



GOVERNANCE OF REGIONAL TRANSIT SYSTEMS:

Observations on Washington, New York, and Toronto

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ABSTRACT

This report examines the governance models of the regional transit agencies in three large metropolitan areas: Washington, D.C., New York, and Toronto. After reviewing the history, structure, and challenges of each system, it assesses the governance arrangements in relation to widely accepted principles of good governance. It concludes that given the unique circumstances in each region, the models are not transferable and specific governance challenges require singular responses. Non-governmental organizations can make substantial planning and advocacy contributions. A shared vision and values among those with decision-making authority matter more than the actual governance structure. There are pros and cons to having elected officials on regional transit boards, but positive engagement with locally elected representatives is essential. Financing cannot be separated from governance; a predictable and sufficient funding framework is an integral part of good governance.



INTRODUCTION

The importance of public transit to the economic prosperity and livability of city-regions is now widely recognized. For decades, North American cities had counted on the automobile to move people around, but two obvious pressures are moving public transit to the political forefront. The global movement of people into cities means quite simply that we cannot meet the mobility needs of people by depending on the automobile alone. Growing awareness of climate change issues is underscoring the imperative of supporting urban growth in ways that contribute to environmental sustainability. Creating the right governance structure to plan and operate the required systems is a particular challenge for metropolitan regions that extend beyond political boundaries.

This study, undertaken while I was a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (April–June, 2014), is intended to explore the challenges of creating effective regional governance for public transit by looking at three case studies. Each region covers a large metropolitan area with extensive and complex public transportation systems:

- Washington, D.C.—Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)
- New York City—Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)
- Toronto - Metrolinx

A broad examination of governance would encompass three levels of governance: the *policy* level; the *management* level; and the *implementation* level. The *policy* level refers to the development of overall policy direction and the setting of strategic priorities for the transportation agency; the *management* level includes the translation of these policies into plans and programs; and finally, the *implementation* level handles the execution of projects and delivery of services. This report focuses solely on the policy level, namely board governance.¹

This assessment is based on the views of two dozen individuals who are current or past participants in the governing processes of the three regional authorities, including staff and board members, as well as knowledgeable observers (Appendix 1). Available reports pertaining to governance of the selected regional authorities were reviewed. In addition, a media scan during the past two years was carried out to ascertain how the agency and its challenges are perceived publicly (Appendix 2).

By reviewing and comparing the governance arrangements of these three large urban regions, I hoped to find lessons for general application, for the Toronto region in particular. It quickly became apparent that the uniqueness of each system and its specific challenges makes inter-regional comparisons impractical, though some ideas may deserve consideration.

Principles of Good Governance

Most definitions of good governance start with political legitimacy and accountability to the communities served.² The five principles selected are both widely accepted in the literature as fundamental to good governance and seem to matter most for the planning, building, and provision of transit services in metropolitan regions. After reviewing the history, structure, and main challenges of each of the three systems, I will comment on their board governance arrangements in relation to these criteria:

- **Coordination:** the mandate is broad enough to facilitate the development of an integrated transportation system for the metropolitan area and to allow costs and benefits to be shared fairly
- **Efficiency:** the structure permits strategic directions and priorities to be set, and services to be delivered cost-effectively
- **Accountability:** decision-makers can be held responsible for their actions and the decision-making process is understandable and transparent enough to encourage access and participation of all stakeholders
- **Responsiveness:** local community needs and preferences are given due consideration
- **Sufficient and sustainable revenue:** the fiscal framework within which the board operates enables it to deliver on its mandate

In choosing these criteria, the question arose: how broad should the definition be? All of the literature on governance agrees that urban governance is about more than government. It involves the coming together of governments, business leaders, and civil society to shape the decisions and judgments that impact the region.³ Rather than having a separate criterion for stakeholder engagement, this dimension of governance is intended to be captured in the accountability principle.

It has also been suggested that a governance framework should include “effectiveness” in producing outcomes that are desirable. These outcomes could be linked to the customer experience, or more broadly, to economic, social, and environmental societal goals. This is consistent with the so-called “balanced scorecard” approach, used by many corporations. However, using such an extensive definition would necessitate making value judgments on the public transportation decisions of the networks reviewed. This would not have been possible within the limited scope of this review.

SUMMARY OF THREE SYSTEMS

City	Annual Ridership ⁴	Area Served	Mandate	Funding Sources	Board Structure
Washington, D.C. WMATA Founded 1967	343.3 million trips (2010)	1500 sq mi. Washington and parts of Northern Virginia and Maryland, with a population of 5.2 million (2012) ⁵	Commuter rail, bus, heavy rail rapid transit	Fares (farebox recovery ratio: 0.5), gas tax, land value capture	8 voting and 8 alternate (non-voting) members: 2 each from the District of Columbia, Virginia, Maryland, and the federal government
New York City MTA Founded 1965	2.6 billion trips (2010)	5000 sq mi. 12 New York counties and two in Connecticut, with a population of 15.1 million (tri-state population: 18.9 million (2012) ⁶)	Subways, bus, commuter rail services, bridges, and tunnels	Fares (farebox recovery ratio: 0.5), petroleum and transportation industries tax, sales tax, bridge and tunnel tolls, corporate surcharge, and payroll tax	23 members, (14 voting): 4 recommended by New York City mayor, 1 from each of 3 large counties; 4 from the smaller counties share 1 vote; 6 chosen by the governor, including MTA's CEO; 6 rotating non-voting seats
Toronto Metrolinx Founded 2006	843 million TTC trips; 64 million GO trips (2012)	4250 sq mi. Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, with 30 municipalities, and 6.4 million people	Commuter rail, bus, and light rail	Fares (farebox recovery ratio: 0.8 for GO) and direct government support, mostly from province	15 provincially-appointed citizens; elected officials currently prohibited from serving



OVERVIEW OF THE THREE REGIONS

WASHINGTON, D.C.: WMATA

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) is a tri-jurisdictional government transit agency created by the U.S. Congress as an interstate compact between the District of Columbia, the State of Maryland, and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Its mandate includes rapid transit service (MetroRail, but not including commuter rail and Amtrak), fixed-route bus service (MetroBus), and paratransit service (MetroAccess), spanning the 1,500 square mile area in Washington, suburban Maryland, and northern Virginia, for nearly 350 million rides per year.

WMATA and Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOCG)

It is essential to understand at the outset that the mandate of transit authorities in the United States is limited primarily to the delivery and operational responsibilities for transit services. Every American city with a population greater than 50,000 is required by congressional legislation to have a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) comprising representatives from local government and public transportation authorities. They are responsible for transportation and transit planning and are the conduit for funding from senior levels of government. Congress created MPOs (Federal-Aid Highway Act, 1962) to ensure that government spending for transportation projects and programs would be based on a “continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (‘3-C’) planning process.” As of May 2014 there are 384 MPOs across the United States.⁷

Governance structure for MPOs varies greatly in different parts of the country and within states. In many urban areas, existing organizations, such as councils of government, also



serve as MPOs; most have a professional staff and various committees. Typically the policy committee includes local elected officials, representatives from different transit modes (public transit, freight, bicycle/pedestrian), state agency officials (such as the state department of transportation), and non-voting members. MPO policy committees have key responsibilities, including adoption of the metropolitan long-range transportation plans, transportation improvement programs, and budgets. While this study is limited to transit authorities, the governance of MPOs needs to be referenced as well.⁸

In Washington, D.C., the MPO is housed within the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, known as MWCOG. Founded in 1957, MWCOG is an independent, not-for-profit association where area leaders address regional issues affecting the same area that WMATA covers: the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and northern Virginia. The Council of Governments, with about 300 local, state, and federal elected officials, comprises 22 local governments in the Washington metropolitan area, as well as area members of the state legislatures of Maryland and Virginia, together with members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

Acting as a convener, MWCOG facilitates work on issues of regional significance, including transportation, the environment, land use planning and housing, and public safety and health. It has several boards and committees, but most important are the Air Quality Committee (MWAQC) and the Transportation Planning Board (TPB).

Transportation planning in the capital region is heavily influenced by air quality planning because conforming to national ambient air quality standards is the main criterion for securing federal funds. Meeting these standards has not been an issue for the region because Greater Washington is a low producer of greenhouse gas emissions.

Since 1966, the TPB has served as the federally designated MPO for the metropolitan Washington area and is the conduit for state and federal funding for transportation projects. Of particular interest here is the relationship between COG, the TPB, and WMATA. All three are engaged in regional transit planning:

- The TPB is required to produce two basic documents: the *Financially Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan* (CLRP) and the *Transportation Improvement Plan* (TIP)⁹. CLRP identifies all regionally significant transportation projects and programs that are planned in the Washington metropolitan area between 2014 and 2040. This list of more than 750 state and local initiatives is developed cooperatively by the governmental bodies and agencies represented on the TPB.¹⁰ The CLRP is viewed as a brokered catalogue of projects, rather than a strategic plan. The 1998 *Vision* report, now 16 years old, continues to serve as TPB's policy framework. The requirements of federal law compel the key transportation players, including WMATA, to work through the TPB process and align with the CLRP.

- In 2008, to fill the strategic policy gap, MWCOG adopted a conceptual growth plan to 2040 for the region, called *Region Forward*. The plan was developed by the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition, a group of public, private, and civic leaders for MWCOG. Its purpose was to help the metropolitan region contend with aging infrastructure and accommodate 2 million more people by 2050. In 2010, COG and all 21 local governments individually endorsed *Region Forward*. Although MWCOG has no power to enforce its plans, *Region Forward* has been influential. It has provided practical guidance by setting out regional planning goals in a variety of sectors and identifying targets to enable communities to measure progress in achieving these goals. And it has led to subsequent reports that educate decision-makers and motivate action at the local level.¹¹
- WMATA, despite its operational focus, does have a responsibility to “develop and adopt” a mass transit plan for the immediate and long-range needs of the region, which it “may from time to time review and revise”. Last year it produced a *Metro 2025* strategic plan, called *Momentum*, to guide its investment decisions for the coming decade, and is in the process of developing *Metro 2040*, the *2040 Regional Transit System Plan*, to include both the core system improvements outlined in *Metro 2025* and new connectivity and expansion projects.

With three organizations producing multiple plans, the process is not perfectly smooth and the model is not ideal, yet it appears to work quite well.¹² In part, this is because some of the same locally elected officials participate both on the WMATA board and the TPB.¹³ The planning directors across the region are like-minded in their planning philosophy: there is a common understanding among the stakeholders regarding the region’s challenges and priorities that supports a collaborative spirit. Moreover, there is extensive consultation with the public as plans are developed.¹⁴

WMATA History

Prior to WMATA’s creation in 1967, the Washington area had been served by a variety of private bus lines and streetcar services, most of which were absorbed over time into the Capital Transit Company. It was renamed “DC Transit” after being granted permission by Congress to replace streetcars with buses.

WMATA was established in the Lyndon Johnson era as part of the Great Society program. Congress passed two acts, in 1964 and 1965, that promised 66 percent federal funding for urban mass transportation projects and approved the construction of a 25-mile national capital rapid transit system. This set the stage for the formation of the new regional authority. Following successful negotiations between Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, WMATA was established in 1967 with the sole mission of building a rail system for the



region. When the agreement was renewed in 1971, WMATA was authorized to take over bus companies, though rail remained its chief focus.

During the period 1970-2000, WMATA's focus was almost entirely on constructing the system. There were no substantial changes to governance, other than Maryland taking more ownership of its regional responsibilities.

By the early 2000s, it was evident that the system was aging. The emphasis had been on building new infrastructure, not maintenance. And governance was starting to fray.

Governance

Two recent events triggered interest in changes to governance. The first was a devastating subway crash in June 2009 causing several deaths due to two trains colliding within a signal system meant to prevent such events. Confidence in the system and its governance fell. A number of editorials in local newspapers, blogs, and other media called for reforms to WMATA's governance. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recommended reforms internal to the board to enhance oversight over safety. The second impetus was the decision by Congress, with agreement by President George W. Bush (2008), to invest additional federal money into D.C. transit (\$150 million per year to be matched by the three jurisdictional partners at \$50 million each). This commitment came with three conditions, two of which affected governance: inclusion of some federal members on the board; creation of an inspector general position; and the addition of cell phone capacity to the system.

In response to the growing discontent with WMATA governance, several studies were published recommending changes and a strong consensus emerged on the need for reform.¹⁵ Since 2010, significant improvements to governance have been made. These include the adoption of a regularly updated code of ethics and bylaws; a recalibration of the board's activities to focus on high-level policy issues with operations (including procurement and staff matters) delegated to the general manager; use of an effective and extensive system of board committees; maintenance of a constructive relationship with the inspector general; and the appointment of high caliber board members with solid transit backgrounds.

According to the people consulted, WMATA has two main challenges; both are related to funding constraints.

- *System upgrading.* Since the system was opened in the 1970s, the region has grown tremendously, more advanced technology has become available, and the infrastructure has aged. WMATA sees itself at "a critical juncture." Investments and upgrades to the system have not kept up. "Today's customers are experiencing the effects of years of chronic underfunding and underinvestment: aging equipment, deteriorating infrastructure and less-reliable service."¹⁶ This is consistent with the themes emerging from the two-year media scan conducted for this study.¹⁷ Although recent efforts to renew the system are helping, it is a challenge to manage customer expectations, given that virtually every aspect of the system needs to be modernized.

- *Sustainable funding to maintain infrastructure and respond to growth.* Other than by fares, WMATA's \$2.5 billion annual budget is funded by contributions from federal, state, and local government subsidies. Each of the partners contributes its share as mandated by the board-approved formula, and each in its own way. Requiring Congressional approval each year for the federal contribution is labor intensive, but does not appear to be resented by WMATA staff. Securing the capital to pay for *Momentum*, its 2013-2025 strategic plan, as well as the capital to support long-term system enhancement and expansion (to be outlined in Metro 2040), is viewed as a serious challenge.

NEW YORK CITY METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY (MTA)

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority is North America's largest transportation network. It serves a population of more than 15 million people spread over 5,000 square miles (13,000 km) in 12 New York counties and two in Connecticut.¹⁸ MTA subways, buses, and railroads provide 2.62 billion trips each year (8.5 million per day) to the customers of this region. This is the equivalent of approximately one in every three users of mass transit in the United States, and two-thirds of the nation's rail riders!¹⁹

MTA's mandate is by far the broadest of the transit authorities reviewed in this study. It encompasses subways, buses, two of three commuter rail services (New Jersey runs the third), bridges, and tunnels. MTA operates through several affiliates and subsidiaries, including New York City Transit, MTA Bus Company, the Long Island and Metro North Railroads, MTA Bridges and Tunnels, and MTA Capital Construction.

The MTA is responsible for the development and implementation of a coherent mass transportation policy for the entire New York Metropolitan area.

MTA History

Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller created the Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority (MCTA) in 1965 to purchase and operate the bankrupt Long Island Rail Road. In 1968, the MCTA dropped the word "commuter" from its name and it became the MTA; at that time it took over the operations of the New York City Transit and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authorities. These are now called MTA New York City Transit (NYCT), and MTA Bridges and Tunnels (B&T). The agency also took control of several commuter lines through lease arrangements, including the Hudson, Harlem, and New Haven lines, which were first contracted out to Penn Central, then folded into Conrail in 1976, and ultimately incorporated into the MTA in 1983 as the Metro-North Commuter Railroad.²⁰

In 1980, the New York Metropolitan region was considered a region at risk: crime rates were high, infrastructure was crumbling, and job creation was low. However, New York has made a remarkable come-back since the early 1990s, attested to by population, employment, and tourism growth numbers.²¹ Coinciding with this growth was the recovery of the New York City subway, enabled, in part, by increased federal support for transit.

The provision of mass transit in the region served by the MTA is often referenced with respect and even awe. According to the MTA, its mass transit system enables New York to be the most carbon-efficient state in the nation. The sheer size of the system and the number of customers it serves is remarkable. New York transit is often cited as one of the world's top-ranked systems²² and a critical reason for New York's success as a global financial, commercial, and cultural center.

New York City also receives high praise for the innovative streetscape and transportation programs introduced by the City's Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) under Mayor Michael Bloomberg's leadership.²³ A new Select Bus Service, with painted bus lanes, is attracting riders in all five boroughs; local bike lanes (141 acres) and Citibike stations have been introduced on Manhattan streets; streets and intersections have been re-made, providing right-of-way for buses and cyclists; new public spaces have been created by re-purposing many acres of roadway, most famously pedestrianizing Times Square. Street re-design—using inexpensive, fast turnaround materials like paint, planters, and stone blocks—is ubiquitous across the boroughs. These improvements to the pedestrian realm benefit transit users as well. The local municipal perspective is an essential complement to the regional mandate of the MTA.

Governance

The MTA is governed by a 23 member board nominated by the governor of the State of New York. Four members are recommended by New York City's mayor, and one each by the executives of seven surrounding counties; members representing the four small northern counties cast one collective vote. Together with five members from the state and the CEO of the MTA (who also serves as chair of the MTA board) there are 14 voting members. Six rotating, non-voting seats represent the labor unions and the commuter councils. All members are confirmed by the New York State Senate. The board reports to, and is accountable to, the governor of New York State.

The governance of the MTA did not seem to elicit concern in our scan of media coverage over the past two years. To the extent that the coverage was negative, the top issue was a two-year-long contract struggle with the transit workers union, which was settled just recently.²⁴

Like many federal agencies and authorities that receive federal funding, the MTA has an Office of the Inspector General (IG). The position was established by the state in 1983 to

provide independent oversight of the operations of the MTA and all subsidiary agencies.²⁵ Appointed by the governor of New York, the IG has authority to audit and investigate complaints; depending upon the individual, the IG can add value and enhance the credibility of the agency, as the current IG is seen to be doing.

The New York City/New Jersey/Connecticut tri-state region has a Regional Planning Association (RPA) that plays a leadership role in transportation and transit planning (it is America's oldest independent research and advocacy organization). RPA is a non-partisan agency that develops plans and—as a nongovernmental body—can and does advocate for their implementation. RPA is governed by a board of directors and three state committees comprising business leaders, experts, and opinion leaders, and has a staff of about 30 planners, designers, engineers, and policy professionals.

RPA has created three regional plans since 1929; a fourth is underway. It claims that 85 percent of its recommendations have been implemented. While it is not directly connected to MTA, the RPA has made important contributions to transit investments in the region, including the design and structure of various projects. It is worth noting that many of the ideas proposed by RPA align with New York's DOT. For example, RPA's second regional plan proposed closing Broadway to traffic in Midtown Manhattan, which was achieved in 2009; the third plan called for revitalizing streetscapes, a current priority for DOT. Because RPA is not subject to political interference and is supported by both business and civil society groups, it is viewed by many as a very effective model for regional planning.²⁶

Unlike the role played by MWCOG in the Washington metropolitan area, the MPOs in the New York region appear to be somewhat peripheral to the planning process. There is no single MPO for the region, but 13 MPOs across the tri-state metropolitan region. As required by federal legislation, they do approve the projects for funding, but references to their contribution in reports on regional planning and by those interviewed is minimal.

The majority of NYC MTA funding comes from stable sources. Unlike WMATA and Metrolinx, MTA has some control over its own revenue with relative flexibility to raise fares and tolls without state approval. Its revenue tools include transit fares, a Petroleum and Transportation Industries Tax, sales tax of 0.25 percent, bridge and tunnel tolls, a corporate tax surcharge (the Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Mobility Tax), a payroll tax, and a Mortgage Recording Tax. Most of these funding tools came from amendments to legislation. Because of the diversity of its sources, its funding base is more stable than those that rely on just one source such as a sales tax.

Notwithstanding its range of revenue tools and the apparent control it has over them, the MTA has serious budget pressures. After decades of minimal capital construction, four big rail projects are now being built: East Side Access connecting the Long Island Rail Road to a new terminal in Grand Central Station; the first phase of the Second Avenue Subway (which, when complete, will extend from 125th Street to the Financial District); 7 Line subway



extension; and a new subway hub at Fulton Center. The largest of these projects, the East Side Access project, has started but is not fully funded; future phases of the Second Avenue Subway are not funded either. Approval authority lies with the state government; every five years the MTA must go to Albany to seek approval of its capital program and to close any funding gap. The track record on execution is that most of the new large infrastructure projects, including the East Side Access, Second Avenue Subway, and the Fulton Center station, are not being delivered on time or on budget.²⁷

The issues of insufficient and unsustainable funding were raised in most interviews, and from two perspectives related directly to governance.

- *Insufficient revenue.* Despite the revenue platform, which gives the MTA access to seven dedicated revenue sources, and despite the relative stability of the funding sources that theoretically are less affected by economic cycles, funding is insufficient. For instance, following the 2008 real estate market collapse, Mortgage Recording Tax revenues varied greatly. The Payroll Mobility Tax was reduced in 2011. The MTA has raised fares four times since 2008 and following the 2010 fiscal collapse was forced to cut services (many of which have since been restored). Because the New York transit system is so old—the subway infrastructure dates back to 1904, and it runs 24/7 non-stop—it is in constant need of repair. The MTA is now advancing a modernization program for all aspects of the current system, from fare collection (with a new Smart Card, linked to charge cards) to passenger information. Cost pressures are viewed as undue.
- *Unfair treatment of New York City.* There is a feeling among the New Yorkers interviewed that New York City is short-changed in funding and policy decisions. As evidence, they point to the fact that no new track has been laid in New York City since the 1950s—until the current construction of the Second Avenue Subway, after decades of delay. In their view, the governor and state legislature are more responsive to the suburban and rural sections of their constituency than to the needs of New York City. They link this to the composition of the MTA board where New York City has just one-third of the voting members (4 out of 14), but more than 44 percent of the population (8.1 million out of 18.9 million) and the bulk of the tourists. The rejection by the New York State Legislature of New York City’s proposal to introduce congestion pricing, which would have brought in much-needed revenue and helped address congestion in Manhattan, is frequently cited as an example unjust treatment.²⁸

From MTA’s perspective, this sense of grievance is unwarranted: the MTA statute provides that in addition to the mayor’s four nominees, three of the governor’s appointments must be City residents; it does not acknowledge the enormous benefits that the City does receive, such as very low transit fares with 24/7 service; that creating and managing a region-wide

network the size of the MTA necessitates trade-offs; and it often takes time to win adoption of local priorities. Moreover, the City of New York benefits significantly from the state funding that is available because of the MTA.

There was consensus among those interviewed that, challenges notwithstanding, New York's regional transit system works well, and better than most large public systems. As Robert Yaro, president of the Regional Plan Association, put it: "The New York region is a big, messy place, but the system works; it is not neat and tidy, but it works."

GREATER TORONTO AND HAMILTON AREA: METROLINX

Metrolinx began as the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority (GTTA), created in June 2006 with the mandate to develop a regional transportation plan that responded to growing region's needs. In 2007, it was re-named Metrolinx and in 2008 produced, as its first major deliverable, *The Big Move*, a bold 25-year, \$50 billion regional transit plan. In May 2009, GO Transit (rail and bus)—Canada's first and Ontario's only inter-regional public transportation service for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) and beyond—merged with and became an operating division of Metrolinx. The re-structured Metrolinx had five main responsibilities:

- Improve and expand GO Transit as the backbone of regional transit
- Implement the first phase of *The Big Move*
- Introduce Presto, one common fare card for payment of fares across all transit systems in the region
- Prioritize the next wave of *Big Move* projects for funding
- Develop an investment strategy for sustained funding for *The Big Move*

The backdrop to the creation of Metrolinx and the key to understanding its extensive planning and execution challenges is the dramatic recent and predicted population growth in the Toronto city-region. With a population of 6.4 million, Toronto is the largest city-region in Canada, the fourth largest in North America, excluding Mexico City; one-third of Canada's population lives within 160 miles of Toronto! And another 2.5 million people, with 1 million more vehicles, are expected to arrive by 2036. The growth rate is among the fastest for any metropolitan region in North America. But for decades, investments in the region's public transport have not kept pace with economic and population growth. As a result, the Toronto region, which used to be considered a transit system leader, now ranks among the worst performers in Canada in moving people to and from work and is near the bottom of global rankings.²⁹

In addition to pressures arising from population growth and infrastructure neglect, are issues related to the arrangement of public transit across the GTHA, divided among 10 separate agencies. The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) is by far the dominant provider of public transit in the region, with an annual ridership of 525 million in 2013, almost nine times as many as GO Transit and two and one-half times the annual trips of WMATA!³⁰

An important step towards integration will be taken when the new Presto Card, a smart-card-based fare payment system, is fully implemented. That said, with nine local transit authorities plus GO Transit, each with its own priorities and revenue constraints, and with one of them, the TTC accounting for 75 percent of all passenger trips, the challenge of creating an integrated multi-modal transportation system is daunting.

Metrolinx History

In its brief history, Metrolinx has made impressive progress in most of its mandate areas: GO Transit is considered one of the world's most successful urban rail systems, delivering high quality service for 65 million riders per year with region-wide expansion plans. One hundred projects are underway to increase capacity on its rail and bus network; Union Station (the central hub for both inter-city and commuter rail, linked to the Toronto subway system) is being redeveloped and renovated; the first wave of fully funded projects under The Big Move (\$16 billion worth of transit construction) is in progress now, including a Spadina subway extension, the Eglinton Crosstown rail project, the YRT and VIVA rapidways, and the Union Pearson Express, a rail link connecting Union Station with Pearson Airport. It all adds up to an unprecedented level of investment and building.³¹

But it has not all been smooth sailing. The stories of the Eglinton Crosstown Line and Scarborough Subway are illustrative. The Eglinton Line was proposed by then-Mayor David Miller as part of a comprehensive Transit City plan, which included six other light rail lines across the city. The design was changed several times and is now being built by Metrolinx as conceived. But the political debates over the design made the planning and decision-making process appear untrustworthy.

Similarly, the long-running debate this past year over whether the aging RT (rapid transit line) in Scarborough, a former municipality within the eastern part of the amalgamated City of Toronto, should be replaced by light rail or subway highlighted concerns about how planning decisions are made; these concerns extended to the governance of Metrolinx. In October, notwithstanding the commitment to light rail technology in *The Big Move* and the signing of a Master Agreement by the City of Toronto, the TTC, and Metrolinx, City Council voted for an underground three-stop Scarborough subway. The Province of Ontario's transportation minister responded by announcing agreement to fund a subway that follows the existing RT alignment. While Metrolinx continued to support the LRT as the technically-supported

solution, it accepted the decision of the city (which had been promised federal funds) and the province to proceed with a subway extension. It stated that if the city decided on a subway line, it would negotiate a new financial framework, leaving the route decision to the city, conditional upon the results of an environmental assessment.

To most transit experts, the Scarborough subway decision appeared to be ill-advised, wasteful, and not evidence-based, lacking the ridership and jobs to justify the expense. Faith was shaken in Metrolinx as the body that would use evidence-based planning to build a regional transit infrastructure network to unlock congestion and support a productive metropolitan economy that benefits everyone. Transit issues in Toronto appear to be more politicized than in Washington or New York, likely due to the contentious choices associated with system expansion in contrast to system renewal.

Governance

When Metrolinx was established by the Ontario Government as a crown agency in 2006, its board was made up mostly of mayors and chairs from the GTHA. Its governance was changed in 2009 following the merger with GO Transit to exclude elected representatives from the board. The current board consists of 15 citizen members, recommended by the minister of transportation and appointed by the Province of Ontario. Removing elected officials from the board has elicited some concerns, for instance with respect to how accountable an appointed board is to the public and how connected they are to local community views. Recent reports on Metrolinx governance, together with interviews and conversations on the topic, all raise similar issues:

- *Political legitimacy.* The concern most often cited is that of insufficient political legitimacy, defined as a clear process of accountability for decisions and actions to the community it serves. Metrolinx is a region-wide body for an area that includes some 30 local and regional municipalities, but no over-arching regional political governance. As a creature of the provincial government, it reports through the minister of transportation to the Government of Ontario. The question is how can there be true accountability and legitimacy without some form of regional government.³²
- *Links to locally elected officials.* While there is accountability to the provincial government, there is no institutional link to or engagement of the locally elected representatives in the development and approval of its policies and strategies.
- *Freedom from political interference.* Despite its non-political mandate to be evidence-driven and make the best investment decisions based on demonstrated need and value for money, Metrolinx appears to be unable to withstand undue political interference.³³



- *Stability of decision-making.* Uncertainty in decision-making for major projects of the regional plan is eroding public and business community confidence (“When is a plan a plan?” “When is a decision a decision?”³⁴)
- *Relationships with local transit authorities.* Tensions in the relationship between Metrolinx—a policy body without operational background, except for GO Transit—and some local transit operators are being blamed for causing unproductive delays.
- *Speed of implementation.* The slow roll-out of the Presto fare card across the entire system together with perceived protracted delivery on some projects have led to suggestions for bringing various transit operations within the control of one organization or body.³⁵
- *Funding autonomy and sufficiency.* Lack of funding control and funding constraints are seen by many as Metrolinx’ main challenges, inextricably linked to lack of independence and public credibility.

While there is widespread agreement on the need for some governance modifications, the proposals for reform are not consistent, either in substance or timing. Suggestions for change range from modest changes to the status quo, such as adding individuals nominated by each region to the current Board or adding elected officials to the board to uploading all of the local authorities and integrating all functions in a single, consolidated provincial agency. The idea of applying special purpose governance arrangements like those found in London, England, and in Germany has attracted interest.

The Metrolinx board has recommended adjusting its composition to provide municipalities in the GTHA with the opportunity to nominate up to six citizens to the board.³⁶ This recommendation was supported by the premier of Ontario’s Transit Investment Strategy Advisory Panel.³⁷ Governance issues are currently being considered by the Metrolinx board of directors.

DO THE REGIONAL SYSTEMS HAVE GOOD GOVERNANCE?

The overview of governance arrangements for regional transit in Washington, New York, and Toronto shows that commonalities are surprisingly few. What they do share is that their mandates reach beyond the limits of individual municipalities, and even states (in the cases of Washington and New York). The solution to providing public transport for the entire metropolitan area is different in each case. Each of the systems studied has a different



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history and each is embedded in a network of other systems and regulatory environments that makes them unique.

There is no agreement on the optimal governance structure for metropolitan areas in the literature. Some argue for centrist approaches: urban regions have outgrown their boundaries and government structures must adapt; addressing urban sprawl and regional inequality requires regional governance; and fragmentation promotes harmful competition for economic development. Others argue in favor of smaller jurisdictions: they are more responsive to citizen preferences, allow for wider participation, monitor performance and costs better, and offer choice to citizens to move to another municipality.³⁸

My own view has long been that a governance structure that aligns with the metropolitan area is critical for the capacity to integrate land use and transportation planning. There is some evidence that city-regions with governance bodies perform better. They are denser, have higher per capita GDPs, and attract more people. There is also a correlation between city-regions with regional transport authorities and public satisfaction, as well as environmental outcomes.³⁹ A two-tier governance arrangement appears to offer the best of both worlds.⁴⁰

I offers a set of observations on each of the three systems with respect to five governance principles:

Coordination: *the mandate is broad enough to facilitate the development of an integrated transportation system for the metropolitan area and to allow costs and benefits to be shared fairly*

WMATA's mandate is geographically broad enough to permit coordination and the existing formula for cost-sharing seems to be generally accepted. The federal government



requirement that all of the transportation players, including WMATA, work through the Transportation Planning Board, which is the MPO for the region, does compel collaboration. Despite the fact that three organizations produce multiple plans, there seems to be satisfaction with and pride in MWATA's strategic plan in Momentum and in the planning process.

The mandate of the **MTA** is the most extensive of the systems reviewed, encompassing all five New York City boroughs and seven suburban counties; its service responsibility includes subways, buses, two of three commuter rail services, and some bridges and tunnels. MTA does not provide these services directly, but oversees seven operating transit agencies. It does not have control over the two other large regional transportation providers—the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey (which operates the PATH rail transit system) and New Jersey Transit, which have their own boards and funding frameworks. The MTA's fare system across the region is mostly but not completely unified. Not everyone agrees that all costs and benefits are shared fairly. That said, its capacity to coordinate transit planning for the metropolitan area is considerable.

The constraints on the ability of **Metrolinx** to coordinate transit planning for the GTHA stem from the absence of a regionally representative institution to which it is accountable. As a special-purpose agency created to plan and develop an integrated regional transportation network and, subsequently, to operate the GO commuter network, Metrolinx lacks the authority to raise revenue for new projects through taxation or to compel the municipalities in the region to comply with its *Big Move* plan. It can find itself in a situation of planning overlap, as it does, for example in the current efforts to define the route of the "Downtown Relief Line," with Metrolinx, the City of Toronto, and the TTC all studying the options; the multiple transit choices that ensue create public confusion and frustration. That said, the re-thinking process can yield better alternatives.⁴¹ Unlike the situation of the other two transit agencies, it is the Province of Ontario that establishes the planning framework to which *The Big Move* must conform.⁴²

Efficiency: *the structure permits strategic directions and priorities to be set and services to be delivered cost-effectively*

WMATA's strategic plan, called *Momentum*, includes a set of seven key investments, called Metro 2025, and a plan for 2040 is currently in preparation. The governance structure clearly allows directions to be set and priorities established. The tension for the Metro system is over the capacity to fund these priorities and whether the plan, even if implemented, will be adequate to keep up with projected growth over the next 30 years.

MTA's governance structure clearly allows for strategic decision-making and priority-setting. The MTA retains direct control over capital and operations of each of its operating agencies; all decisions on fares, service levels, and procurement are the responsibility of and wholly

controlled by the MTA board. MTA's planning role is focused on operations for the network: it does a 20-year needs assessment that looks at both the state of repair and the demographics that will drive transit needs; the operating agencies do the detailed operational planning, while the RPA undertakes the high level long-term visioning for the region. MTA has a long range plan and five-year capital plans to which its affiliates and subsidiaries must conform.

Metrolinx' raison d'être was to create a regional transportation plan with a seamless grid of road, transit, cycling, and pedestrian infrastructure expansion. *The Big Move*, which sets out strategic directions, is that plan. However, with no independent capacity to fund the plan, priorities are subject to ongoing political approval.

Metrolinx does not operate transit services, with the notable exception of GO Transit. By all accounts, this is considered an exceptional commuter rail/bus system and is slated for major expansion. Metrolinx currently has \$16 billion worth of transit construction underway; these projects are, for the most part, proceeding well, notably where Metrolinx is implementing the project directly. Most challenging to deliver on time and budget are those projects not within its control (such as the subway extension to Vaughan and the renovation of Union Station). Taken together, the track record on execution averages 5 percent over budget.

Accountability: *decision-makers can be held responsible for their actions and the decision-making process is understandable and transparent enough to encourage access and participation of all stakeholders*

Since 2010, when the governance of **WMATA** was revamped, the accountability and transparency of the agency have apparently improved significantly. All board and committee meetings are public, with occasional exceptions for legal or procurement matters. The inspector general, who is appointed by and reports to the board, offers an independent check on performance which can add value. The outreach program for *Momentum* was extensive and engaged almost 12,000 stakeholders.

MTA is a state agency accountable to the governor of New York. It prides itself on being exceptionally transparent. All meetings are held in public, with rare exceptions for legal or union matters; the meeting schedules and detailed agendas are published and available to stakeholders and the general public in advance. Detailed reporting on capital build programs permits the public and investors to remain informed of and build trust in how funds are being spent. The process for outreach to stakeholders is a traditional one, involving, for example, public hearings for infrastructure decisions.

Metrolinx is a provincial agency, accountable to the minister of transportation. The region it acts for comprises 26 lower-tier and four regional municipalities, nine of which have their own

local transit authorities. With no over-arching regional governance mechanism, and no locally elected representatives on it, Metrolinx is viewed by some academics and specialists as lacking meaningful accountability to and linkages with the community it serves.

Responsiveness: *local community needs and preferences are given due consideration*

According to **WMATA**'s code of behavior, known as the WMATA Compact, "before a mass transit plan is adopted, altered, revised, or amended", the board must consult with all relevant transportation and planning agencies of the counties and cities in the "Zone". On a day-to-day basis, because the board includes elected representatives (Virginia sends elected officials, and the District of Columbia's representative from City Council is an elected official), the local perspective is present.

Opinion on the **MTA** is divided on this criterion. As noted above, the New Yorkers consulted do *not* think that the needs and preferences of New York City residents are given due consideration. The decades-long delay building the Second Avenue Subway and the rejection of congestion pricing are two frequently cited illustrations. Interference by the governor, who effectively controls the MTA, and the suburban and rural bias in the state legislature are viewed as the explanation. The innovative policies and programs currently transforming New York City, emulated globally, were only achieved through local leadership and funding. Those responsible for determining region-wide priorities counter that this sense of entitlement and injustice is parochial and overstated.

Metrolinx was viewed as responsive to local needs in the process of developing *The Big Move*, which was a product of consensus among elected officials of the region. Now that the board does not include politicians, there is concern that clear links to locally elected representatives are missing and that future planning will not be informed by local knowledge or preferences.

Sufficient and sustainable revenue: *the fiscal framework within which the board operates enables it to deliver on its mandate*

As noted above, **WMATA** does *not* score well on this measure. Major spending is needed to upgrade and modernize virtually all elements of the system following years of chronic underinvestment. Projected growth in the region is adding to the pressure. Other than fare revenue and contributions from governments, WMATA does not have its own predictable source of revenue that is sufficient for its needs.

MTA gets its funding comes from a diverse mix of sources, and compared to the funding structures of other large systems, appears to have more control and flexibility. However, the MTA's funding needs are immense and it has faced ongoing shortfalls, both operating and capital. Those consulted feel that its funding framework is *not* adequate for the burden.

Metrolinx does *not* have the fiscal capacity to deliver on its mandate. In addition to the Investment Strategy proposed by Metrolinx, several options have been advanced, including that of the premier's Transit Investment Strategy Advisory Panel, which I chaired.⁴³ The issue of how to provide a sufficient and sustainable revenue stream to fund the regional transit network so urgently needed in the GTHA was front and center in the first three months of 2014 until the calling of the provincial election in April and the onset of campaigning for the October 2014 municipal elections. Politics has interrupted this public discussion.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The capacity to plan, develop, and implement transit and transportation planning on a region-wide scale is a cornerstone for successful twenty-first century metropolitan regions.
2. There is no one track to effective governance. The governance models of the three transit systems reviewed here are very different, yet all perform quite well in delivering safe, reliable transit service. Each system has a different history and each is embedded in a network of other systems and regulatory environments that makes them unique. Addressing specific governance challenges will require singular responses.

Operating responsibilities, financial frameworks, governance structures and composition are all different. It is worth noting that neither WMATA nor the MTA function as their region's primary metropolitan planning organization. Both Washington and New York rely on other bodies, the Council of Governments (COG) and Transportation Planning Board (TPB) in the case of Washington, and the Regional Plan Association (RPA) in New York's case.

Metrolinx is responsible for coordinating planning to develop a multi-modal transport network for the GTHA, but in conformity with the Government of Ontario's *Places to Grow Act, 2005* and the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006*. Local and regional municipalities and transit agencies also engage in transportation planning and come forward with options of their own.

3. Effective governance, in accordance with accepted criteria, appears to depend more on shared visions and goals and on clarity of decision-making authority than on board structure per se.
4. Civil society organizations can play pivotal roles in educating the public and decision-makers and in developing a public consensus in favor of transit investment. Perhaps the best example is the educational and advocacy role played by the RPA since





1929 via its series of long-range plans and other activities in the New York region. Advocacy by the Greater Washington Board of Trade and the Riders' Advisory Council contributed significantly to the push to reform the governance of MWATA in 2010.

Tensions over jurisdictional entitlement between the central city and its suburbs are a common dynamic in metropolitan regional systems. Bridging them requires continuous effort and leadership among all constituents to embrace new insights on how to create thriving, livable, and sustainable twenty-first century city-regions.

5. Federal government support for transit is all-important. Almost all federal financial assistance to public transit is provided by grants authorized by Congress in the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964. Amended since it was introduced, the U.S. federal program provides transit systems with federal funds for up to 80 percent of capital projects; operating assistance grants are also available. The recovery of the New York Subway in the mid-1990s was enabled in part by increased federal financial support. Because the grants often come with strings attached, they can incent positive policy changes, such as including environmental protection objectives in transit projects. Certainly, the absence of a sustained national policy and investment program for urban transport stands out as a critical missing element in Canada. The just released 10-year funding commitment through *The Building Canada Plan* does include funds for transit infrastructure but not on a dedicated basis.
6. Obtaining sufficient and sustainable revenue sources is one of the biggest challenges facing public transit agencies. Even agencies like the MTA, which appear to have a range of funding mechanisms within their control, are under-resourced relative to the upgrading requirements and growth pressures they face.
7. There are several implications for the Toronto region:
 - a. The problem of insufficient political legitimacy cannot be fully solved without some form of regional governing body that would provide a level of oversight



to Metrolinx. A strong case for this has been made by London transit expert David Quarmby who argues that a single organization similar to the Transport for London (TfL) model with overall responsibility for all transportation in the city-region would provide accountability to the communities served and a seamless customer experience.⁴⁴ Unlike the GTHA, however, with the Greater London Authority, London has an upper-tier regional government.

- b.** Multiple transportation planning bodies add value in all three jurisdictions reviewed. Despite the possible lack of clarity or impatience that flow from various planning proposals, they can produce better solutions. An integrated governance model with all planning, investment, and service decisions centralized is not a panacea.
- c.** Increased engagement with locally elected representatives would help to strengthen linkages with local municipalities. Metrolinx has recommended that the board composition be adjusted to allow GTHA municipalities to nominate six citizens for appointment.⁴⁵ This appears to be a reasonable step forward. My discussions with those interviewed confirmed that there are advantages and disadvantages to having elected officials on the board: local knowledge of needs and preferences and perceived accountability benefits must be weighed against the tendency to defend jurisdictional entitlement and a short-term perspective.⁴⁶
- d.** Without a predictable and sufficient funding framework that accounts for expansion, renewal, maintenance, and financing requirements, Metrolinx will not be perceived as independent, nor will it be able to deliver on its mandate. The federal government should commit to being a reliable funding partner.



APPENDIX I: INDIVIDUALS CONSULTED

I would like to thank the following people for taking the time to share their knowledge and views on issues related to transit governance in metropolitan regions.

General

<i>Carol L. Ketcherside</i>	Director of Administration & Organizational Development, Valley Metro RPTA
<i>Michael Roschlau</i>	President and CEO, Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA)
<i>Joshua L. Schank</i>	President and CEO, ENO Center for Transportation

In Washington, D.C.

<i>Mortimer L. Downey</i>	First Vice Chair, WMATA
<i>Art Guzzetti</i>	Vice President of Policy, American Public Transportation Association (APTA)
<i>Carl L. Jackson</i>	Associate Director, District Department of Transportation]
<i>Petra Mollet</i>	Chief of Staff, American Public Transportation Association (APTA)
<i>Barbara J. Richardson</i>	Chief of Staff, WMATA
<i>Harriet Tregoning</i>	Director of Sustainable Housing and Communities, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

In New York

<i>Ester Fuchs</i>	Professor, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University
<i>Margaret Newman</i>	Executive Director, Municipal Art Society of New York (MASNYC)
<i>Tom Prendergast</i>	Board Chairman and CEO, MTA
<i>Mary Rowe</i>	Director, Urban Resilience and Livability, Municipal Art Society of New York (MASNYC)
<i>Kate Slevin</i>	Vice President , Policy and Planning, Municipal Art Society of New York (MASNYC)
<i>Robert D. Yaro</i>	President, Regional Plan Association (RPA)
<i>Veronica Vanterpool</i>	Tri-State Transportation Campaign
<i>Juliette Michaelson</i>	Vice President of Strategy, Regional Plan Association (RPA)



In Toronto

<i>Paul Bedford</i>	Former Chief Planner, City of Toronto; current member and fellow, Canadian Institute of Planners
<i>Iain Dobson</i>	Co-founder, Strategic Regional Research Alliance (SRRA)
<i>Jennifer Keesmaat</i>	Chief Planner, City of Toronto
<i>John Lorinc</i>	Freelance Journalist
<i>Bruce McCuaig</i>	President and CEO, Metrolinx
<i>Gary McNeil</i>	Former President, GO Transit
<i>Eric Miller</i>	University of Toronto

I especially want to acknowledge the help I received from Rei Coleman, a scholar intern at the Wilson Center. Rei not only did the media scan summarized in Appendix II, but assisted with the research, which made my efforts more productive.



APPENDIX II: MEDIA SCAN

By Rei Coleman, Scholar Intern, Woodrow Wilson Center

April 30, 2014

This report on transit agencies in the media reviews news coverage and editorial opinion of five major transit system authorities: Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (Metrolinx), Greater Vancouver Area (TransLink), New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), and Chicago Regional Transportation Authority (RTA).

Methodology

Key words after the name of transit agencies: "news," "problems," "success/successfully," "governance," "performance," "accountability," and "trust."

Search methods:

- The first 100 search results each in **Google News**, **Bing News**, and **Yahoo News**, the three most popular search engines, with key words and transit agency name.
- Specific searches from prominent news outlets in the specific transit agency's urban region, with an effort to balance the political perspectives of selected publications and channels.

Washington, D.C.: *The Washington Post*, NBC Washington

Toronto: CTV Toronto, *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*

Vancouver: *Vancouver Sun*, *The Province*, CBC.ca

New York: *New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, myfoxny

Chicago: *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, Huffingtonpost Chicago.

- Searches include both reportage and opinion.
- The time period covered is two years between April 2012 and April 2014.

Sections and Analysis

Time period of news stories covered in the report:

- The first portion of each transit agency section covers reportage and opinion for the **six months** leading up to this report.

- The second portion of each transit agency section covers reportage and opinion during the **two years** prior to this report.

A five point scale ranging from *very negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, very positive* will accompany the six month report and the two year report.

A “findings summary” concludes each section. The findings summary also includes a short assessment of how much governance and accountability influenced its rating on the negative to positive scale.

WMATA

Recent Coverage:

There was equally distributed mention of ridership, expansion, praise, contracting problems, unreliability, delays, and minor accident coverage. Cost overruns⁴⁷ are a significant concern reflected in the past six months of WMATA coverage. Random negative news articles on employees are more prevalent for WMATA than for other transit agencies.⁴⁸ The agency received occasional positive comments, for instance on the opening of a reliable new bus facility.⁴⁹

Main topic covered: The building of the Silver Line received considerable negative attention, and while this is a project of the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority, the transit agency’s image was affected because the Silver Line is an extension of the Metro rail system.^{50 51 52}

very negative **somewhat negative** neutral somewhat positive very positive

In the past two years:

Coverage was mixed over the past two years, but more negative than neutral or positive. There was occasional praise for transparency and some mentions that performance is improving, but more criticism related to aging infrastructure.⁵³ During this period, accidents⁵⁴ and rail performance and mishandled scheduling⁵⁵ issues have been the dominant concerns. Silver Line construction delays were mentioned in 2013, but emerged as a big issue during the past six months.⁵⁶

very negative **somewhat negative** neutral somewhat positive very positive



Findings summary

A first time, unbiased viewer of the news might get a somewhat negative image of the Washington Metro system; the negative perceptions were slightly alleviated thanks to WMATA's public relations efforts. The older the news, the more disapproving and negative the results tend to be.

Governance/Accountability: The main issues concern budget matters; a few articles blame WMATA's financial structure for cost overruns and infrastructure deterioration. For example, a 2004 Brookings Institution study blaming "the problematic revenue base" of WMATA for budget problems received considerable attention.⁵⁷ WMATA governance was not linked to Silver Line delays or problems.

MTA

Recent Coverage

Recent coverage of the MTA is rather negative. Topics include safety concerns for the entire six month span and MTA's downgraded bonds from AA to A+.

Main topic covered: contract issues with transit workers union, with most articles portraying the MTA in a negative light. The dispute was very recently settled,⁵⁸ but the issue lasted for two years.

very negative **somewhat negative** neutral somewhat positive very positive

In the past two years

The coverage over the previous two years was mixed, but more positive overall than during the past six months alone. A few articles commented positively on the extraordinary ridership being served. However, there were still criticisms regarding safety issues and accidents. Sporadic positive coverage included personal stories of good deeds by MTA employees.⁵⁹

The failure to settle the contract with transit workers lasted the entire two-year period and negatively affected the media coverage.

very negative somewhat negative **neutral** somewhat positive very positive



Findings summary

A first-time unbiased viewer of the news were to read only the past few months of coverage would likely come away with a somewhat negative image of the MTA. The earlier months of the time period covered in this report were kinder in reportage of MTA's governance and actions.

Governance/Accountability: Few of the negative news articles, less than one in five, referenced governance.

METROLINX

Recent Coverage

Coverage has been for the most part neutral or negative. Negative articles consisted mainly of criticism of the *Big Move*. A December 2013 column by Toronto Star City Hall commentator, Royson James, was particularly hard-hitting. In reporting on a severe critique of the *Big Move* done for the Neptis Foundation, James asked rhetorically, "Is Metrolinx killing our transit dreams? The provincial agency lost its way in only five years. Can it find its way back? Or are our transit dreams dead?" For James, the author's analysis resonated because of Metrolinx's change of position in the debate over how to replace the Scarborough RT.⁶⁰

Because Toronto Mayor Rob Ford helped to engineer the City Council's flip-flop on the Scarborough LRT to a subway, and because of the media's preoccupation with Mayor Ford, Metrolinx got caught in the media spillover.⁶¹

Another point of criticism was disappointment that the *Big Move* did not include more proposals for active transportation, like walking and cycling, in the plan.⁶²

The Metrolinx website itself is the main source of positive news about the agency in all of the three search engines.

very negative **somewhat negative** neutral somewhat positive very positive

In the past two years

Coverage was mixed, but leaning towards negative. Some of the reportage was neutral, related, for instance, to The Big Move's contracting deals and details of specific projects.

There was some criticism of Metrolinx' advertising program as "misleading."⁶³ Much of the negative coverage dealt with congestion and lack of train service.⁶⁴ Articles on misuse of funds were not uncommon.⁶⁵⁶⁶ On the other hand, Metrolinx had its defenders: "Politicians should let Metrolinx do its job," said the Toronto Star in July 2013.⁶⁷

Fewer than 1 in 10 results on any search engine yielded positive news; however, the most positive news was praise for GO Transit from both major and minor news outlets. Coverage of the ongoing saga of the Scarborough issue and of Mayor Ford's role in it fanned out to tarnish the image of Metrolinx during 2013.⁶⁸

very negative **somewhat negative** neutral somewhat positive very positive

Findings summary

A first-time, unbiased viewer of the online news will receive a somewhat negative image of Metrolinx. The more recent the coverage, the more negative it is.

Media criticism extended indirectly to governance. The cumulative impression from the media is that confidence in both the independence and effectiveness of Metrolinx is not robust.⁶⁹



ENDNOTES

- 1 This typology is used by Acure Consulting, Translink Governance Review, March, 2013
- 2 The criteria chosen are based on those put forward in The Conference Board of Canada, The Canada Project, V.III (2007), p. 69. The six criteria used by Acure Consulting, op cit., are: Accountability, Transparency, Responsiveness, Clarity of Purpose, Advocacy, Productive Relationships.
- 3 UNESCO defines urban governance as the processes that steer and take into account the various links among stakeholders, local authorities and citizens; cited in The Canada Project, V III, op cit., p. 67.
- 4 Ridership is calculated differently in the United States and Canada; The United States uses “boardings,” so each transfer is a new trip; Canada uses “linked trips”; the Toronto (TTC) data have been adjusted by the Canadian Urban Transit Association to match the U.S. definition.
- 5 Population numbers from Regional Plan Association, Transit Leadership Summit, May, 2014.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 MPOs have five core functions: establish and manage a “fair and impartial setting” for effective regional decision-making; “establish alternatives” based on the complexity of the region, its issues, and realistic options; develop and regularly update a long-range transportation plan with a 20 year planning horizon; develop a transportation improvement program; and involve the public in all aspects.
- 8 A study of MPOs shows that transit investment has lagged in regions where boards have not fairly represented city populations (Detroit and Milwaukee being egregious examples). MPOs and COGs can be very undemocratic. A 1999 Brookings Institution study found that central cities were under-represented in as many as 92 percent of MPOs and COGs; Portland, Oregon, has the country’s only directly elected MPO board and it has been rated as by far the United States’ best regional planning agency by Myron Orfield, author of *American Metropolitcs*. He favors directly elected MPO boards with proportional representation. (Angie Schmitt, *Meet the Obscure Unelected Agencies Strangling Many U.S. Cities*, <http://usa.streetsblog.org/2011/07/21>)
- 9 TIP is a six-year financial schedule of accountability to the federal government.
- 10 Members of the TPB include representatives of local governments, state transportation agencies, the Maryland and Virginia General Assemblies, and WMATA, plus non-voting members.
- 11 *Place + Opportunity: Strategies for Creating Great Communities and a Stronger Region, 2014* focuses on *Activity Centers*, the places that will accommodate most of the region’s growth.
- 12 For instance, at the time of writing there was some tension regarding the funding available to WMATA for the system renewal requirements set out in *Momentum*; at first, it was not fully funded, but that is being resolved. Nor have the expansion aspects of *Momentum* yet been endorsed in the TPB plan; the debate is about the pace of expansion.
- 13 It should be noted that control over land use is jealously protected as a local responsibility, as it is across the United States.
- 14 For example, TPB’s *Regional Transportation Priorities Plan* originated with its Citizens Advisory Committee in 2010, involved a consultation event with regional stakeholders, and has been followed up by listening sessions, a forum and polling.
- 15 Greater Washington Board of Trade and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments [November 2010]; The Riders’ Advisory Council, Report on Governance of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority [December 2010].
- 16 Strategic Plan 2013-2025, Executive Summary.
- 17 Appendix IV.
- 18 The population for the tri-state area which includes the largest cities in New Jersey and Connecticut is almost 19 million.
- 19 The MTA Network Homepage. <http://web.mta.info/mta/network.htm>; Wikipedia, Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

- 20 The various subsidiary agencies have both legal names and popular names (Wikipedia, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, page 3).
- 21 It must be noted that the region's economic growth has not been shared by all; in fact, median income in the region, adjusted for inflation, has dropped 14 percent since 1990 (RPA, *Fragile Success*). Declining incomes, together rising living costs and the region's vulnerability to disasters caused by climate change, are acknowledged serious risks to the region's future.
- 22 For example, CNN, "What are the World's Best Metro Systems?" travel.cnn.com, January 9, 2013; Walk Score, "The Results are in: New York has the Top-Ranked Transit System in the Country," April 26, 2012, based on access.
- 23 DOT's plan, *Sustainable Streets:2013 and Beyond*, elaborated on Mayor Bloomberg's *PlaNYC*, which called for more efficient transportation and a revitalized public realm to support his vision of a thriving, world-class twenty-first century city.
- 24 There were also some critical articles with respect to safety.
- 25 There are more than 70 federal offices of inspectors general since the initial legislation for inspector generals in 1978.
- 26 An organization based on the RPA model—the Strategic Regional Research Alliance—was recently formed (2011) in the Toronto region; funded by the Province of Ontario, Metrolinx, several municipalities including the City of Toronto, and private sector developers, it has produced several influential studies linking land use, transit, and economic development.
- 27 RPA, *Fragile Success*, op. cit. East Side is estimated to 70 percent over budget and nine years late; the Second Avenue Subway, 33 percent over budget and two years late; Fulton Center, 87 percent over budget and seven years late.
- 28 This was not a simple story of city versus suburbs; opposition to the congestion charge came also from the outer boroughs whose residents opposed tolls on formerly free bridges.
- 29 Toronto Region Board of Trade, *A Green Light to Moving the Toronto Region*, 2013, p.5; the average daily commute time is projected to increase to 109 minutes in the next 25 years.
- 30 The 525 million trips is equivalent to 843 million boardings (the U.S. definition of ridership)
- 31 See speech by J. Robert S. Prichard, Chair Metrolinx to the Empire Club, April 23, 2014, for a summary of the progress made by Metrolinx.
- 32 The GTA Task Force (1996), which I chaired, argued that the GTA needed a regional government to address the major challenges like regional planning and infrastructure investment and fulfill accepted governance principles, including accountability.
- 33 Transit infrastructure investments are political by nature and some interventions are to be expected and can be warranted (e.g. Stopping the Spadina Expressway in Toronto).
- 34 Carol Wilding, President and CEO, Toronto Region Board of Trade
- 35 For example, the 2014 Ontario Progressive Conservative Party's campaign platform called for merging GO Transit, LRTs, subways, and major GTA highways into a single transportation authority. Toronto City Councilor Karen Stintz, a mayoral candidate in the Fall 2014 municipal election, has promised to appoint a transportation czar for the City of Toronto to mediate all transport-related matters; she has also called for the integration of GO Transit and TTC.
- 36 Metrolinx Investment Strategy, 2013, Recommendation 3
- 37 *Making the Move: Choices and Consequences*, December 2013.
- 38 Ahrend, R., C. Gamper and A. Schumann (2014), "The OECD Metropolitan Governance Survey: A Quantitative Description of Governance Structures in Large Urban Agglomerations", OECD Regional Development Working Papers, 2014/04, OECD.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 21
- 40 The Task Force Report on the Future of Greater Toronto recommended a two-tier model for Toronto, with the five then-existing regional governments replaced by a single, indirectly elected Greater Toronto Council; it would be responsible for planning and coordination on matters of region-wide interest, including integrated land use and transportation planning.
- 41 Royson James, "More twists and turns as city steers through transit woes," *Toronto Star*, June 12, 2014, argues that the multiple efforts create public confusion. However, I would argue that things have changed since 2008 and new research has emerged (for instance on the extent to which job growth is occurring in areas not served by the current proposals). Re-thinking transit options in the light of new information can be very positive and avoid costly mistakes.

- 42 *The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, 2006
- 43 *Making the Move: Choices and Consequences*, December 2013. Also, reports by Toronto Region Board of Trade, City of Toronto Staff Report, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and Ontario Chamber of Commerce.
- 44 David Quarmby, speech to the Toronto Region Board of Trade, April 9, 2014.
- 45 Metrolinx Investment Strategy, Recommendation 3, supported by the premier's TransitPanel (December, 2013).
- 46 The experience of Translink, responsible for regional transportation in Greater Vancouver, is instructive. When created in 1999, the board comprised elected representatives. In 2007, the structure was changed to a provincially appointed board of non-politicians, but with a Mayor's Council on Regional Transportation that approved Translink's 10-year plan and a commissioner to oversee fare increases, alignment with the provincial plan, and customer satisfaction performance. A further review in 2013 praised Translink governance as "state of the art" in many respects, but identified a significant accountability gap. Despite having what many transit experts view as closest to the ideal governance structure, Translink is still struggling to perfect its model. It still has challenges: its relationship with the Province of British Columbia, tensions between the central city of Vancouver and the suburbs, debates over which transit technology to use, and funding shortfalls (a controversial transit funding referendum is planned). As well, the Mayor's Council is calling on the B.C. government, once again, to amend the Translink governance structure to give the Council oversight of the agency's operating budget. Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation, *Regional Transportation Investments: A Vision for Metro Vancouver*, June 12, 2014.
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