose versions also exist. Their membership may also be compulsory or voluntary. Compulsory multi-purpose regional intergovernmental organizations are discussed first, followed by voluntary partnership bodies and single-purpose districts.

This section profiles three compulsory regional intergovernmental organizations (see Table 3).

- Created in 1967, the Metro Vancouver Regional District has the longest history. Having absorbed several metropolitan single-purpose districts, some founded early in the 20th century, it is the only multi-purpose regional intergovernmental organization discussed here that operates infrastructure systems and facilities.
- The Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal is a more recent creation, established in 2002 in tandem with a province-wide restructuring of local government.
- Alberta created the precursor to the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board, the Capital Region Board, in 2008.

Each body was established by provincial statute, has compulsory membership, and has boundaries that approximately correspond to the census metropolitan area.

5.1 Profile: Metro Vancouver Regional District

Historical background. Municipalities in the Vancouver region have voluntarily collaborated since the early 20th century. An intermunicipal sewer and drainage district established in 1913 established an enduring institutional template

Table 3: Compulsory regional intergovernmental organizations

	Metro Vancouver Regional District	Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal	Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board
Regional population	2.46 million (2016)	4.1 million (2020)	1.35 million (2019)
Central city population and percentage of regional population	City of Vancouver 631,486 (25.6%)	City of Montréal 1,801,546 (44.4%)	City of Edmonton 972,223 (72%)
Land area	2,877 km ²	4,371 km ²	9,439 km ²
Year established	1967 (as Greater Vancouver Regional District; renamed in 2007)	2002	2008 (as Capital Region Board; reconstituted in 2018)
Board	23 members: 1 member each from 21 municipalities, 1 elected from electoral area comprising unincorporated territory, 1 delegated by treaty First Nation	28 members representing 82 municipalities: Mayor of Montréal, 13 delegated from Montréal Agglomeration, 3 from City of Laval, 3 from City of Longueuil, 4 from North Shore, 4 from South Shore	13 members: 1 member each from 13 member municipalities (all municipalities in region with a population of more than 5,000); minister may appoint 1 or more nonvoting members.
Head of board	Elected by members from their own number	Mayor of the City of Montréal	Elected by members from their own number or appointed by the province
Voting formula	Votes are weighted by municipal population Consensus required for major decisions	One member, one vote Supermajority required: 2/3 of members	One member, one vote Supermajority required: 2/3 of members comprising 2/3 of population
Operating responsibilities	Water supply (wholesale) Sewer treatment (wholesale) Social housing Solid waste management Air quality monitoring Regional parks Investment attraction		
Planning/ coordinating responsibilities	Regional planning	Regional planning Artistic or cultural development Economic development Social housing Regional visitor facilities Public transportation Air quality Water treatment Waste management	Regional planning Regional service planning
Annual operating budget	\$890 million (2020)	\$97.2 million (2018)	\$3.6 million (2019)
Boundaries correspond to CMA	Yes	No – the CMM covers a smaller total area than the CMA, but also includes several municipalities that are not part of the CMA.	Yes
Website	www.metrovancouver.org	www.cmm.qc.ca	www.emrb.ca

characterized by equitable treatment and flexibility (Lea 1913; Taylor 2019b, 196–200). Municipalities financed regional activities in proportion to benefits received and new members were admitted on the same terms as existing ones. This arrangement enabled the extension of trunk water and sewer systems to support urban growth while minimizing political controversy over apportioning costs.

In response to municipal demands, the province passed enabling legislation to create intermunicipal regional planning boards structured along the same lines. The province established a Lower Mainland Regional Planning Board (LMRPB) in 1949 (see Harcourt, Cameron, and Rossiter 2007, ch. 1). After a decade and a half of study and discussion, the Board adopted a binding regional zoning plan in 1966.

To coordinate planning and servicing by single-tier municipalities and unincorporated areas across the province, the provincial government began establishing “regional districts” in 1965. Their boards were composed of municipal council representatives in proportion to each municipality’s share of the population. Territories without incorporated municipal government are represented on the board as “electoral areas.”

The Lower Mainland was divided into four regional districts in 1967, including the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). Adopting the model of Vancouver’s water and sewer districts, municipalities financially contributed to the district in proportion to their share of metropolitan assessed value of property. While municipal membership in a regional district is mandatory, and participation in some functions is compulsory, municipalities may opt out of some services. This has proved to be a flexible and uncontroversial arrangement.

Recognizing strong local opposition to incursions into local autonomy, the province mandated few functions for the regional districts. Only a few years earlier, local opposition had sunk a commission’s proposal to establish a Metro Toronto-style metropolitan government (Ray 1960). Nevertheless, the GVRD soon absorbed existing water and sewer special districts, as well as a recently established regional parks district. It also assumed authority over capital borrowing, public housing, labour relations, air pollution control, and solid waste management (Tennant and Zirnelt 1972, 1973). While the GVRD had expected to take control of public transit from BC Hydro, this never occurred. Instead, the province created a separate metropolitan special purpose body called TransLink in 1998.

Regional planning authority and the administration of the 1966 Official Regional Plan were transferred to the four Lower Mainland regional districts in 1969. The province abolished regional planning authority in 1983 (Harcourt, Cameron, and Rossiter 2007, 70–72; Oberlander and Smith 1993, 363). Building on decades of collaboration and integration through the regional district and its predecessors, Greater Vancouver municipalities chose to continue working together voluntarily under the rubric of “development services” (Taylor 2019b, 232–237). Their cooperation culminated in a voluntary regional plan, which was given statutory effect in 1996 by a new provincial government (GVRD 1996).

The *Growth Strategies Act* institutionalizes the consensual local decision making that had already emerged. Under the legislation, a “regional growth strategy” can come into effect only with the consent of all affected local governments – there is no legislative requirement that local municipal plans conform to it. As part of the process, each municipality produces a “regional context statement” explaining how its plan and actions align with the regional strategy. A binding arbitration process is invoked if a municipality disagrees with an adopted regional strategy, or if the regional district rejects a regional context statement.

Although they share mostly the same board membership (varying only in terms of municipal participation in functions), the Greater Vancouver Water District, Greater Vancouver Sewerage and Drainage District, Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation, and Metro Vancouver Regional District are technically separate entities with their own budgets and financing arrangements. The water and sewer districts are self-financed through user fees charged to municipalities in proportion to water consumed and liquid waste drained, and for solid waste, tipping fees, and energy sales. The housing district is primarily funded through rents and subsidies provided by other levels of government.

The regional district itself is funded through a requisition from member municipalities in proportion to their share of the region’s assessed property value, as well as user fees. The requisition accounts for approximately 6 percent of the consolidated regional operating budget. The MVRD adopted a special \$4-million requisition to finance affordable housing construction in 2019 (Pablo 2020). Dating back to the creation of the sewerage and drainage and water boards before the Second World War, this proportionate, user-pay system is well entrenched and uncontroversial.

Current challenges. While this system remains intact today, its operation has not always been smooth. Achieving consensus on planning goals required side deals that arguably undermine broader objectives. After the 1996 municipal election, for example, the suburban City of Richmond’s new council threatened to quit the regional district unless its forecast growth allocation was increased (Pynn 1998). Coquitlam, Langley, Maple Ridge, and Surrey secured similar modifications (Munro 1998). Nevertheless, the highly public process of negotiating planning goals has cemented the legitimacy of regional planning and the regional district as an institution. The 1996 regional plan was revised in 2011, albeit with additional negotiations over growth allocations (Metro Vancouver 2011).

The regional district model has retained its flexibility. The four Lower Mainland regional districts were reduced to two as the GVRD’s membership expanded in 1988 and 1995. Non-GVRD municipalities have at various points participated in GVRD services. Its provision of water, sewer, waste management, and other services remains uncontroversial. Reflecting comfort with the system, member municipalities voted unanimously to rename the regional district the Metro Vancouver Regional District (MVRD) in 2007 – an extraordinary move, given outlying municipalities’ historical suspicion of the central city’s motives. The regional district has continued

to assume additional functions, most recently deciding to launch a new investment attraction service in 2019.

The greatest dangers to the regional district's effectiveness may lie beyond its control. Municipal politicians acknowledge the province's crucial role in financing infrastructure projects that are beyond the fiscal capacity of local governments (Bohn 1995; Sinoski 2011). As discussed below under TransLink, the province has repeatedly used its legislative authority and spending power to impose its own agenda for major transportation projects, overruling the preferences of the regional district. While the regional district has resisted redesignating regional agricultural zones and provincial Agricultural Land Reserve lands for residential development, it has not been able to arrest erosion of the Lower Mainland's agricultural land base (McDougall, Mussell, and Yang 2017, 19–26). Since the regional growth strategy is implemented through municipal official community plans by consent, much depends on municipalities' willingness to follow the "spirit of the law" when making specific urban development and infrastructure decisions.

5.2 Profile: Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal

Historical background. Established in 2001, the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal (CMM) emerged from a broader provincial reform that restructured local government and dissolved existing upper-tier "urban communities" that had existed since 1969–70 in the Montréal, Québec City, and Outaouais areas.

The CMM succeeded the Communauté urbaine de Montréal (CUM), which covered only the island of Montréal. Established by the province in 1970, the CUM operated bus and underground Métro transit through the Société de Transport de la Communauté Urbaine de Montréal, as well as police services and water supply, and coordinated land-use planning and economic development. The system was designed to give the City of Montréal effective control. The mayor of Montréal automatically served as chair of the CUM board and city councillors formed a majority. This arrangement fuelled ongoing resistance from suburban municipalities, especially those in the anglophone-majority west island, despite a double-majority voting rule (Boudreau et al. 2006, 23; Sancton 1985, 114–115).

The CUM's proactive policy-making capacity diminished as the Montréal region as a whole, and the central city in particular, endured severe economic recession during the late 1980s and early 1990s. As the CUM was funded in proportion to each municipality's share of the island's tax base, declining property values in the City of Montréal destabilized the relationship between core and suburban municipalities.

In 1993, a provincial working group chaired by Claude Pichette called for a new metropolitan institution, its boundaries aligned with the CMA, to combat Montréal's economic malaise (Pichette 1993; Sancton 1999, 190). Its board would be composed of municipal elected officials in proportion to the subregions' share of the regional population.

The province did not, however, immediately move to replace the CUM with a new metropolitan institution. Instead, it created the Agence métropolitaine

de transport (AMT), a new special-purpose body, responsible to the Québec government, in 1996 to plan and coordinate local transit service, as well as operate regional rail services. The AMT moved quickly to expand the regional rail system and establish a common zoned fare system spanning the region's then-16 transit providers.

The province created the CMM (and a similar agency for Québec City) in 2001 in parallel with other imposed municipal amalgamations across the province. All 28 CUM municipalities were amalgamated as boroughs into a new single-tier City of Montréal. Some were “demerged” after referenda in 2006, leading the province to establish an “agglomeration council” to cost-share island-wide services inherited from the CUM. The agglomeration is administered by, and its board controlled by, the City of Montréal, rendering the demergers largely symbolic in terms of increasing policy autonomy.

The amalgamated cities of Montréal and Longueuil (on the south shore), are divided into boroughs, each with its own council, with significant responsibilities, if limited fiscal autonomy (Collin and Robertson 2005; Meloche and Vaillancourt 2013). The CMM was designed as a “thin” institution – a collective strategic planning and coordinating body rather than a deliverer of services to individuals and households. Approximately three-quarters of its revenues come from municipalities, the remainder from the province.

Its council, which (as with the earlier CUM) is automatically chaired by the mayor of Montréal, has 28 members. The Montréal agglomeration council appoints 13 members, giving the island half the CMM council's seats. The rest are allocated by balancing subregional interests. The City of Laval and the Longueuil agglomeration council each appoint two members plus their mayors, and the other North Shore and South Shore municipalities each select four mayors from among their number. The latter are appointed to ensure representation of each Regional County Municipality (RCM).³ Most decisions are made by majority, but the metropolitan plan and matters involving infrastructure and facilities of metropolitan scope must be approved with two-thirds support.

The result is what Klein and Tremblay (2010, 569) call an “administrative archipelago”: a four-tier local government system in which the CMM sits atop the urban agglomerations of Montréal and Longueuil and 12 RCMs wholly or in part, within which are nested lower-tier municipalities. The Cities of Montréal and Longueuil are in turn divided into boroughs with their own mayors and councillors.

Current challenges. The CMM's first task was to develop a metropolitan plan that would supersede the planning authority of the RCMs – a move the RCMs, understandably, resisted (Douay and Roy-Baillargeon 2015, 33). The draft plan attracted little public attention and was criticized for being vague and reactive.

3. County-like upper-tier municipalities.

After this failure, the provincial government amended legislation in 2010 to distinguish the planning authority of the CMM from that of the RCMs. The CMM's plan would be more broad-brush while the RCM plans would be more specific and geared toward implementation. The RCMs and municipalities are required to amend their plans to conform to the metropolitan plan.

A metropolitan plan was adopted by a 28–1 margin in 2011 (CMM 2011), its acceptability arguably flowing from its avoidance of strong prescriptions and the wide distribution of growth opportunities across 155 transit-oriented development areas, to which 40 percent of future housing is to be directed (Mennie 2011; Roy-Baillargeon 2017).

The CMM has also indefinitely deferred expansion of its tax-base sharing scheme. Similar to a program in Minneapolis–St. Paul, municipalities are required by provincial regulation to contribute incremental revenues from residential and commercial tax base expansion to a common development fund; the CMM council sets the total value of municipal contributions. Municipalities' total annual contribution to the fund has been frozen at \$100,000 since 2006, however, virtually eliminating any redistributive effect, and the fund's expenditures have been directed toward specific projects rather than the general fund (Lafortune and Collin 2011, 407). Municipalities have also prevented expansion of expenditure-sharing for the following regional visitor facilities specified in the legislation: the botanical garden and Insectarium, the planetarium, the Biodôme, and the Cosmodôme. While its enabling act provides broad scope for municipalities to “upload” local functions to the CMM, no uploading has occurred.

Nevertheless, the CMM has presided over several collaborative plans, studies, and projects. Since 2011, the CMM has collected a regional passenger vehicle registration fee that it remits to the *Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain* (ARTM).⁴ It has also adopted general policies and plans for economic development, a cycling network, islands and shorelines, agriculture, waste management, and flood resilience. The CMM is also the conduit for social housing funds flowing from the province to municipalities. In contrast to regional planning, Lafortune and Collin (2011) view the housing program as a success. Working within strong provincial mandates and with financial incentives, municipalities collaborated through the CMM to devise a funding allocation formula.

The CMM's influence has been constrained since its inception. Imposed by the province, it had no constituency among local politicians, especially in the off-island suburbs, which had no desire to cede control over land-use or economic development to a body that appeared to be a front for the City of Montréal (Tomàs 2012, 560). The RCMs, some of which are only partially within the CMM's jurisdiction, also had no incentive to cede their land-use planning authority to another entity. For its part, the province has resisted empowering an institution

4. The ARTM replaced the AMT in 2017. While the CMM approves the ARTM's regional transit plan, it does not develop it.

that would be, in effect, a province within a province. While it has used the CMM to deliver social housing, it did not side with it against the RCMs in the debate over land-use planning powers.

The modest goals of the CMM's 2011 plan are not being met. A recent report states that automobile commuting, including from outside the CMM, is increasing, as is the production of single detached housing in outlying areas (CMM 2020b). In response, the CMM has proposed entering into agreements with bordering municipalities to develop public transit connections (CMM 2020a). The province has been an inconsistent ally. The CMM opposed the province's approval in 2019 of new greenfield development outside designated areas for urbanization, much of it on protected farmland, in the RCM of Montcalm (CMM 2019), but it can do nothing about it.

5.3 Profile: Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board

Historical background. Similar to B.C.'s Lower Mainland, but unlike Calgary, Edmonton has always been a polycentric region. To the northwest, the historical Métis settlement of St. Albert predates the founding of Edmonton itself, while the nearby settlements of Spruce Grove to the west, Fort Saskatchewan to the northeast, and Leduc to the south were incorporated more than a century ago.

As Edmonton expanded, these villages grew into substantial freestanding towns and cities. The rural Municipal District of Strathcona's proposal to build a new town on Edmonton's east flank called Sherwood Park in the early 1950s – unsuccessfully opposed by Edmonton – precipitated the province's appointment of the McNally Commission and the adoption of the unicity policy in both Calgary and Edmonton. Nevertheless, Edmonton's polycentricity rendered the policy less effective than in Calgary. Today, the City's share of the regional population is about 70 percent.⁵

A statutory Regional Planning Commission (RPC) operated in Edmonton between 1950 and 1995, when it was abolished by the province (see Climenhaga 1997). After 1963, its board was made up entirely of delegates from municipal councils. The RPC prepared official plans and planning studies for small municipalities and, after 1953, exercised subdivision approval authority in rural areas to ensure that fringe-area construction met urban standards prior to annexation. After 1957, the RPC was required to prepare a regional plan to guide urban expansion and servicing (see EMRPC 1984, pt. I). These plans became binding on municipal plans in 1977 (Masson and LeSage 1994, 414–422). This requirement gave Edmonton, which regulated subdivision within its borders, indirect control over urban development beyond its boundaries. Observers agree that despite skirmishes between the regional commissions and municipalities, the system was generally effective during the 1950s and 1960s (Alberta 1981; Cullingworth 1987, 340–347; Dale and Burton 1984; Masson and LeSage 1994, 422). Nevertheless, an

5. The Edmonton region is defined for this calculation as the City plus Lamont, Leduc, Parkland, Strathcona, and Sturgeon Counties and associated municipalities. This is identical to Statistics Canada's definition of the Edmonton CMA.

ultimately unsuccessful proposal by Edmonton to annex neighbouring St. Albert, Fort Saskatchewan, and the urbanized portion of Strathcona County in the late 1970s led to administrative appeals and considerable acrimony (Plunkett and Lightbody 1982).

The provincial government's dissolution of the RPC in 1995 created a metropolitan governance vacuum characterized by disjointed planning and distrust between the City and its neighbours. The RPC's attempt to transform itself into a voluntary "forum" failed and the province shelved the 2001 Capital Region Governance Review report (Alberta 2001; Hodge and Robinson 2001, 258–259; LeSage and Stefanik 2004).

In 2008 the provincial government broke the impasse by unilaterally imposing a Capital Region Board (CRB) with compulsory membership and charging it with preparing a regional "growth plan" with which municipal plans and actions must be consistent. The region covered corresponds to Statistics Canada's definition of the Edmonton CMA – a vast area covering 9,439 km² and one-third of the provincial population. In addition, the board is required to approve, among other municipal actions, all proposed development projects that affect more than one municipality, subdivisions planned to contain more than 1,000 residents, and major industrial developments within 5 km of a city boundary.

Edmonton's neighbours resented the CRB because its voting formula gave the City an effective veto: all decisions must be approved by 17 of the 25 member municipalities representing 75 percent of the population. Although a regional plan was adopted in 2009 by a vote of 19 to 6, and approved by the province in 2010, conflict continued, with municipalities engaging in "tit-for-tat" battles over major development approvals, annexation proposals, economic development projects, and even passing the organization's budget (Neufeld 2017; Staples 2017; Stolte 2013, 2016).

Current challenges. In 2018, the provincial government renamed the CRB the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board (EMRB).⁶ Arguing that "there needed to be a tighter, more nimble team," the minister also reduced the board to one elected councillor from each of the 13 municipalities with more than 5,000 residents (Stolte 2016). (While halving the size of the board, the change left the board still representing more than 98 percent of the region's population.) Decisions must be adopted by two-thirds of the municipalities representing two-thirds of the population. With 72 percent of the population, Edmonton retains a de facto veto, but must bring another eight municipalities on side for any business to be approved. The voting model remains controversial in that it favours more populous municipalities. A special board meeting on March 12, 2020, discussed alternatives, including bloc voting by type of municipality, but made no decision.

The regulation requires the EMRB to prepare both a growth plan and a servicing plan and specifies the content of each. Adopted in 2019, the servicing plan focuses on solid waste management, stormwater management, fire protection, and

6. A parallel body was established for Calgary. Both draw their authority from regulations made under the *Municipal Government Act*.

emergency services (EMRB 2019a). To forestall concerns about arbitrary decision-making in its approval of municipal plans, the EMRB is now required to develop a “regional evaluation framework” (REF) that lists triggers for local planning issues to be referred to the Board for review and approval. The current version was approved by the minister in 2017.

The EMRB has also adopted Vancouver’s practice of having municipalities prepare “regional context statements” that describe how municipal plans are consistent with the regional growth plan. Once the evaluation framework and growth plan are approved by the minister, all local plans must be approved by the EMRB to come into effect. The provincial requirement for the regional board to prepare the two statutory regional plans represents a profound shift from early voluntary collaboration and will have far-reaching effects on the region’s development pattern.

There are signs that the decade-long experience with a compulsory regional board has smoothed intermunicipal friction (EMRB 2019b):

- The Board created Edmonton Global, a regional investment attraction agency, in 2018. A revised growth plan was adopted by the CRB in 2016. Only two municipalities opposed it. Parkland County disagreed with the creation of Edmonton Global, while Leduc County argued that the growth plan does not sufficiently protect agricultural land (Johnston 2016). The plan would still have passed under the new EMRB voting structure.
- The Board has developed decision support systems for municipalities, including a shared GIS infrastructure and performance monitoring dashboard.
- Member municipalities have initiated plans and strategies not mandated by the province, including the Regional Agriculture Master Plan, the Regional Energy Corridors Advocacy Strategy, and a regional broadband plan. The board is also working on a Shared Investment for Shared Benefit Initiative, to guide cost-sharing for projects that cross municipal boundaries.
- A study of combining all municipal public transit services into a single regional commission was received in January 2020 (Ernst & Young 2020). All municipalities except for Strathcona County endorsed the plan, which must be approved by the minister (Johnston 2020).
- The Board now spends considerably more than it did a decade ago in nominal terms. While most operating funds come from the province, member municipalities contributed more than one-third of its approximately \$3 million budget in 2019.⁷

7. It is unclear how costs are shared in practice. The implementing regulation states that “The Board may...requisition participating municipalities for operating costs related to the operations of the Board and capital costs where authorized by the Board” (s. 6(b)) but does not specify a formula. The Board’s governance manual states that costs be apportioned through a combination of an equal “core fee” and a “weighted allocation formula based on population and total equalized assessment. The core fee recognizes all members’ commitment regardless of size, with the balance of the fees allocated proportionally based on size of municipality” (EMRB 2018, 36).

5.4 Lessons

The compulsory regional intergovernmental organizations operating in the Vancouver, Montréal, and Edmonton regions have played an important coordinating role in their polycentric metropolitan areas. At their most effective, they not only smooth relationships but also provide a platform for municipalities to pursue joint projects. Other examples include:

- the Capital Regional District centred on Victoria, B.C., which follows the same template as Metro Vancouver;
- the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board, whose implementing regulation is almost identical to Edmonton's;
- the Communauté métropolitaine de Québec, which follows the same pattern as the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal.

Although they are not discussed in this report, New Brunswick's regional service commissions, three of which are centred on the urban centres of Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John, bear a close resemblance to British Columbia's regional districts and are required to provide regional planning, solid waste management, policing, and emergency management planning, along with cost-sharing for regional infrastructure and facilities.

There is considerable variation in the powers and functions of the regional institutions. Montréal and Edmonton's bodies are designed to develop binding plans that coordinate the activities of municipalities and single-purpose bodies – transit, economic development, and other entities – not to operate infrastructure systems or provide services directly to residents. Charged with administering water and sewer infrastructure, solid waste, and other functions, Metro Vancouver's extensive operating responsibilities are the product of its distinct long-term development. Planning responsibilities were grafted onto pre-existing operating functions, not the other way around.

We can draw two lessons from the Vancouver, Montréal, and Edmonton cases. First, only provincial governments have the authority to establish and empower metropolitan institutions with compulsory municipal membership. As each institution is created by provincial statute, municipalities are legally bound to participate in their deliberations and financing. As we shall see in the next section on voluntary municipal partnerships, absent compulsory membership, municipalities have little incentive to participate.

Second, while compulsory membership brings municipalities to the table, provincial governments must provide additional incentives to promote collective problem-solving. Perhaps the most powerful incentive is money. Alberta subsidizes the operation of the EMRB, including mandated planning exercises. Québec uses the CMM as a conduit for provincial conditional grants for social housing. It is no surprise that these are considered the EMRB and CMM's most successful activities.

The Metro Vancouver case differs in that its various activities are funded by member local governments according to proportional formulas. In essence, contributions are proportional to benefits received.

Institutional design also matters. The three institutions each have carefully crafted representation that balances subregional interests and voting formulas that ensure that adopted initiatives have broad support. In Montréal and Edmonton, the central city is given an effective veto; however, supermajority requirements prevent it from acting unilaterally. At least potentially, the fact that the mayor of Montréal automatically chairs the CMM gives the core city a powerful agenda-setting role. Metro Vancouver's weighted voting system overrepresents small municipalities, but the requirement of consensus for major decisions gives a veto to *all* members, including the City of Vancouver. The three cases' distinct representation structures and voting rules likely generate different outcomes from those of one-member, one-vote majority voting.

Fiscal incentives and institutional structures are the "rules of the game" within which routine interactions between municipal elected officials occur. By stabilizing expectations about what will happen in future, they help build trust, both in the institution and among members. This dynamic is the key to understanding the long-term development of the Metro Vancouver Regional District. After decades of intermunicipal collaboration through the sewerage and drainage and water districts, municipalities became comfortable with adding additional functions, most recently economic development.

Comfort with larger collective initiatives may grow from the accumulation of small successes over time. This positive feedback loop may be developing in Edmonton. Successful collaboration on something as non-controversial as a shared data clearinghouse, as well as provincially mandated plans and studies, may have fostered the willingness to pursue more far-reaching projects, such as the creation of Edmonton Global and the integration of municipal public transit systems.

Until such collaborative learning processes become self-reinforcing – as has arguably occurred in Vancouver – they must be nurtured by the only external authority able to establish the incentive structure: the provincial government. The CMM's apparent inability to move from protecting local prerogatives to more extensive regional problem-solving points to inadequate fiscal and institutional incentive structures put in place by the Québec government.

6. Voluntary intermunicipal partnership

Some provincial governments provide legal or material support to voluntary intermunicipal organizations. By their very nature, voluntary bodies cannot make binding decisions, nor decisions that allocate costs and benefits across their membership. However, they can function as a forum for ongoing interactions that institutionalize relationships, promote a common understanding of problems, and build trust, potentially leading to the creation of more authoritative, compulsory bodies.

They may also be a waystation in the creation of compulsory bodies. This appears to be the case in Winnipeg and Calgary, where voluntary intermunicipal “talking shops” have been replaced, or are being replaced, by partnerships with compulsory membership, and ultimately by compulsory regional intergovernmental organizations with specific operating mandates. Again, the province is the central actor in this story.

Provincial involvement is required, as only provincial governments have the legal authority to impose obligations on municipalities. Because of the transitional nature of the Winnipeg and Calgary cases, they are profiled as examples of transformation over time in provincial-municipal relations in which a voluntaristic model is but one stage.

6.1 Profile: Winnipeg Metropolitan Region

Historical background. Winnipeg has a rich history of metropolitan government reform. A two-tier system similar to Metro Toronto (but directly elected) was established in 1961 and replaced with a single-tier City of Winnipeg – dubbed “Unicity” – in 1972 (Sancton 2015, 120–121, 142–144). The city was given extraterritorial jurisdiction over urban development, but this power was eliminated in the 1980s (Hodge and Robinson 2001, 252).

Due to the region’s slow growth in the intervening years, the central city remains home to 91 percent of the CMA’s population. Despite the City of Winnipeg’s dominance, interest in improving the coordination of municipal economic development and infrastructure decisions persists.

Recognizing the central city’s decline relative to surrounding areas, and following several conflicts over development projects, the provincial government appointed a Capital Region Review Panel in 1998 to recommend options for reform. The panel proposed general legislation enabling the formation of “regional associations” to which member municipalities could delegate any of their existing functions (Scath et al. 1999). Although this legislation was never enacted, a Capital Region Partnership organization composed of Winnipeg-area heads of council continued to meet to discuss matters of common interest.

Implementing the recommendations of an advisory committee (Thomas 1999), the province passed the *Capital Region Partnership Act* in 2006. The statute established an entity called the Capital Region Partnership with 18 member municipalities, and a mandate to “discuss and develop regional solutions” for land-use planning, infrastructure development, environmental protection, and water quality and supply. While the statute enables the province to establish a specific mandate for the organization, it never did so.

Although it is grounded in a provincial statute, the partnership is essentially a talking shop. Nevertheless, it has fostered several collaborations: a broad-brush Regional Growth Strategy (Thompson 2016), released in 2016, and the creation of JohnQ Public Inc., a joint-procurement corporation, in 2018. These events coincided with the Capital Region Partnership’s 2018 rebranding as the Winnipeg

Metropolitan Region (WMR). Together these initiatives signalled the growing willingness of area municipalities to work together for common objectives, provided that they benefit all parties.

Current challenges. The status of metropolitan governance in Winnipeg, and of WMR in particular, is in flux. In December 2018, the Manitoba government released a new provincial economic development strategy, which mandated WMR to deliver regional economic development programs and services (Froese 2019). WMR commissioned a wide-ranging set of consultations on problems requiring metropolitan collaboration in the Winnipeg region (Murray 2019). This review recommended that the province establish a regional authority, patterned on the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board, to develop a growth management plan and prioritize infrastructure projects.

The provincial government moved quickly to implement this recommendation. Bill 48, to amend the *Planning Act* and the Winnipeg Charter and repeal the *Capital Region Partnership Act*, received its first reading in the legislature on March 19, 2020, one day before the assembly was indefinitely suspended in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸ If enacted, the bill will establish a regional planning board with compulsory municipal membership, funded by member municipalities. The board would be required to adopt a regional plan with which all local plans and zoning bylaws must be consistent, subject to ministerial approval. Granted natural-person power and authority to expropriate property, borrow and lend money, and “exercise any other powers that are necessary to carry out its mandate,” the board would wield broad authority over the region’s development.

While not yet in existence, the Capital Region Planning Board would represent both an evolutionary development and a profound shift in Winnipeg metropolitan governance. It is evolutionary in the sense that there has been incremental movement over time from informal and voluntary intermunicipal collaboration toward compulsory institutionalized interaction. However, the province’s establishment of a statutory regional planning instrument subject to the minister’s approval breaks new ground insofar as it establishes new legal authority at the metropolitan level and inserts the provincial government directly into what had been an intermunicipal process. Whether municipalities will tolerate this impingement on their existing planning authority remains to be seen (Zerucha 2020).

6.2 Profile: Calgary Regional Partnership

Historical background. Calgary may offer insights into where Winnipeg may be headed. After statutory regional planning commissions in Calgary and Edmonton were abolished in 1995, area municipalities formed a voluntary consensus-based body, the Calgary Regional Partnership (CRP), in 1999. Member municipalities unanimously adopted the Calgary Metropolitan Plan in 2009 after several years of consultation and study (CRP 2012, 2010). Copying the B.C. model, municipalities

8. Bill 48, *The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act*, 2nd s., 42nd leg., Manitoba, 69 Eliz. II, 2020. <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/bills/42-2/b048e.php>

pledged to include “regional context statements” in their plans. Although the City of Calgary assumed that the Calgary Metropolitan Plan would be given authority under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (discussed below), this did not occur (Kuzmak 2019, 4).

The plan’s adoption masked disagreement, however. Opposing Calgary’s dominance, the surrounding rural municipal districts – Bighorn, Rocky View, Foothills, and Wheatland – either left the organization or refused to join the Calgary Regional Partnership. High River voted to quit in April 2013. (The remaining 14 municipalities, including High River, had unanimously approved an updated plan in 2012.) The provincial government of the day signalled that it would not compel them to remain.

The crux of the matter is the servicing of new urban developments with water. While most of the region’s municipalities are near the limits of their water allocations under the provincial licensing regime (and the province stopped issuing new licences in 2006), Calgary can support a population of three million people, more than twice its current population. Calgary’s control over servicing gives it extraordinary influence over its neighbours. While most smaller urban municipalities have accepted Calgary’s dominance, the rural municipalities see it as frustrating the legitimate desires of their present and future residents, and consequently have boycotted the Calgary Regional Partnership and its plan (Braid 2008; Kom 2009).

Current challenges. Soon after a change in government, in September 2015 the province announced that it would break the impasse by imposing mandatory growth management boards on both Calgary and Edmonton. It amended the *Municipal Government Act* in 2016 to provide for regional planning boards. The CRP disbanded in 2017 and the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board (CMRB) commenced operation in January 2018. Its authority is almost identical to that of Edmonton’s board. Perhaps to mollify more distant settlements, the new body’s territorial jurisdiction is smaller than the partnership’s.

While at various points, 18 municipalities have been members of the Calgary Regional Partnership, the regulation provides for the new CMRB to have 10 members. While each municipality has one seat on the board, all decisions require the support of two-thirds of municipalities representing two-thirds of the population. While the City of Calgary has only one vote on the board, it accounts for 84 percent of the population. (Airdrie, with 4 percent, has the second largest share.) While Calgary has a veto, it must bring six other municipalities on side to gain support for any decision.

The mandatory board’s creation was not welcomed by all municipalities. The final chair of the CRP, Okotoks Mayor Bill Robertson, remarked that “It’s going to take years to get past the government mandating this” (Okotoks Today 2018). Although an Interim Growth Plan was passed and approved by the minister in 2018, conflict continues. In 2019, Rocky View County proposed amendments to its plan that would lift limits on the population growth of designated hamlets. While

CMRB planners and an independent consultant found that the amendments were consistent with the regional board's interim growth plan, Calgary engineered their removal (Rockview County 2019).

6.3 Lessons

The Winnipeg and Calgary stories illustrate the limits of voluntary bodies, their potential to intensify collaboration, and the centrality of provincial governments in structuring intermunicipal relations. In both regions, intermunicipal trust has been hampered by the central city's dominance of the regional population.

Although the outcome is uncertain, Winnipeg appears to be a more successful example of how the capacity to accomplish regional projects can emerge incrementally. Through the development of the Regional Growth Strategy and the formation of JohnQ, area municipalities became increasingly comfortable with working together, ultimately leading to acceptance of the recommendation to create a more authoritative regional body grounded in provincial statute.

Calgary's experience has been more conflict-ridden. Having reached a stalemate, the province imposed a compulsory solution: the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board. It remains to be seen whether municipalities will participate in good faith, and whether the provincial government (now dominated by a different party from the one that created the boards) will support the board's authority when conflicts emerge.

7. Metropolitan single-purpose body

A more limited form of metropolitan governance is the single-purpose body. Intermunicipal bodies of metropolitan scope include watershed management boards (conservation authorities), water supply boards, health authorities, and port authorities. Some have municipal involvement, others do not (see Sancton 2015, ch. 4). I will focus on what may be the most contentious examples: regional transit and economic development agencies. As the institutional structure, intergovernmental relationships, and responsibilities of the three largest metropolitan areas' transit authorities are worth comparing directly, they will be discussed together. The section concludes with a brief discussion of regional investment attraction agencies in Toronto, Montréal, and Vancouver.

7.1 Profile: Regional transit agencies in Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver

Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal each have regional transit authorities: TransLink, Metrolinx, and the *Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain* (ARTM), respectively. Each is a provincial government agency rather than a local body, established by provincial statute as a non-profit public corporation. Each administers an electronic fare system and prepares long-term transportation plans. While superficially similar, however, they vary with respect to municipalities' involvement in regional decision-making and financing and the extent of involvement in local transit operations (see Table 4).

Table 4: Regional transit bodies

	TransLink (Vancouver)	Metrolinx (Toronto)	Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain (Montréal)
Year established	1999	2006	Agence métropolitain de transport (AMT) established in 1996; ARTM established in 2017 in current form
Constitution	Provincial agency established by provincial statute	Provincial agency established by provincial statute	Provincial agency established by provincial statute
Board	Board of directors: 9 members – 2 appointed by the minister, and 7 by Mayor's Council from the Screening Panel's list. Mayor's Council on Regional Transportation: composed of all 21 Metro Vancouver mayors and the Chief of Tsawwassen First Nation. Approves TransLink plans and borrowing limits. Appoints 3 members to the TransLink Board of Directors from a list screened by a panel.	Board of Directors: maximum 15 members, including the chair, appointed by the province	Board of directors: 15 members – 7 independent members appointed by the province, including the chair; 3 independent members appointed by the CMM; 5 municipal elected officials designed by the CMM
Operating responsibilities	Bus and SkyTrain transit West Coast Express rail SeaBus Compass fare system (2013) Maintenance of major road network, including 5 bridges	GO Transit (since 2008) PRESTO fare system (since 2011) UP Express airport train (since 2015)	OPUS fare system
Planning/ coordinating responsibilities	Long-term transportation planning supporting Metro Vancouver's Regional Growth Strategy.	Long-term transportation planning supporting the provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.	Long-term transportation planning supporting the CMM's Plan métropolitain d'aménagement et de développement; fare system planning and coordination; establishes local agencies' levels of service
Intergovernmental fiscal role	Administers regional share of the federal Gas Tax Fund for capital projects.	Administers electronic fare system, manages major rapid transit project procurement.	Administers provincial transit operating subsidy and capital grant, municipal operating subsidy, vehicle registration tax revenues, and fare revenues, redistributing to local authorities, EXO, and projects
Operating revenue sources	Motor vehicle fuel tax, levy on residential hydro bills, property tax, fares	Provincial subsidy, regional transit fares	Vehicle registration tax, municipal subsidy, provincial subsidy
Relationships with local transit authorities	None; TransLink delivers all transit in the region.	Coexists with 16 local transit authorities	Coexists with local transit system operators
Website	https://new.translink.ca	http://www.metrolinx.com/en/	https://www.artm.quebec

Governance. The entire Metrolinx board has been appointed by the provincial government since 2009. For the first three years of its existence, its board had 11 members: two appointed by the province, four by the City of Toronto, and one each appointed by the City of Hamilton and the Regional Municipalities of Halton, Peel, York, and Durham. The 2009 change was motivated by the province's desire to exert more direct control over its infrastructure expenditures (Tremblay-Racicot 2018).

While the Autorité régionale de transport métropolitaine (ARTM) is responsible to the Québec government, the minister appoints only seven of the board's 15 members, including the chair. Three are "independent members" appointed by the CMM. The remaining five are elected municipal officials selected by the CMM. The 10 non-elected members are professionals with diverse private-sector and scientific backgrounds.

The selection of TransLink's board is the most elaborate process, reflecting a balance between provincial and municipal interests. From its inception until 2007, TransLink's board was composed of municipal officials along the same lines as the Metro Vancouver Regional District. After a 2007 provincial governance review found the board to be "dysfunctional," it was replaced with a new system. The province would appoint two members directly. The remaining seven are appointed on staggered terms by the Mayor's Council on Regional Transportation, which consists of all mayors in the service area, from a list submitted by a five-member Screening Committee. One member each of the screening committee is appointed by the minister, the Mayor's Council, the board of the Organization of Chartered Professional Accountants of British Columbia, the board of directors of the Vancouver Board of Trade, and the Greater Vancouver Gateway Council (an organization of executives promoting trade-enhancing transportation infrastructure). Every year the screening committee submits 15 names to fill open slots. The board currently has 11 members: six with private-sector backgrounds, two elected municipal officials, and three with professional backgrounds in academia, trade unions, and municipal public service.

Responsibilities and funding sources. While Metrolinx coexists with local transit planner-operators, the ARTM is responsible for funding transit operators and determining their service levels. TransLink is alone in being the principal operator of local transit services in addition to its planning and coordinating responsibilities. (This fact reflects its idiosyncratic origins. Historically local transit in the Vancouver region was delivered by BC Hydro; there were no pre-existing local transit systems.) TransLink's operating budget is primarily funded by a local motor vehicle fuel surtax, a regional property surtax, and fare revenues, with capital funding coming from other levels of government, including the federal Gas Tax Fund.

Although the ARTM does not operate transit services directly, it plays an important role as a fiscal conduit, connecting provincial, regional, and municipal authorities. Provincial subsidies for local transit operations and capital works flow through the ARTM, as do vehicle registration tax revenues. As the administrator

of the electronic fare card and multi-zone fare system, it collects fare revenues and redistributes them to local operating authorities and EXO, the regional rail operator.⁹ Municipalities contribute about 30 percent of the global public transportation budget in proportion to their share of assessed property value – a level set by the CMM (ARTM n.d.). The ARTM is currently crafting its first long-range strategic plan (Plan stratégique de développement des services) and redesigning the fare collection and distribution system to make it more efficient and equitable.

Metrolinx is largely disconnected from local transit operations. Local transit authorities in the Toronto region are self-financing insofar as operating subsidies over and above fare revenues come from municipal coffers. Metrolinx's involvement in transit operations extends only to the regional bus and rail system and the Union-Pearson (UP) airport train, which receive an annual subsidy from the provincial government. While Metrolinx administers the PRESTO fare card, it has played virtually no role in coordinating local fare structures and transfers between local service areas. Unlike in Montréal, there is no zoned fare system. While PRESTO is the payment medium in all systems, users pay a second fare when they cross local service area boundaries. Metrolinx's primary involvement with local transit service is through capital project delivery, as it administers procurement for major rapid transit projects.

Current challenges. The ARTM's planning and redistributive activities have been criticized since its inception. Municipalities, the three local transit operators (whose service planning functions were transferred to the ARTM), and EXO have condemned the ARTM for being heavy-handed and duplicative, while its subregional consultation and coordination committees are seen as bureaucratic, detracting from a regional vision (Bisson 2018). Agreements between the ARTM and the operating authorities setting out the funding formula were signed in 2019, 18 months later than expected.

The local transit authorities' and EXO's discontent with the ARTM boiled over in early 2020, leading the provincial government to issue a directive to the ARTM to behave in a more collaborative manner (Bisson 2020). The fare structure redesign, which was to be completed in 2018, is not yet finalized, and drafts of the long-term strategic plan for transit expansion have been criticized by the City of Montréal as insufficient to meet future transportation demand. The local transit authorities and EXO have demanded seats on the ARTM board to remedy what they see as a failure to ensure fair representation.

TransLink is also frequently caught between divergent municipal and provincial priorities. The choice of SkyTrain technology, route selection, and financing of a new rapid transit line connecting downtown Vancouver to the airport and to

9. In 2017, Québec replaced the Agence métropolitaine de transport (AMT) with two agencies: the Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain (ARTM) tasked with producing a regional transit plan subject to approval by the CMM, and the Réseau de transport métropolitain (RTM), operating as EXO, which runs regional rail and bus service (Magder 2015).

Richmond's town centre were driven as much by intergovernmental politics in advance of the 2010 Winter Olympics and the premier's desire for a legacy project before leaving politics in 2011 as by demand forecasts and technical requirements (Siemiatycki 2007).

The governing Liberals' 2013 election platform promised a referendum on any new transportation taxes in Greater Vancouver (Liberal Party of British Columbia 2013, 17–18). In 2015, Greater Vancouver voters defeated a 10-year transportation plan developed by Mayor's Council, its \$7.7-billion price tag to be funded by a 0.5 percent sales tax increase (Lesch 2019). The provincial government of the day did little to defend the plan, and taxpayers' rights groups successfully portrayed it as a tax grab by an unaccountable agency. Lacking sufficient own-source fiscal resources, TransLink could not sustain incremental capital investment in new lines and service frequency improvements (Bula 2014). The provincial government's insistence on a tax increase referendum – something unprecedented in the postwar Canadian context – fits poorly with its unilateral decision-making on highway and bridge infrastructure. No referendum was required for the government's replacements of the Port Mann Bridge, which opened in 2012, and the Massey Tunnel, which broke ground in 2017. Both projects cost (or are forecast to cost) almost as much as the mayors' 10-year plan. Both were also opposed by TransLink and Metro Vancouver, which argued that they undermined the adopted growth management strategy. (After the 2017 change in government, the province put the Massey Tunnel replacement on hold pending a review, and has committed to funding, along with the federal government, to a revised version of the mayors' transit plan.)

Metrolinx has also faced criticism for prioritizing projects that respond more to political pressures facing the provincial government in power than to long-term needs. In 2018, the provincial auditor general found that repeated redefinition of ongoing rapid transit capital projects had resulted in \$436 million in additional direct costs over the previous decade (Janus 2018), not to mention the much larger potential long-term capital and operating costs of delayed openings and of building facilities with suboptimal capacity and location from a technical perspective.

7.2 Profile: Regional economic development agencies in Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver

The idea that economic development policies should be tailored to the specific needs and economic bases of regions is not new, although focusing such policies on metropolitan areas arguably is (Rodríguez-Pose 2008). Around the world, concern that the economic competitiveness of metropolitan areas was suffering due to competition between municipalities for residents and business investment grew starting in the late 1980s, leading to the creation of region-scaled agencies charged with investment attraction, place promotion, site selection support, and related tasks (Clark 2005).

Municipalities' willingness to hand over investment attraction to a regional body is inhibited by their continued reliance on property taxes for revenue, which

gives them a strong incentive to compete for lucrative growth in assessed property value. For this reason, metropolitan economic development agencies in Canada have generally been mandated to focus on international place marketing and the attraction of foreign direct investment rather than playing an active role in domestic firm recruitment and site selection. To do so would insert the regional body into the conflictual and likely politically untenable realm of picking winners and losers within the region.

Of Canada's three largest cities, Montréal was the first to establish a regional economic development agency, Montréal International, in 1996. It is primarily focused on investment and foreign talent attraction and acts as an intermediary among governments, firms, sectoral associations, investors, research institutions, local economic development agencies, and incubator and accelerator organizations. Montréal International is responsible for implementing the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal's place promotion and investment attraction policies. Structured as a public-private partnership, its board consists of a mix of business representatives and municipal elected officials, with the latter in the majority. In 2019, one-quarter of its \$20-million budget came from private-sector partners and three-quarters from the federal and provincial governments, and from municipal governments through the CMM.

Emerging from the work of the provincial Office of the Greater Toronto Area, the provincial-municipal Greater Toronto Coordinating Committee, and an ad hoc group of Mayors and Regional Chairs led by former Mississauga mayor Hazel McCallion, a Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance (GTMA) was created with tri-level government support in 1997. A more modest entity than Montréal International, the GTMA was overshadowed by competing municipal agencies, including Invest Toronto, established by the City of Toronto in 2008 to serve as its arm's-length investment attraction agency. A 2011 *Toronto Star* editorial reported that: "Municipalities across the Greater Toronto Area employ no fewer than 160 people in 20 different organizations to attract jobs and investment to the region. ... [T]he various existing agencies continue to spend about \$25 million a year on their multiple and conflicting marketing efforts" (Toronto Star Editorial Board 2011).

In 2016, after lobbying by the Toronto Region Board of Trade, municipal and provincial authorities agreed to establish a regional agency called Toronto Global (GIAG 2015; TRBOT 2014). Its \$6.8-million 2019–20 budget was primarily funded by contributions from the City of Toronto, the Cities of Mississauga and Brampton, and the Regional Municipalities of Halton, York, and Durham, as well as from the federal and provincial governments. Similar to Montréal International, Toronto Global coexists with municipal economic development activities; however, it is intended to play the lead role in greenfield foreign (as opposed to domestic) investment attraction and data sharing. For its part, the City of Toronto wound down Invest Toronto and transferred its assets to the new entity. Its first major project was to submit a regional bid for Amazon's second headquarters – a signal of the member municipalities' willingness to collaborate.

Until recently, the Vancouver area did not have a regional economic development organization. Instead, investment attraction and site selection support have been the purview of municipal and provincial agencies, including the Vancouver Economic Commission and the provincial body, Trade and Invest B.C. In July 2019, however, Metro Vancouver announced that it would establish investment promotion as an operating function of the regional district, citing the need to overcome destructive competition among municipalities (Bradley 2019). It anticipates an annual budget of \$2.5 million and 12 staff members by 2023. Although it would not replace existing municipal agencies, it is expected to improve their coordination.

7.3 Lessons

The experience of Canada's three largest metropolitan areas with regional single-purpose bodies for transit and economic development is varied. Emerging from idiosyncratic institutional and historical contexts, each has a different governance structure, funding formula, intergovernmental accountability relationships, and assigned responsibilities. Vancouver's institutional systems for both functions are the most integrated, with TransLink holding a regional monopoly not only on transit planning, but also operations, and investment attraction emerging as a function of the long-established regional district. Compared with Toronto, another jurisdictionally fragmented region with multiple local transit providers and a regional rail system, Montréal's transit governance model is more sophisticated and integrated. The ARTM not only plans, but is also the conduit for all transit funding, which is partly redistributed through a seamless zoned fare system. While potentially capable of doing so, Toronto's Metrolinx has eschewed more thoroughgoing fare system integration and plays no role in financing local transit operations and establishing service levels. Although the new Toronto Global is growing fast, Montréal International is also a more sophisticated and well-endowed organization. And both the ARTM and Montréal International are accountable to municipalities through their relationship to Montréal's regional intergovernmental organization, the CMM – a type of institution the Toronto region does not possess.

Yet while Vancouver and Montréal seem to have better designed institutions than Toronto, all is not smooth sailing. All three cities are vulnerable to the politicization of transit capital planning, a game provincial governments usually win, given their constitutional authority over local government. The Montréal-area municipalities have safeguarded their prerogatives by restricting expansions to the CMM's policy-making authority. Perhaps because they are administered by special-purpose bodies with substantial provincial funding, transit and economic development remain the most effective parts of Montréal-region governance. In this context, it will be interesting to see how the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board's establishment of regional economic development and transit agencies, both currently in their infancy, play out.

Echoing lessons drawn at the end of the discussion of regional intergovernmental organizations, the provincial government is the central actor in

the intergovernmental system because it is uniquely empowered to establish and reorganize regional and local institutions and use its spending power to promote intermunicipal collaboration on regional projects and objectives. This situation is, however, a double-edged sword, as provinces are responsible to a larger electorate than localities. On the one hand, this enables them to see the big picture; on the other, the electoral pressures felt by provincial governments may lead to them to make suboptimal decisions.

8. Provincial metropolitan policy overlay

Provincial statutes and policies spatially targeted to metropolitan areas are not generally seen as a form of metropolitan governance because they do not involve local institutions. Nevertheless, binding provincial policy frameworks designed to direct or coordinate local governments within a metropolitan area represent a potential alternative to restructuring local governments or establishing new single- or multi-purpose metropolitan authorities.

The most elaborate Canadian example is Ontario's multi-part policy framework for the broader region centred on Toronto, which the province refers to as the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Other provinces have also enacted policy overlays that are spatially targeted but not specific to metropolitan areas. British Columbia's Agricultural Land Reserve and Québec's agricultural zones are province-wide systems of farmland regulation. While they influence the development of metropolitan areas where designated lands are close to areas of urban growth, they are not metropolitan policies as such.

8.1 Profile: Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe planning regime

Historical background. The history of provincial policy engagement with Toronto's metropolitan growth goes back to the 1940s and is well documented elsewhere (Feldman 1974; Taylor 2019b, ch. 4; White 2007). Current arrangements – the 2006 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the 2005 *Greenbelt Act*, and associated policies – have their origins in the 1970s, when the provincial government established land-use regulations specific to the Niagara Escarpment, a land form that cuts across the western flank of the Toronto region, and to a multi-use corridor called the Parkway Belt, through which Highway 407 now runs. Through these statutes, the province pre-empted municipal land-use authority by creating a land-use instrument binding on local official plans, zoning bylaws, and undertakings.

A 1970s proposal to create a comprehensive policy overlay for the Toronto region as a whole – Design for Development – was pursued by the government of the day but ultimately abandoned amid economic difficulties. This template was revised in the 1980s and early 1990s as successive Ontario governments explored, but never enacted, a policy statement specific to the Greater Toronto Area.

The turning point came in the late 1990s as urban development pressure north of Toronto began to impinge on the environmentally sensitive Oak Ridges Moraine and traffic congestion became an important public issue. The provincial

government enacted a policy overlay to regulate land use on the Moraine (Ontario 2002) and established “smart growth” panels in 2001. The Toronto-region panel of municipal leaders, property developers, environmentalists, and farmers produced a widely publicized report that reflected an interdisciplinary consensus on the region’s problems and affirmed the need for regional growth management (Ontario 2003).

After a change in government in 2003, the province built on this initiative in two ways. First, it established a Greenbelt in 2005 that encompasses and expands on the Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine plan areas. It also put in place the *Places to Grow Act*, which enabled the creation of provincial plans with which municipal plans must be consistent. These initiatives represent the extension and modernization of the earlier regional policy overlay template.

The first regional plan adopted under the act was the 2006 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario 2006). This was later supplemented by a subregion-specific plan targeted at the sensitive Lake Simcoe watershed north of Toronto (Ontario 2009).

The plans are detailed and directive. The Greenbelt, Niagara Escarpment, and Oak Ridges Moraine plans contain policies pertaining to classes of land mapped at the parcel level. The Growth Plan sets residential development targets for municipalities. Each municipality is required to direct a minimum percentage of residential growth to areas within a provincially defined “built boundary” – the built-up urbanized area as of 2006, when the plan took effect. “Greenfield” development outside the built boundary must mix uses and surpass a threshold density. Municipalities are also required to direct more intense growth to a network of “urban growth centres” and transit station areas.

Current challenges. While this overlapping tapestry of provincial policy overlays for the Toronto region remains in effect today, its implementation by municipalities has been slow and uneven. A 2012 review found that only 11 of the region’s 19 upper- and single-tier municipal planning authorities had brought their official plans into conformity with the Growth Plan, mainly because the plans were, in whole or in part, under appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board, and only 60 percent of the 89 lower-tier plans had adopted conformity amendments (Allen and Campsie 2013, 33–34). A comprehensive revision of all four plans in 2017 re-established the five-year deadline for conformity; a further revision of the Growth Plan in 2019 did so once again.

The transmission from provincial policy to visible urban development is long: upper-tier municipalities must approve lower-tier official plans, plans are implemented through zoning bylaws, and only then are local development decisions fully subject to the provincial plan. Although the original Growth Plan came into effect in 2006, there has been no recent comprehensive accounting of its effects on urban development patterns. Moreover, as rules guiding land use, these plans can accomplish only so much without supportive infrastructure investments and

planning. While Metrolinx's long-term capital plan, which focuses on large-scale rapid transit projects, is required to support the Growth Plan, the plans of local transit authorities are not. The disconnection across scales of infrastructure and service delivery, along with the politicization of infrastructure investment decisions, makes it difficult to assess the plan's effectiveness (IMFG 2019; Siemiatycki and Fagan 2019).

8.2 Profile: Alberta's South Saskatchewan Land Use Framework

Alberta's South Saskatchewan Land Use Framework is another provincial policy overlay with relevance to metropolitan growth and development. Alberta adopted a province-wide Land Use Framework Policy in 2008 and the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* to implement it in 2009. The policy and act divide the province into seven watershed-based zones for which the province will enact plans. Only two have been established to date.

Passed in 2014 and amended in 2017 and 2018, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan covers a broad swath of southern Alberta, including the Calgary metropolitan area, where more than three-quarters of the plan area's population lives (Alberta 2018). The primary objectives of Alberta's regional plans are to coordinate the activities of provincial government ministries and municipalities, protect land, air, and water for environmental, recreation, and resource extraction purposes, and prioritize infrastructure investments. As noted above, the City of Calgary had expected that the Calgary Metropolitan Plan would be incorporated into this instrument, but it was not. Instead, the provincial government has given separate statutory authority to plans prepared by the Calgary and Edmonton Metropolitan Region Boards, which are required to be consistent with the applicable regional land-use framework.

Unlike the directive wording and targets in Ontario's plans, Alberta's regional plans are vague and aspirational. The urban development policies generally call for provincial agencies and municipalities to work together and raise awareness. The South Saskatchewan regional plan states that "The Government of Alberta recognizes the significance and importance of the Calgary Regional Partnership, and the Calgary Metropolitan Plan, in contributing to the objectives of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan" (Alberta 2018, 108). Given the plan's vague urban development policies, however, it is difficult to say what impact it will have on urban development patterns in the Calgary metropolitan area.

8.3 Lessons

Provincial policies with specific application to metropolitan areas represent another form of metropolitan governance, although not one that most recognize as such. Ontario has gone the furthest down this path and has done so as an alternative to establishing a regional intergovernmental organization as Alberta, British Columbia, Québec, and now Manitoba have done for their large metropolitan areas. Ontario's provincial government has effectively become the governor of the Toronto region through policy overlays, Metrolinx, and support for Toronto Global.

Municipalities have not always been willing participants in this arrangement. Without comprehensive monitoring of outputs and outcomes “on the ground,” however, it is difficult to assess the impact of provincial actions within the Greater Golden Horseshoe’s 110 municipalities.

Meanwhile, Alberta has pursued a dual strategy of establishing a compulsory regional intergovernmental organization for Calgary and a policy overlay at a broader regional scale that is predominantly directed toward matters related to natural resources and environmental protection. At present, the effectiveness of this approach remains to be seen.

9. Conclusion: The future of Canadian metropolitan governance

The need for effective and equitable metropolitan governance within a supportive multi-level legal and fiscal framework is now recognized by public authorities and private advocates in Canada and around the world. As a recent OECD report states:

the success of cities depends not only on local institutions and actors, the framework set by national governments is also of critical importance. Only when national policy settings are sufficiently supportive can city-level initiatives have sufficient impacts and pay-offs. National policies typically determine both what cities can do, and what cities have an incentive to do (OECD 2015, 121).

Given Canadian provinces’ constitutional authority over local government, we can substitute “provincial” for “national” in this statement. Closer to home, the Canadian Global Cities Council, a coalition of leading business groups in major Canadian cities, writes that an approach to metropolitan governance that aligns the resources of all levels of government yet is sensitive to local needs, requires a region-level voice in multi-level partnerships (CGCC 2018, 28–29).

Answering this call, an OECD review found that there has been a dramatic uptick across its member countries over the past 20 years in the creation of metropolitan governance bodies, most of which focus on planning and transportation (Ahrend, Gamper, and Schumann 2014). This review shows that Canada is not immune to this global trend, although changing governance arrangements in Canada’s large cities are tailored to local conditions and historical patterns of intergovernmental relations. The paper concludes by identifying themes and trends before expanding on the proposition that, willingly or reluctantly, Canadian provinces are becoming “metropolitan metagovernors.”

9.1 Themes and trends

1. There is no single “Canadian model”

Unlike in the United States, where federal mandates and conditional grants exert a homogenizing force on metropolitan governance, we find considerable variation from one province to the next. While Canada’s constitution is sometimes characterized as overly rigid, this variation reflects the flexibility of Canadian governance and policy making and the responsiveness of provincial governments to local conditions.

Despite considerable interprovincial variation, the review suggests that the larger jurisdictionally fragmented regions are converging on the compulsory regional intergovernmental organization model. British Columbia's pioneering creation of regional districts in the 1960s and Québec's renovation of Montréal-region governance in the 2000s represent such an approach, even if they are not consistently backed up with political and fiscal support from provincial governments. While imperfect, each system seeks to balance a regional agenda with local self-determination while recognizing the provincial interest in urban policy matters.

Recent developments in Alberta and Manitoba suggest similar provincial engagement along similar lines. While the Ontario government is heavily involved in setting the regional land-use and transportation agenda for the Toronto region, it stands alone in its lack of an institutionalized arena for municipal deliberation. (Toronto Global's board is the exception.) As a result, municipalities in the Toronto region have no incentive to collectively formulate regional priorities and objectives.

2. Models often exist in combination

In most metropolitan areas profiled, we see not a single model but a combination of one or more (see Table 5). As Calgary's unicity continues its principle of servicing lands following annexation, its relationships with its neighbours are structured within the Calgary Metropolitan Board, in the context of the provincial South Saskatchewan Land Use Framework. The Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal coexists with several metropolitan single-purpose bodies, each of which has an accountability relationship with it. The Metro Vancouver regional district consolidates a range of operating and planning functions within a single entity, yet it is administratively distinct from TransLink. For now, Halifax Regional Municipality remains an all-encompassing unicity. All regional functions are provided by the municipality.

The combination of models found in each region depends on how local government institutions are organized in each region, including the total number of municipalities and their population sizes relative to one another, and the relative dominance of a central city. It also reflects whether the historically evolved character of provincial-municipal relations is dirigiste or laissez-faire and whether a province contains a single predominant metropolis or several metropolitan areas, and how fast they are growing.

Since the failure of the 1995 referendum on independence opened the political space to consider other matters, the Québec government has actively involved itself in metropolitan governance, not only in Montréal, but also in Québec City, both of which are highly jurisdictionally fragmented and have experienced considerable population growth.

In British Columbia, the province-wide regional district system established in the 1960s emerged as the natural foundation of metropolitan governance not only in Vancouver, but also in Victoria. In the process, formerly provincial responsibility

Table 5: Layering of models in seven Canadian metropolitan areas

	Unicity	Compulsory regional intergovernmental organization	Metropolitan single-purpose body	Provincial metropolitan policy overlay
Vancouver		Metro Vancouver Regional District	TransLink	Agricultural Land Reserve
Calgary	City of Calgary	Calgary Metropolitan Region Board		South Saskatchewan Land Use Framework
Edmonton		Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board	Edmonton Global	
Winnipeg		Winnipeg Metropolitan Area	JohnQ	
Toronto			Metrolinx Toronto Global	Greenbelt Plan Growth Plan Niagara Escarpment Plan Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Metrolinx's Regional Transportation Plan
Montréal		Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal	Autorité régionale de transport métropolitaine EXO Montréal International	Agricultural Land Preservation Law
Halifax	Halifax Regional Municipality			

for public transit has been devolved to single-purpose regional agencies.¹⁰ While not discussed in this paper, regional and local land-use planning occurs within limits imposed by the provincial Agricultural Land Reserve, a province-wide statutory agricultural zoning overlay.

10. While Victoria's transit service continues to be operated by BC Transit, policy decisions are made by the Victoria Regional Transit Commission, which is appointed by the province from elected members of area municipal councils.

For much of the postwar period, Alberta relied on the unicity system to locally manage metropolitan planning and service delivery in Calgary and Edmonton. As the growth of outlying centres eroded the central cities' dominance, however, the province was compelled to step in.

Toronto is an outlier insofar as metropolitan single-purpose bodies exist without a regional intergovernmental organization, although the province has imposed region-specific land-use and transportation policies.

3. Voluntary, bottom-up collaboration has limited potential to address major issues

The experience of voluntary intermunicipal partnerships in Calgary and Winnipeg suggests that their impacts have been modest. At best, they are transitional stages toward the development of compulsory bodies with specific mandates. In both cases, intermunicipal agreement on priorities was inhibited by conflict between the central city and much smaller suburban and rural municipalities.

The limited effectiveness of voluntary intermunicipal partnerships is understandable when we consider their objectives. Most were nudged by the provincial governments toward developing regional land-use and economic development plans. As Spicer (2015) has shown, voluntary formalized bilateral and multilateral agreements between municipalities are common in Canada's larger metropolitan areas. Seeking mutual benefit, municipalities have entered into such agreements to ensure interoperability (for example, with emergency services) or extraterritorial extension of services (for example, of transit routes and water and sewer service).

Such collaborations generally avoid what Williams (1971, ch. 6) refers to as "life-style policies" that directly affect residents' living spaces and life experiences. He argues that local communities would be unlikely to voluntarily standardize such things at the regional scale and would instead use local government institutions to defend their preferences. In the same vein, American public administration scholar Luther Gulick once said that for independently incorporated communities to voluntarily cede authority to metropolitan institutions would be "contrary to the laws of political biology" (Gulick 1962, 125).

Nelles (2012) and others (Henton, Melville and Walsh 1997; Pastor, Benner and Matsuoka 2009) have found that voluntary collaborations germinate through the actions of "civic entrepreneurs" – often business leaders and other elites – who articulate compelling visions and projects and build coalitions around them. Although the profiles in this paper do not mention specific individuals, such entrepreneurs and coalitions are present in all the cities examined. Their existence may be a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one if regional projects entail allocating costs and benefits, or redistributing resources, across space. This is what land-use planning, investment attraction and site selection, and locating major transportation infrastructure and social housing does.

4. *Effective metropolitan governance requires establishing supportive institutional and fiscal incentives*

Building on the previous point, it follows that without external incentives, purely voluntary bottom-up collaboration is likely to be limited to a few noncontroversial subjects. As the OECD report cited earlier notes, statutes, regulations, policies, fiscal arrangements, and institutions are incentive structures. Through carrots, sticks, and everyday operating procedures they can encourage desirable outcomes and discourage undesirable ones. Most institutional and fiscal incentives available to municipalities are established by provincial governments, although new federal programming targeted at urban issues has enlarged their role. Unless provincial governments choose to govern metropolitan areas directly, their challenge is to establish incentives that promote intermunicipal collaboration on desirable metropolitan-scale economic, social, and environmental objectives. Much intermunicipal and provincial-municipal conflict observed appears to stem from provinces' having set inadequate or ineffective incentive structures. Without supportive incentives, municipalities are less likely to work together toward common objectives.

The first element is mandating responsibilities. Creating institutions without specifying compulsory tasks to perform or products to produce may generate talk and trust, but is unlikely to produce policies that impose obligations on members. All the compulsory regional intergovernmental organizations and metropolitan single-purpose bodies profiled have statutory purposes or obligations to produce particular outputs. The Calgary and Edmonton Metropolitan Region Boards are required to produce regional land-use and servicing plans, as will be the proposed Winnipeg Planning Board.

The structure of metropolitan institutions also matters. The dilemma of how best to balance the representation of different sizes and types of municipalities is common to every jurisdictionally divided metropolitan area profiled in this paper. In British Columbia's regional districts, Alberta's metropolitan region boards, Winnipeg's new body, and Québec's metropolitan communities, this challenge has been managed through population-weighted or supermajority voting. These schemes create a de facto veto for large municipalities in which most people live while requiring municipalities to forge broad coalitions to pursue major initiatives. No representation system will satisfy all members all the time, but all members must believe it is possible to achieve their objectives at least some of the time.

If mandating responsibilities and institutionalizing participation are the sticks, money is the carrot. In Montréal, intermunicipal collaborations on housing, transit, and economic development are arguably the most successful components of the regional governance framework anchored by the CMM. This is in no small part because the province has provided financial inducements for municipalities to participate in collaborative programs. The Alberta government has at various times subsidized regional bodies so they have a core administrative capacity independent of municipal funding. Montréal International and Toronto Global also receive

substantial provincial and federal funding in recognition of senior governments' material interest in the health of city-regional economies.

It is worth noting that the governing boards of the single-purpose transit bodies were designed to minimize municipal influence. (While the ARTM board has a minority of municipal representatives, the Metrolinx and TransLink boards have none whatsoever.) This choice was intended to depoliticize transit decision-making. It may be, however, that the cure was worse than the disease. All three agencies are embroiled in conflicts with municipalities and, in the ARTM's case, transit operating authorities. All three are criticized for being remote and bureaucratic. It is up to provinces to create incentive structures that will induce collective responsibility for a regional agenda and efficient and equitable funding arrangements. At least on the transit file, the results have not been encouraging in Canada's three largest cities.

5. External incentives can nurture intermunicipal trust

In their recent IMFG Perspectives paper titled *A Playbook for Voluntary Regional Governance in Greater Toronto*, Côté, Eidelman, and Fenn (2020) emphasize the need to build trust between municipal executives and suggest that the capacity to do big things will emerge incrementally through the accumulation of small successes. This dynamic is present in several cities profiled here.

In Metro Vancouver, local elected officials' and civic administrators' long experience with intermunicipal collaboration going back to the original sewerage and drainage board in 1913 entrenched trust and durable norms of reciprocity. In Winnipeg, ongoing intermunicipal interaction through the Capital Region Partnership opened the door to creating the JohnQ joint procurement corporation and, today, the likely transformation of the partnership into an authoritative planning board.

Building trusting relationships is essential, but it is more likely to result in an enduring capacity to address metropolitan problems when supportive incentives are offered. In the early years, municipal cooperation in the Vancouver region required active, if not always overt, provincial suasion (Taylor 2019b, 215–228). As norms have been established and the system's legitimacy and predictability are generally accepted, a provincial backstop is no longer required to ensure collaboration on routine matters. Indeed, we saw how municipalities drew on past experience to continue regional planning during the 1980s, after the provincial government abolished the statutory regional planning framework.

The depth of intermunicipal trust in the Vancouver region – the product of a long history – may be unique in Canada. In Calgary and Edmonton, the partnerships that succeeded the statutory regional planning commissions after their elimination in the 1990s failed. In Calgary, Edmonton, and Winnipeg, much will depend on how their provincial governments nurture municipal participation in regional decision-making, and whether they offer political and fiscal support to projects collaboratively developed by local governments.

9.2 The future: Provinces as “metropolitan metagovernors”

What is the future of metropolitan governance in Canada’s large cities? More than 10 years ago, Sancton (2009, 231) remarked that “it is likely that provincial governments...will consolidate their roles as the real strategic authorities for Canada’s city-regions.” This review provides ample evidence that this process is well advanced. Across Canada, provincial governments have established metropolitan-scale institutions or targeted policies for their most populous city-regions.

Provincial governments have become increasingly embroiled in metropolitan governance as urban regions have become more populous and institutionally complex, and as pressing social, economic, and environmental policy dilemmas have become concentrated in cities. They are compelled to do so because of their distinct constitutional authority and legal powers over local government and land use. Moreover, as the metropolitan electorate has grown as a proportion of the province as a whole, provincial governments cannot ignore the political costs of not becoming involved. This trend will no doubt continue, although the provincial response will vary from one jurisdiction to the next.

Some, like Ontario, may choose an interventionist path, establishing binding mandates and compliance systems – in effect, assuming the role of regional governments themselves. Ontario’s hierarchical and regulatory approach to governing the Toronto region is one way to bring many local land-use authorities into policy alignment. Nevertheless, its reliance on coercion generates friction while rendering the whole system vulnerable to electoral change or shifts in the provincial government’s political fortunes. Remove the keystone from an arch and the structure will come tumbling down.

Most urbanized provinces with jurisdictionally fragmented metropolitan areas – British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Québec, and New Brunswick – have established institutions that enable local governments to collaborate without direct and overt provincial involvement, except in exceptional circumstances. The most common institutional form is the compulsory regional intergovernmental organization, often paired with metropolitan single-purpose bodies that incorporate some form of municipal representation.

With the exception of the unicity examples, none of Canada’s metropolitan governing bodies features directly elected councils. Voluntary and compulsory intergovernmental bodies have been structured as federations of local governments, their boards made up of local officials. Sometimes (as in Calgary), the work of metropolitan institutions is nested within provincially determined regional policy frameworks. Most models – B.C. is the exception – incorporate a formal provincial backstop: in Alberta and Manitoba, the minister reserves the right to impose a solution if municipalities do not collaborate effectively.

This approach exemplifies what some European scholars call “metagovernance” or the “regulation of self-regulation” – in essence, the art of governing in decentralized states while sustaining and supporting the autonomy of local actors

(Sørensen and Torfing 2007; Torfing et al. 2012). As metropolitan metagovernors, provincial governments set overarching goals and establish the incentive structure within which local authorities operate, yet resist “getting into the weeds” by micromanaging local actors or imposing coercive dictates. With their wheels greased by an appropriate incentive structure, local authorities are more likely collectively to innovate policy agendas that are mutually acceptable, durable, and aligned with broader provincial, and possibly national, economic, social, and environmental objectives.

Can provinces sustain this role as the midwives of collective metropolitan endeavour? It is an often invisible and politically thankless role whose positive returns accrue beyond the four-year electoral cycle. The case studies suggest that, in general, provinces have been more reactive than proactive, and that their interventions are more often siloed “patches” than conscious whole-of-government strategies.

Nevertheless, we can identify positive examples, chief among them the century-long intermunicipal collaboration through the Metro Vancouver regional district and its precursors. Now operating under its own momentum, the Metro Vancouver system has proven resilient despite episodes of provincial indifference and hostility. The question is whether other provinces can learn from the British Columbia experience and adapt it to their own metropolitan contexts – a process that will require close attention and careful nurturing on their parts.

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