Inter-municipal collaboration through forced amalgamation:
A summary of recent experiences in Toronto & Montreal

**Prepared for the Project on New Public Consortia for Metropolitan Governance
(NPC Project)**

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Introduction

The objective of this paper is to provide a general overview of experiences in inter-municipal collaboration, both before and after recent municipal amalgamations, in the Toronto and Montreal metropolitan areas. The paper reviews political structures and mechanisms for municipal collaboration in these metropolitan regions prior to amalgamation, and reports on why these structures were scrapped in favour of the forced amalgamation of a number of municipalities into one large megacity. The effectiveness of these new megacities in achieving the objectives set out by the provincial governments is also examined.

Looking beyond the provincial objectives and rationale for legislating municipal amalgamations, the paper also attempts to assess the impacts of these forced mergers on other important social objectives, such as public involvement in civic life, a more equitable redistribution of wealth, access to services, etc. Although there are not a lot of indicators to provide quantifiable data in some of these areas, some trends are identified.

This paper was compiled by a review and interpretation of published on-line sources relating to municipal governance in Toronto and Montreal. The review concludes that additional research is required in order to better quantify the social and political outcomes of these amalgamations.

Toronto

Inter-municipal collaboration prior to 1998 amalgamation

The evolution of formalized inter-municipal coordination in the Toronto metropolitan region dates back to 1953, when the Ontario provincial government of the day brought in the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto Act, establishing North America's first two-tiered, federated system of municipal governance.

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Rather than merging or amalgamating the city of Toronto and adjacent municipalities (as was subsequently done in 1998), the Metropolitan Toronto Act provided for the creation of a new regional political entity to serve Toronto and 12 surrounding municipalities. The Regional Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, or Metro as it came to be known, became the senior level of municipal government for the area. The geographic boundaries surrounding the 13 municipalities that formed Metro Toronto in 1953 are virtually the same as Toronto city boundaries post 1998 amalgamation.

The literature reviewed on this subject gives no indication that the creation of this new level of government generated anywhere near as much controversy as the amalgamation process that was eventually mandated in the late 1990s. Rather, there seemed to be some consensus in the region that a certain level of consolidation presented benefits for Toronto as well as for its growing suburbs that needed the infrastructure and services Toronto provided. Toronto benefited by being the centrepiece of a stronger, more developed regional economy.

By the early 1950s the 12 suburban municipalities were growing at a far faster rate than the city of Toronto. This is because Toronto had run out of developable land and was becoming too crowded to house its growing workforce at prices they could afford. By the mid-1950s, there were as many people living in the twelve surrounding towns as within the City of Toronto itself. (Alexandroff)

Suburban growth, however, became increasingly constrained by the challenges related to needing to expand water and sewage systems, transportation networks and other urban services in an efficient and integrated manner. With no direct access to Lake Ontario for water supply and sewage treatment, the 12 suburbs were forced to enter into discrete bilateral agreements with the City of Toronto and with each other to supply these essential services. Alexandroff reports that there were 163 such agreements for municipal services entered into between individual municipalities around the City of Toronto by 1953.

Suburban growth had been further stymied by the lingering effects of the Great Depression of the 1930's, which had caused severe and lingering financial problems for suburban Toronto. This condition made it virtually impossible for municipalities in the region to finance badly needed infrastructure improvements when suburban growth began accelerating in the early 1950s. With the rapid spread of urban settlement into the rural areas around Toronto, the notion of consolidating service delivery on a region-wide basis appeared a logical way of addressing these challenges. This was viewed as a way of enabling the Toronto regional economy to continue to grow and flourish, an objective Toronto shared with its suburbs.

Metro

The Metropolitan Toronto Act of 1953 created a new two-tiered system of governance, in which the municipalities retained their existing boundaries and identities, and continued to exercise a wide range of local responsibilities. The decision-making body of Metro, Metro Council, was composed of members elected to their towns' individual local councils and then elected by each council to serve on Metro Council. Similar to the model used in Greater Vancouver, they served as regional representatives without being directly elected to the Metro Council. This was said to ensure "a high degree of coordination and good communication" between the lower tier municipal governments and Metro. (Encyclopedia Britannica Online)

The creation of this new level of regional government was seen as a compromise between doing nothing and thereby letting suburban growth continue without planning or coordination,

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and amalgamating the thirteen municipalities outright, a concept popular in Toronto but not as popular in the 12 suburbs. (Alexandroff)

Under the new system, the new metropolitan government assumed the role of providing some municipal services (e.g. water, sewage treatment, major roadways, welfare assistance), others were provided by the local municipalities (e.g. parks, recreation programs, local streets, community centres), and some municipal services were delivered in a shared manner (e.g. seniors' housing and services, childcare centres, street cleaning and snow removal). (City of Toronto)

Notably, the creation of this new regional government also marked the beginning of regional planning in Ontario. The Metropolitan Toronto Advisory Planning was established as the planning arm of Metro, with a mandate to develop land use and transportation plans for the region. (Hodge and Robinson)

Metro Toronto underwent two relatively significant changes relating to its governance structure in the 1960s and again in the1980s as a result of recommendations from two provincially appointed Royal Commissions. In 1967, the original 13 municipalities were consolidated to create just six municipalities within the Metro Toronto jurisdictional boundaries. This included the cities of Toronto, North York, Scarborough, Etobicoke, York and East York, which were eventually amalgamated with Metro Toronto to form the new City of Toronto in 1998. (City of Toronto)

Direct election of political representatives to the Metro Council was introduced in 1988 through provincial government legislation. This created a governance structure with 34 elected councillors. The purpose of this shift in the Metro Council governance structure was apparently to give Metro more independence from Toronto, which had come to dominate Metro according to some of the suburban councillors, and to create more direct accountability to voters. However, this reportedly led to less cooperation with the lower tier municipalities and their political representatives, who no longer sat on the Metro board.

So how successful was Metro in fulfilling its mandate? What did it do well, and what did it not do so well? As others have noted, measuring outcomes of interjurisdictional cooperation can be problematic for a number of reasons, not least of which being the fact that cooperation (and success) are not easy to measure. (Planning Report for the New Public Consortia Action Team, UBC, 2006)

Alexandroff and others allude to the fact that there were occasional turf battles between Metro and one or more of the lower tier municipalities. He writes that while the new Metropolitan Toronto Government was premised on the notion that the individual municipalities were to carry out truly "local" functions while the metropolitan government would have responsibility for "regional" issues, what is local and what is regional were sometimes controversial.

Such controversies over turf and jurisdiction, however, are a daily part of our political landscape in jurisdictions throughout the country (and beyond), and detracts little from the overall consensus in the literature that Metro largely managed to achieve what it set out to achieve.

An Encyclopedia Britannica article on the evolution of Toronto states:

> "The Metropolitan Council worked well: it resolved many of the difficult sewage and water problems; it greatly improved transportation by constructing expressways and roads, a new airport terminal building (1962), and an excellent subway; it authorized the

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construction of new schools and the renovation of old ones; and it introduced a regional parks system in an attempt to control future development."

Alexandroff is even more generous in his assessment of Metro as a successful model of metropolitan governance:

"Metro has been universally praised by urban planners as a successful experiment in managing urban growth in the age of the automobile. Most critically, it met its prime goal of equipping the municipalities with water, sewage facilities, utilities, new arterial roads and highways, and an integrated public transit system (the Toronto Transit Commission) enabling these municipalities to grow, while avoiding the decay or depopulation in the core City of Toronto."

Finally, the oft-repeated 1987 quote from Peter Ustinov: "Toronto is kind of New York operated by the Swiss" seems to reflect the general view of Toronto that persisted in many visitors' minds at least until the mid 1990s. Some might debate the degree to which the Metro government was responsible for this perception, but few argue that the perception was without merit.

A literature review of what analysis exists regarding an objective assessment of Metro Toronto concludes that Metro was an effective organization to meet the needs of the region during the time in which it operated. However, this research has not been able to answer some of the other key questions relevant to the NPC project (e.g., level and quality of public participation in decision-making processes, social, human and environmental outcomes).

It is apparent that by the mid-1990s the public was viewing Metro as increasingly less relevant to their lives. This was both because local municipalities were the place most people would deal with local issues of concern to them, and because the Toronto metropolitan area had become much larger than Metro's scope. The literature indicates that there was no public outcry for any wholesale change in the regional governance structure beyond the occasional call for an expanded Metro to encompass more of the GTA.

The Growth of the Greater Toronto Area

By the 1990s Metro was no longer large enough in scope to serve the needs or be of much relevance to what had become an expanded urban agglomeration known as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

As the 6 inner cities comprising Metro's boarders developed and green spaces filled in with homes, offices and retail sites, the outer surrounding region also continued to grow, but at an even more rapid pace. Many of the same pressures and issues that preceded the creation of Metropolitan Toronto in the early 1950s were now being experienced in the regions surrounding Metro, with the difference that these suburban regions also included large areas of rural and agricultural lands. (City of Toronto)

Once again the issue of how best to facilitate interjurisdictional cooperation and coordination between Metro Toronto and the rapidly developing outer suburbs of the GTA became an increasingly important subject of discussion and debate for Metro planners and politicians. In 1996, Alan Alexandroff wrote:

"The GTA is not a level of government or statutory body with authority of any kind, but the use of the term signals a belief that the economies of all five regions (comprising

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what is referred to as the GTA) are interdependent and growing more integrated. Over the years, there have been growing concerns among urbanists, planners, and some politicians that this region cries out for coordination."

Again in reference to this same issue, a 2004 report from the City of Toronto stated:

"It is recognized that Toronto is the heart of a large, complex, interdependent, economic and social city-region. Many services and issues spill over existing municipal boundaries and should be addressed at a regional level within a long-range growth management context. The lack of a coordinating mechanism for decision-making and long range planning was becoming an obstacle to the economic prospects of the entire region."

The search for a coordinating mechanism to knit together a common vision for the broader Greater Toronto Area prompted the Ontario NDP provincial government of the day (1995) to appoint the Task Force on Greater Toronto, headed by Anne Golden. The main recommendation of the 1996 Golden task force report called for the establishment of a government institution that would cover all or most of the GTA. Another recommendation was that municipal mergers, while potentially desirable, were not an immediate priority. (Sancton)

However, by the time this report was delivered, a new provincial government had been elected, bringing with it its own vision for municipal governance in the Toronto region.

1998 Amalgamation of Metro Toronto

The *City of Toronto Act* was introduced in 1997 by the Mike Harris Conservative government of Ontario, forcing the amalgamation of the 6 municipalities of Metro Toronto into one megacity, with a population of 2.5 million. This was a completely top-down decision by the provincial government, which had not been requested or solicited by any of the 6 municipalities comprising the Toronto Metropolitan area. Voter referendums in the affected municipalities concerning the province's megacity plan resulted in a strong message of disapproval by more than a two to one margin. This is in sharp contrast to what the literature portrays as a more or less consensual agreement in the early 1950s that led to the creation of the Metro regional government. (Cox and City of Toronto)

Rationale for amalgamation

Regarding the rationale for forced amalgamation, Andrew Sancton infers that the provincial government's stated rationale for forcing a merger of the 6 municipalities of the Toronto was weak at best.

"There is no existing theory or body of literature that is at all helpful in explaining why the Harris government introduced the megacity. There are no precedents for a market-oriented (neo-liberal) central government using its legislative authority to over-ride local referendum results so as to create one large municipal government when once there were a number of federated smaller ones."
(Sancton)

In fact, none of the studies of governance in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) commissioned by the Province prior to this time emphasized problems within Metropolitan Toronto or the need to create a megacity. Rather, these studies identified problems with the coordination of transportation, planning, water provision and waste management among the regions within the

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GTA and focussed on the need for a GTA governing body to address these service coordination issues.

One can only conclude from the literature that the reasons for forcing amalgamation were political, and not based upon principals of sound public policy and improved governance.

A number of commentators in the literature reviewed have posited theories, which make sense, especially in light of the sharp political polarization that existed between the City and the provincial government at that time.

The Harris government was generally viewed as the most right wing provincial government in Canada in modern times. While in opposition in the early 1990s, Mike Harris strongly criticized the structure and costs of municipal governments in the province. In the 1995 election, the Conservatives campaigned on a commitment to reducing inefficiency and waste in the public sector, a theme common with conservative politicians across Canada.

The Conservatives characterized Metropolitan Toronto's two-tiered system of government as wasteful in its duplication of services. They felt that there were far too many politicians and bureaucrats under this system, taxes were too high and overlaps and duplications created a lack of accountability. They were also determined to restructure the provincial–municipal financial relationship by shifting responsibilities to the municipal governments, accompanied by a cost-cutting and downsizing agenda. (Collin and Tomas) There appeared to be little consideration or concern, however, as to whether forced amalgamation would actually improve the delivery of services and improve the quality of urban life in the affected communities, however.

Some speculate that another political reason for the forced amalgamation of Metro's 6 municipalities into one large mega-city was that Harris wanted to blunt the momentum that was building in the Metro area for the creation of a GTA-wide government. While this notion was gaining in popularity, particularly among bureaucrats and politicians in Metro and the City of Toronto, it was strongly opposed in the outer regions of the GTA where the Conservatives had their strongest voter base in the province. Also, a huge GTA-wide government would have created a strong urban political counter-balance to the provincial government, which Harris likely would have had difficulties with. (Alexandroff)

Another credible theory explaining the rationale for amalgamation that is frequently mentioned in the literature is that the amalgamation was a deliberate effort by the Harris government to eliminate the power of the dominant left-leaning majority on the Toronto City Council by swamping a new amalgamated council with more conservative representatives from the suburbs. (Sancton) Toronto's current mayor, David Miller subscribes to a similar view. According to Miller, "The amalgamation happened because of a dispute between a moderately left-wing city government and a radical right-wing provincial government." (Cox)

Trying to make amalgamation work

The literature discussing the forced amalgamation is consistent in characterizing the process as being filled with challenges, frustrations and great turmoil. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe this period in any detail, since much has been written by others on these difficult times for local government in Toronto. The focus here is instead on the pros and cons of amalgamation, what appears to be working and what doesn't after the fact, and on how the new governance structures and processes contribute to progressive public engagement and policies.

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One point that the literature is clear on is that any assessment of whether the amalgamation has "worked" or not is extremely clouded by the fact that the province downloaded a number of responsibilities on to the new megacity when it was created. This provincial downloading, with concurrent cuts in provincial transfers to the municipalities added to the chaos inherent in the amalgamation process, and makes a comparative analysis of "before" and "after" service levels extremely challenging.

The seven municipal governments previously in existence were given roughly 8 months to sort out the megacity's new organizational structures, prior to the new city coming into existence on January 1, 1998. The broad range of municipal services that the new city was responsible for underscores the complexity of this process. The City of Toronto has responsibilities for welfare (income support), police, fire, ambulance, homes for the aged, child care, hostels, social housing, parks and recreation, arts and culture, economic development, tourism, roads, transit, waste management, water and severs and urban planning. (City of Toronto)

Governance structure

The Toronto City Council is comprised of the Mayor and 44 Councillors. The Mayor is elected at large, and each Councillor is elected to serve one of the 44 wards in the city. The political decision-making process occurs through deliberations and debates at standing committees, community councils and task forces, including:

- Six policy-based standing committees (Policy and Finance, Administration, Planning and Transportation, Works, Community Services, Economic Development and Parks Committee)
- Four geographically-based community councils (Toronto East, Toronto North, Toronto South and Toronto West Community Councils)
- A Striking Committee, Nominating Committee, Audit Committee, Budget Advisory Committee, Ethics Steering Committee and various ad hoc and advisory committees. (City of Toronto, 2004)

The role of the four Community Councils is to provide recommendations to City Council on local planning and development matters, as well as neighbourhood matters including traffic plans, parking regulations and exemptions to certain City bylaws.

Inter-municipal coordination within the GTA

One issue of longstanding importance to Metro Toronto planners that still does not appear to be working is the presence of an institutional framework or mechanism to coordinate and integrate with the larger GTA, which surrounds the post-amalgamation City of Toronto. The creation of the newly amalgamated Toronto megacity did nothing to address this issue.

The desirability of greater GTA cooperation was recognized by the Harris government, which it attempted to address with the creation of the Greater Toronto Services Board. The GTSB was established in 1999, a year after the megacity amalgamation. The governing board for the GTSB was comprised of representatives from every municipality and sub-region within the GTA, and given the responsibility for the regional GO Transit system, although little else. The newly amalgamated City of Toronto supported the creation of the GTSB as a "first step in the right direction", but wanted the province to provide its board with a stronger mandate to implement growth management and regional transportation coordination. (City of Toronto)

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The provincial government refused to grant these additional powers, and in 2001, two years after its creation by the same government, it was eliminated, creating an institutional void at the GTA level.

A 2004 report on amalgamation by the City of Toronto's Chief Administrator states that since the dismantling of the GTSB, the City and the surrounding regions continue to cooperate on a number of specific issues ranging from water supply, transit integration across boundaries and on solid waste management, although there is no long range plan or strategic framework to guide these activities.

> "There is a high risk that ad hoc responses to individual issues could result in fragmented, short-term solutions that could frustrate longer-term sustainable solutions. . . . (T)here is an acute and growing need for a mechanism to coordinate growth management across the GTA. It is essential that the GTA governance structures catch up to the expanding and rapidly growing city-region so that it will be possible to balance the needs of the entire region with the unique demands of its specific communities." (City of Toronto)

It is important to note here that since the introduction of the City of Toronto Act of 1997, the City of Toronto can now enter into an agreement with a government without having to go to the province for permission. This is very significant, as it allows the new city much more autonomy than other municipalities have had in this regard.

However, the literature reviewed does not indicate that any formal structures have yet been introduced to help facilitate inter-municipal coordination amongst GTA municipalities. There is little information easily found that helps us to understand the nature of inter-municipal relationships in the GTA region today, beyond general comments like the one above calling for some type of mechanism. What is inferred in the literature is that Toronto is more motivated than neighbouring GTA municipalities to coordinate planning and service functions on a region-wide basis.

Public engagement effectiveness

The City of Toronto website indicates that if a citizen or group wishes to publicly address Council, they must do so through their Community Council, or at a standing committee meeting. The council as a whole does not appear to allow delegations to address this body directly. Given the relatively large size of council (45 elected officials), this policy may be practical, however, it does lessen the individual citizen's access and ability to present views to the larger council. Those wishing to speak to broad city-wide issues (e.g., homelessness, air quality, public transit needs) are relegated to speaking only to the councillors at a Community Council or standing committee meeting.

In what some might characterize as a somewhat aloof attitude towards direct public engagement, the City's website indicates that after presenting to one's Community Council, which acts in an advisory capacity to City Council, the issue may be referred to the larger Council at some future meeting, after which "We will let you know when council makes a decision on the issue." (City of Toronto website)

Being somewhat removed from the decision-makers in this fashion is one of the arguments that are often used against the concept of creating one large government out of smaller, more publicly accessible entities.

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There have been examples of the City engaging citizens and civil society in decision-making. A notable recent example was the establishment of the Community Environmental Assessment Team in 2006 to guide the city's solid waste policies in coordination with the provincial Environmental Assessment Act. Council appointed 22 citizens to this committee.

However, in other key areas where citizen participation might be expected, the City's website provides no hint that this is a priority for the city. For example, beyond making a presentation or writing a letter to the Community Council or the Budget Advisory Committee, there appears to be no mechanism in place to actively encourage or solicit public input into the budget-making process, which is often where municipal priorities are established.

The degree to which civil society groups do or do not feel alienated from the City's decision-making process, and are actually involved in the process is a subject that requires further research. Reports written by or for the City indicate that while Toronto city staff are certainly aware of the importance of involving civil society in decision-making, there is more they believe that they could and should be doing in this area. However, the size and diversity of a city the size of Toronto presents challenges in this regard. (Robinson)

Robinson also notes that citizen and civil society engagement opportunities tend to be episodic in character, rather than sustained and institutionalized as part of the City Hall culture. She points out that, "there remain limited opportunities for citizens to participate in activities or forums with a *city-wide focus* for a *sustained* period of time." Furthermore, she notes that there are no formal measures or indicators of civic engagement used by the City to evaluate progress in regard to citizen involvement.

Finally, Robinson observes that opportunities for citizen involvement do exist in the new megacity government, but due to the absence of a central place to turn to for information about engagement opportunities, better mechanisms for citizen involvement are needed.

Current assessment of amalgamation experience

As noted previously, it is difficult to assess the relative success of the new amalgamated Toronto in any kind of comparative manner. Cuts in funding and provincial downloading of responsibilities to the new municipal government meant that the City had to deliver more than was delivered collectively by Metro and the 6 amalgamated municipalities, with less money to do so. This has presented huge challenges throughout the nearly 10 years of the City's existence.

However, if one were to use cost savings from the reduction of bureaucracy and elimination of duplications of services as criteria for measuring the success of amalgamation (the primary reasons used by the Harris government), we would have to conclude that amalgamation has been a failure for the citizens of Toronto. In 1997, the Harris government predicted that amalgamation would produce cost savings of $300 million per year by eliminating personnel and services. However, City budgets have swollen from $4.2 billion in 1998 to $7.8 billion in 2007, with a deficit of about $575 million projected for this year.

Although a 2004 report by the Chief Administrative Officer documented that amalgamated departments were able to shed 1,104 employees since 1998, overall payroll has swelled by 1,646 positions during the first 6 1/2 years of the merger. (Pittsburgh Post Gazette, Sept. 20, 2004).

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It is also worth noting that the harmonization of the 56 collective agreements that existed for municipal staff prior to amalgamation into the 6 agreements Toronto has today with its unionized workforce led to higher costs, contrary to assertions by the provincial government that the opposite would happen. This is because unions naturally fought for no wage rollbacks, and instead insisted that the highest common denominator contracts become the standard for employees.

The literature refers to the concern some have expressed that the new Community Council system has encouraged parochialism on the part of elected council members, who are criticized for focussing narrowly on their own districts, rather than on the city as a whole.

Because the amalgamated city was too large to administer from one central location, the city bureaucracy split into four zones, one for each of the Community Council zones. This decentralized structure appears to have had the effect of making many people feel even more distanced from the central city government.

Public opinion research regarding citizens' experiences and attitudes towards the amalgamated megacity versus the municipal structures in place prior to amalgamation would be useful in helping with any more detailed assessment of the benefits of the new governance structure.

A problem that still has not been solved is that there is still no institutional mechanism for inter-municipal cooperation across the Greater Toronto Area.

Montreal

Prior to January 1, 2002, the island of Montreal had a two-tiered regional governance structure, not unlike that of Toronto prior to its amalgamation. The island had 28 independent municipalities, including the city of Montreal. The island-wide "regional" governance body was called the Montreal Urban Community (MUC).

In 2002, these 28 independent municipalities and the MUC were legislated into merger or amalgamation by the Parti Quebecois-led provincial government to form the new megacity of Montreal. Regional functions once administered by the MUC are now handled by either the new city of Montreal or by the new and vastly expanded Montreal Metropolitan Community (CMM), which serves 82 municipalities in the greater Montreal metropolitan area (see CMM below).

The forced merger was quite unpopular, especially in the English-speaking suburbs of Montreal. Not only did many of these suburbanites dislike the idea of losing their local government, but they also feared the idea of being swallowed up by French-speaking Montreal. However, Quebec's new merger legislation was not only aimed at metropolitan Montreal. The legislation also caused the amalgamation of a number of other metropolitan regions around the province. In total, more than two hundred formerly independent suburban municipalities were legislated out of existence at this time. This paper focuses only on the Montreal experience.

In April 2003 the Parti Quebecois was defeated and the Liberal Party of Quebec assumed power. A key Liberal campaign promise was to allow merged municipalities to hold referendums on opting out, or "de-merging" from the amalgamations they'd been forced into the year before. The Liberal government followed up on this promise, and in June 2004

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referendums were held in 22 of the 27 previously independent municipalities on the island of Montreal.

As a result of these referendum results, 15 of the previously independent municipalities on the island of Montreal have de-merged from the megacity. They have regained some of their previous independence, but have not been allowed many of the powers they had prior to amalgamation. For example, police, fire and courts are now controlled through a newly created island-wide agglomeration council.

It should be pointed out that the rules established by the provincial government for the referendum made it difficult for those campaigning in favour of de-merging. In order to de-merge 35% of registered voters in a merged municipality had to vote "yes" for de-merging, as opposed to a simple majority of voters. In other words, if only 34% of registered voters turned out to vote, even if a majority of those votes were in favour of de-merging, it would not have been enough to satisfy the requirements the government had established for this referendum. Given the traditionally low voter turnout for municipal elections, this created a very difficult threshold to achieve. Had standard 50 percent plus one rules applied, several more municipalities would have been allowed to de-merge. (Whelan)

Agglomeration Council

In order to accommodate the need for a continued collaborative governance structure between Montreal and the 15 de-merged municipalities, on January 1, 2006, Montreal Island governance was restructured again through provincial legislation introduced by the Liberal government. The agglomeration council was created as a governance board that would allow the de-merged municipalities representation at the municipal level, and as an institutional structure enabling them to maintain and coordinate inter-municipal services in the absence of a single municipal government on the island of Montreal. The de-merged suburbs were required to belong (and contribute financially) to this new agglomeration council, as well as to the new regional Montreal Metropolitan Community.

Under this most recent governance adjustment, the municipal structure within the city is now made up of 19 city boroughs and the agglomeration council. The City continues to offer services throughout the territory of the island of Montreal, including the 15 reconstituted (de-merged) cities. Taxpayers in the reconstituted municipalities receive a tax bill from the City to pay for their portion of shared services on the Island of Montreal, as well as those delivered by the metropolitan government (CMM).

While the agglomeration council, like the city council and the borough councils, is one of the city's political entities, it is important to emphasize that it is not a supramunicipal body (as was the MUC). The council's political makeup calls for a 31 member board, consisting of the Mayor of Montreal, 15 members of the Montreal City Council appointed by the Mayor, 14 mayors from the de-merged municipalities and one extra representative of a larger suburb (Dollard-Des Ormeaux) appointed by the mayor of that municipality.

The representatives from the City of Montreal hold 87% of the weighted voting power, leaving the de-merged municipal representatives with just 13% of the vote at the agglomeration council. These weighted voting percentages are reflective of the proportional population sizes of each of the municipalities on the island. (i.e., Montreal now has 87% of the population on the island – about 1.6 million versus approximately 200,000 in the de-merged municipalities.)

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Borough Councils

The 19 borough councils are responsible for managing local services within the boroughs, including: local roads, garbage collection, recreation, parks, culture, community development, public consultation and some planning aspects. Each borough has a mayor and councillors elected by borough residents. Under this complex system, there are both borough councillors and city councillors, the number of which varies according to size of the borough.

City Council is composed of the Mayor and 64 members from each of the 19 borough councils in the amalgamated city.

The following text from the City of Montreal website is included to illustrate the complex and confusing design of this governance structure, although this obviously wasn't the City's intent:

> "The 19 borough councils have "local jurisdiction" over their respective territories. This means the borough councils manage services for citizens in each of the boroughs.
>
> The mayor of each borough is elected by universal suffrage of borough residents. As Montréal now comprises 19 boroughs, there are 19 borough mayors.
>
> A borough council is made up of no fewer than five councillors. There are both city councillors and borough councillors. The number of city and borough councillors will vary, depending on the borough.
>
> City councillors sit on both the borough council and Montréal's city council. There are a total of 45 city councillors for all 19 boroughs.
>
> Borough councillors sit on the borough council only. There are a total of 40 city [*sic*] councillors for all 19 boroughs." (City of Montreal)

The Communaute metropolitaine de Montreal (Montreal Metropolitan Community)

The CMM is the regional government, much like that which has been proposed for the GTA. It is comprised of 82 municipalities in five municipal amalgamations, including the agglomeration of Montreal.

Created January 1, 2001, the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal (CMM) is a planning, coordinating and funding body serving 82 municipalities in the Greater Montreal metropolitan region. It is home to 3.6 million residents. (The population of the megacity of Montreal after the de-mergers is 1.6 million.)

The CMM has jurisdiction in the following fields, many of which are shared with member municipalities:

- land planning;
- economic development;
- arts and culture promotion;
- social and affordable housing;
- facilities, infrastructure, services and activities of metropolitan importance;
- public transit and metropolitan arterial road network;
- waste management planning;

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- air quality;
- wastewater.

As appears to be the norm with government structures in Montreal, governance of the CMM is somewhat complex. The CMM is administered by a 28-member council composed of the mayors of each of the 5 municipal amalgamations in the region and various numbers of elected councillors (in a weighted voting system) from those municipalities appointed by the local mayor. The mayor of Montreal serves as the chair.

Meetings of the CMM are public, and include a period during which individual citizens may address questions or present information to the members of the council. In this regard, the public would appear to have reasonable access to the council. However, there is nothing on the CMM website that helps or encourages citizens to engage. For example, the website provides no indication of when the next council meeting will be held, nor does it supply minutes from previous meetings.

The CMM is funded through contributions it collects from its member municipalities. The largest budget item in the CMM annual budget is its social and affordable housing program. $50 million was spent in this area in 2006, representing just over half of the organization's total budget.

CMM's social and affordable housing function is significant in that it has helped to establish the right to housing and housing assistance as a region-wide responsibility, unlike the previous system where housing issues were dealt with by individual municipalities (or not dealt with, in many cases). Some of the small but relatively wealthy suburban municipalities contributed little towards housing prior to amalgamation and the creation of the CMM, and the burden for housing would inevitably fall heaviest on the city of Montreal. Now all municipalities in the region jointly share these costs and responsibilities.

The CMM boasts that its housing program provides financial contributions to more than 27,000 households in low-cost rental housing, in addition to 8,500 households eligible for its rent supplement program. Also, more than 9,400 new housing units have been built, or are under construction in the region since the CMM came into existence in 2001.

Rationale for forcing amalgamation

It is interesting to note that the Quebec provincial government, despite substantial local opposition, imposed the Montreal megacity, much as the Ontario government did to Toronto in spite of similarly strong local objections. Unlike the neo-liberal Conservative government of Ontario, the Lucien Bouchard Parti Quebecois government in Quebec was social democratic in orientation. "Fiscal equity" and "social justice" were terms used by the Quebec government to promote and justify amalgamation, whereas for the Harris Conservatives in Ontario, forced amalgamation was all about "efficiency" and "reducing bloated bureaucracies". Still, both governments came up with legislated megacity amalgamation as the solution to these somewhat opposite goals.

It should be pointed out that, unlike what occurred in Toronto, there was at least some support for amalgamation in Montreal. Montreal Mayor Pierre Bourque was a strong advocate, and he has been credited with being a significant factor in affecting the provincial government's decision to legislate the merger. Bourque argued that the suburbs around Montreal were not paying their fair share of the costs of running the City of Montreal, in spite of the fact that they benefited significantly from their proximity to this great city. In Bourque's view, Montreal could

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be much more of a powerhouse on the world stage if it had a broader population and tax base to draw from. (Sancton)

It was argued that due to the disparity of wealth among municipalities, local public services are marked by inequality and lack of equity. Amalgamation and the creation of a new city that ensures the equal redistribution of wealth was considered a solution to the problem. (Collin & Tomas)

Still, there were no other organized societal forces that were urging amalgamation at the time. In fact, there were no governmental or advisory committee reports that existed prior to this time that promoted the idea. In the suburban cities on the Island of Montreal, the notion of merging with Montreal was extremely unpopular, although prior to the legislation it really wasn't something they expected would actually happen. (Sancton, Vengroff & Whelan)

Vengroff and Whelan identify five key reasons that they say guided the PQ government on the issue of municipal amalgamations in Quebec:

- *First* was the issue of fiscal equity. The government sought to reallocate costs and taxes in a progressive tax format that was "fairer" to those who benefited from the services of the central city. (In other words, make the suburbs pay more for the benefits they accrued from Montreal.)

- *Secondly*, they wished to respond to pressures of increasing globalization by granting the mega-city more centralized decision-making power. The mega-city was also considered a solution to inter-municipal competition for investment, which benefited none of the municipalities.

- *Thirdly*, there were perceived increases in efficiency by providing area wide services and eliminating fragmentation.

- *Fourth*, consolidation was conceived by the government as a mechanism to improve the quality and consistency of services throughout the metropolitan region.

- And *fifth*, there was a belief that the clarity of having a single local authority on the island would make it easier for citizens to understand what was going on and to hold their elected officials accountable.

An unspoken (and completely political) motivation that has also been attributed to the PQ's decision to force amalgamation was the notion that by uniting Montreal under a clear Francophone majority in a single government, there would be no basis for breaking up Montreal in response to some future successful Quebec secessionist referendum. There had been much discussion in the preceding years that if Quebec was ever to secede from Canada, a number of the predominantly English suburbs of Montreal would attempt to secede from Quebec in order to remain a part of Canada. The language/cultural issue continues to be an important factor in the whole merger, de-merger and governance tinkering processes that have played out in Montreal since 2001.

Public engagement effectiveness

According to the City's website, "Montreal's public consultation and participation policy aims to foster…the exercise of participatory democracy, a key component of any representative

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democracy….Montreal recognizes the fundamental rights of the public to influence the decisions that affect them and to participate in the development of their community."

One of the City's "guiding principles" in its consultation and participation policy calls for the City to "Build concrete and lasting partnerships with the members of civil society, the purposes of which are to exchange information, identify the needs, design the projects, programs or policies, and evaluate the results." (City of Montreal)

Montreal appears to be fully committed to these principles. In 2006, the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities was put into force. This innovative Charter was the result of an extensive consultation between the city, community groups and individuals, with the intent to enshrine a number of important social, cultural, environmental and political rights that citizens should expect to enjoy.

The Charter is given additional force and credibility through the city's appointment of an ombudsman to oversee the Charter's enforcement and mediate any citizen complaints about perceived City violations of Charter rights, and through the creation of an Office of Public Consultation department at City Hall. Montreal is the only city in Canada to have such a charter.

It is also interesting to note that a review of City Council agendas indicates that Council meetings begin with an opportunity for members of the pubic to ask questions of their elected representatives. This is an extraordinary policy for a municipal government to have, especially one as large as Montreal.

While it might be questionable whether a 65-member city council would feel accessible and approachable with its citizens, Montreal appears to address the issue of public involvement better than most large municipal governments. What is not clear from the literature reviewed is to what degree municipal governance restructuring and amalgamation has been a factor in what has been achieved in this regard.

Current assessment of amalgamation and de-amalgamation experience

It is also difficult to reach many conclusions regarding how well the megacity model is actually working in terms of other social and environmental objectives. Perhaps it is still too early in the process, with the de-mergers and the subsequent agglomeration council too new to be able to evaluate at this point.

Some aspects of the amalgamation appear promising, others not. The literature does indicate that a more equitable tax and service delivery structure is in place in today's metropolitan Montreal, which ought to promote a generally more equitable society. As a result of broadening Montreal's tax base to include wealthier suburbs, a lower average income city like Montreal obviously benefits. And since the vast majority of the residents of the Island of Montreal live in the City, this would have the affect of providing benefits for the majority of the overall population.

The creation of the Metropolitan Montreal Community as a broader region-wide governance structure, replacing the geographically smaller Montreal Urban Community, seems to have created tangible societal benefits for the region (i.e., important commitments to social and affordable housing, broader regional planning, etc.). Since about half of the population of metropolitan Montreal lived outside of the jurisdictional boundaries of the MUC (which basically

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consisted of the Islands of Montreal and Laval), having a single regional coordinating body would appear to be an obvious benefit.

However, on the Island of Montreal there remains a significant amount of discontent with the new governance and taxation structures within the de-merged municipalities. Much of this discontent is displayed at agglomeration council meetings, where de-merged municipal mayors express frustrations about their sense of impotence on the committee (holding only 13 percent of the committee's votes), and the feeling that taxes levied on them by the megacity are out of proportion to their population sizes or relative wealth. The de-merged suburbs point out that even though they have only 13 percent of the population, they are paying about 20 percent of the agglomeration council budget. They also resent that much of the tax revenue they pay goes not to their municipalities, but to infrastructure projects that take place in Montreal. They accuse Montreal of taxation without representation, due to the limited vote and voice they hold at agglomeration council meetings. (CBC News stories, November 30 & December 1 and 6, 2006)

One could argue that the complaints from Montreal's suburbs merely reflect a typical reaction by the relatively well heeled to the sense that they are paying taxes to help the less fortunate in society, in this case those living in the City of Montreal. It is difficult to know how much this type of thinking factors into the political stance suburban mayors have taken regarding the issues of representation and taxation at the agglomeration council, versus genuine concerns about the shortcomings and difficulties inherent in co-existing as a small minority within the metropolitan agglomeration structure.

An example of where the mega-city model was failing one of the small suburbs and its residents may be found in the de-merged municipality of Cote Saint-Luc. An emergency medical services care unit has existed in the town for decades. However, in order to rationalize service delivery throughout the new megacity, this small EMS care unit was to be closed and moved out of town, in spite of outraged objections from Cote Saint-Luc residents. Losing control of important local services like this would seem to be a legitimate reason for local residents to oppose wanting anything to do with amalgamation.

Recognizing problems with amalgamation and its subsequent political structures still exist years after it was forced on the Island of Montreal and its municipalities, the Quebec Liberal government is scheduled to once again introduce legislation to attempt to fine tune local governance. Bill 22, which is reportedly to be introduced this fall, attempts to respond to suburban complaints about disempowerment at the agglomeration council. Assuming this bill passes, Montreal would be granted the ability to raise revenue through imposing taxes in various new areas, but in return will be giving up some of its power on the agglomeration council, which may or may not be enough to satisfy the concerns of the de-merged municipalities.

The fact that the province has to once again step in to try to "fix" local governance is an indication that it recognizes that the current system is still at least somewhat dysfunctional.

Finally, it should be noted that the language issue is an underlying issue that complicates regional politics in Montreal. Montreal's official language is French, which is a condition explicitly written into the section of the provincial legislation creating amalgamations that deals with Montreal. ("Montreal is a French-speaking city." - Bill 170)

Many, although certainly not all, of the objections many of the forcibly merged municipalities had to becoming a part of the Montreal megacity were related directly or indirectly to this fact. Predominantly white, English-speaking suburban residents were both culturally and

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linguistically different from Montreal's increasingly ethnically diverse, French-speaking majority. Class has also been a factor in this alienation between Montreal and its English-speaking suburbs. As is the case with most large North American cities, Montreal had a much higher percentage of lower income residents than the suburbs.

Conclusions and lessons learned

A review of the Toronto and Montreal experiences with inter-municipal cooperation and forced amalgamations leads to some key conclusions and lessons about what has worked and what has not worked out so well for these amalgamated megacities and their citizens.

Firstly, it is not difficult to conclude from the literature that the manner in which Toronto and Montreal and their adjacent suburbs were forced to merge through the top-down introduction of legislation by their provincial governments created a poor environment for mutual cooperation and coordination. Subsequent to the amalgamations the municipalities have had difficulties both in cooperating amongst themselves, as well as with their provincial governments. Had there been greater pubic support for the creation of these types of megacities, outcomes would have likely been better than what we see today.

But there was no real public support in either of these cases. The literature indicates that had citizens been consulted and given the opportunity to vote on the issue of merging into these large megacities, they would have soundly rejected such amalgamations. Yet these same citizens have been generally quite open to and supportive of other collaborative metropolitan structures and various forms of public consortia. Regional coordination of services like transit, water, sewage treatment, policing, environmental management and other key services have long been an accepted part of metropolitan life in large Canadian cities. Municipal amalgamations and annexations are also fairly normal and publicly accepted occurrences historically, although never done on a scale anywhere near as large as the recent Toronto and Montreal mergers.

It appears that the popular objections to the megacity model stems from the desire of citizens to feel connected to their municipal governments. The megacity is widely viewed as simply being uncomfortably large and somehow more distant from its residents. Although the borough and community council systems introduced in both cities were designed to overcome these sentiments, it is not clear that this has been achieved in either example. While citizens may take their concerns to their community council or borough council, these bodies don't have the decision-making authority or other powers that the former municipalities once had. Therefore, that power is now somewhat more distant to the average citizen, along with the ability to speak to that power on civic issues. It is too soon to tell whether Montreal's new Charter of Rights and Responsibilities will help in this regard, although it appears to offer a lot of promise.

On a broader metropolitan level, the Quebec government has addressed the issue of municipal cooperation in the Greater Montreal Area with the creation of the Montreal Metropolitan Community. This supra-municipal authority appears to be at least somewhat effective in coordinating regional services and planning. It's commitment to building and financing affordable housing programs and projects around the region is notable.

On the other hand, Ontario failed to create a structure for inter-municipal cooperation in the Greater Toronto Area, outside of the megacity of Toronto. The body that was created, the Greater Toronto Services Board, was never given adequate authority to be of relevance as a

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regional body, and was disbanded after only 2 years. The unwillingness of the Ontario government to provide this authority has led to an ongoing vacuum in regional planning and coordination in the GTA. This may be seen as a failure of the amalgamation, in that one of the reasons for introducing this structure was to create better region-wide cooperation.

Still, a case could be made that both amalgamations have resulted in some positive societal benefits as a result of more equitable region-wide taxation systems. The central cities of any metropolitan region incur higher expenses than their suburban municipal neighbours, both because of the more developed infrastructure required in the core city, as well as because of greater spending on social services than what is typical in suburban communities.

Since the suburbs largely exist (and often thrive) only because of the presence of the larger central city, the argument is made that they ought to contribute more towards the city's social and infrastructure costs. As a result of the amalgamations, the suburbs now do contribute a more equitable share towards municipal costs. From the standpoint of wealth distribution and improved social equity, we would have to conclude that these amalgamations have at least moved things in this direction.

Both the Ontario and Quebec governments often used the claim of increased cost efficiencies as a justification for forcing amalgamation on municipalities. These claims have not been clearly demonstrated to have occurred. While some municipal services have been consolidated and there is some savings resulting, overall municipal budgets have risen and there are conflicting views on whether any savings have actually occurred. It is also apparent that the transitional costs of amalgamating have been greater than what was expected by amalgamation proponents. Furthermore, a number of experts who have studied costs for service delivery in municipalities have concluded that after cities attain a certain unspecified size, per capita costs actually increase.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to quantify whether people in Toronto or Montreal are generally better off today or not as a result of the governance changes that have been introduced over the past decade. This is because the quality of life in Canadian cities is strongly influenced by policies of senior levels of government. Cuts in transfer payments to the provinces, cuts in funding for social housing, cuts to unemployment insurance and welfare eligibility and rates, and failure to index social assistance and pension programs have served to exacerbate problems such as poverty and homelessness, which are growing in many Canadian cities.

Some have concluded that if there is one overarching positive outcome of the amalgamations of Toronto and Montreal into cities with broader regional scope, it is that these two large metropolitan cities now enjoy greater influence with senior governments then they previously had. If this is indeed the case, and most observers believe it is, than presumably these municipalities will use this new influence to lobby for policies that will help to address some of these pressing social issues.

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