

**Searching for a Public Transit 'Fix': A Multi-scalar  
Study of Public Transit Policy in Ottawa and  
Waterloo Region**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

In recent years, Canadian governments have embraced transit-led planning strategies as a solution to problems of unsustainable urbanism. With this shift, investments in public transit systems have increased dramatically. This thesis explores the development of public transit policy agendas in two urban contexts, the City of Ottawa and Waterloo Region. It evaluates the priorities underlying particular visions of transit-oriented reform and points to the challenge of equitable transit planning under conditions of growth-first governance.

The emergence of transit-oriented reform agendas has taken place as part of a broader project of sustainable city-building. Despite post-political appeals to holistic or triple-bottom-line policymaking, sustainable urbanism is a contested process that seeks to renegotiate ongoing tensions between the perceived exigencies of growth-first neoliberalism and the conditions of collective reproduction in the city. This negotiation has been characterized as a search for a ‘sustainability fix’ (While et al. 2004). In this thesis, I examine how public transit policymaking helps to constitute this search for a stable political and institutional ‘fix’.

In this thesis, urban policymaking is analyzed as a multi-scalar process. Transit policy is constituted across federal, provincial, regional, and municipal scales of governance. The thesis explores this multi-scalar process using an ideational-institutional approach. It analyzes the ways in which actors interpret and represent institutional contexts, as well as the ways in which institutional contexts filter and structure political demands. Transit policy agendas are negotiated across scales, but are also shaped by Canada’s distinctive institutional form of urban governance.

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## **Introduction: In Search of a Public Transit ‘Fix’**

According to data compiled by the Canadian Urban Transit Association, federal, provincial, and municipal spending on public transit infrastructure in Canada has increased dramatically over the last twenty years. In 2001, combined capital expenditures across government totalled approximately \$1.2 billion. In 2018, combined expenditures reached over \$8.6 billion (both values in 2018 dollars, CUTA 2010-2018). Why has this shift taken place and what does it suggest about the state of urban governance in Canada?

The growth of transit capital spending has taken place in the context of a broader urban ‘sustainability turn’ in North America. Sustainability, according to Michael Gunder, has become a new ‘transcendental ideal’ for urban planners. It defines a basic set of practical and normative assumptions that constitute today’s conception of the ‘good city’ (Gunder 2006). With the embrace of sustainable planning norms, cities have begun a slow turn away from the practices of automobile-centric suburban sprawl that began to dominate urban development after the Second World War. What Peter Hall referred to as the ‘city on the highway’ is today being challenged by a neo-traditional planning vision that emphasizes compact growth, mixed-use zoning, pedestrianized neighbourhoods, and investment in public transit (Hall 2014).

One influential expression of this vision is the concept of ‘transit-oriented development’ (TOD). Originally developed by the academic planner Peter Calthorpe in the 1980s, the concept of transit-oriented development has emerged as an increasingly popular approach to sustainable planning reform (Carlton 2007). Transit-oriented development is a ‘nodal’ approach to sustainable urban reform. The objective is to concentrate activity in pedestrian-oriented mixed-use areas, where there are opportunities to live and work, shop, and access services. These neo-traditional nodes are in turn linked together through a metropolitan network of rapid transit

infrastructure (Ditmar et al. 2004). In Canada, this nodal approach to urban reform has been embraced as a way to overlay sustainable planning forms onto built environments that are dominated by the logics of automobile-centric sprawl (Filion and Kramer 2012).

My objective in this thesis is to examine the practice of transit-oriented reform in two Canadian regions, Ottawa and Waterloo, through an urban political economy lens. Following Brenner, political economy is understood as a critical approach to urban studies. It situates cities and city life in relation to processes of capitalist urbanization. As such, it “emphasizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested and therefore malleable character of urban space – that is, its continual (re)construction as a site, medium and outcome of historically specific relations of social power” (Brenner 2009). From a political economy perspective, the urban process is necessarily power-laden and articulated to wider institutional structures that mediate and reproduce a restless and contradictory capitalist system.

The application of a critical lens to the study of urban sustainability brings into view policy dimensions that are occluded by ‘mainstream’ analysis. Specifically, it helps to problematize ‘post-political’ accounts of sustainability that subsume political conflict through appeals to a common public interest in sustainable development (Macleod 2011; Swyngedouw 2007). For mainstream analysts, the fact that urban sustainability speaks simultaneously to economic, environmental, and social policy concerns validates the idea that sustainability can operate as a form of ‘three-pillar’ policymaking. Sustainable urbanism, however, is, like any mode of development, power-laden and ideologically structured. It prioritizes some values and interests at the expense of others. A critical analysis aims to make clear where these tensions lie and to understand how they are resolved.

The practice of transit-oriented reform has been particularly susceptible to this kind of post-political framing. Today, the demand for more and better public transit appears to emanate from every political corner. Growth coalitions and suburban commuters are looking to mass transit as a solution to crises of urban mobility and congestion; entrepreneurial economic development actors are embracing rapid transit projects as a way to attract young professionals and spur revitalization; environmentalists are demanding investment in public transit as a response to automobile-induced climate change; and community activists advocate for public transit because it can improve accessibility for those who have historically been excluded from the dominant culture of automobility. Because so many interests favor investing in public transit, it has become common for policymakers to represent transit improvements as an example of sustainable development *par excellence*.

In reality, however, public transit policy can never operate in the post-political way that many policymakers suppose. It is true that public transit policy can be mobilized to serve a variety of economic, environmental, and social objectives, but it is rarely, if ever, the case that these objectives are pursued simultaneously or on equal terms. Instead, some aspects of the transit problematic tend to be accorded more weight than others. In the current conjuncture, this has typically meant that the economic dimensions of policy are privileged. Other values and concerns may also be incorporated into policy, but following Jessop, the economic pillar appears to exert a kind of ‘ecological dominance’ within the system of sustainability (Jessop 2000). A clear illustration of this weighting is seen, for example, in the views of former Mayor of Toronto David Miller, a leading advocate of Canadian urban policy and a person who helped to make the case for renewed government investment in public transit:

Clearly, while public transit is about a lot of things – a greener city, equitable access, cost-effective transportation – its primary role is economic, contributing to the wealth and well-being of all of us (Miller 2013).

In this thesis, my objective is to understand the process by which such an ideational construction emerges and the implications that it has for practices of transit-oriented reform in Canadian cities. Underlying this objective is the implicit assumption that the way in which policy actors are engaging with the problem of public transit tells us something important about the state of contemporary urban governance. This is a moment when the state is seeking to come to terms with the dilemmas of neoliberal urbanism. From a critical perspective, sustainable urbanism has been read as a site where policy actors are trying to realign the domains of economic development and social reproduction (Krueger and Savage 2007). The conduct of public transit policy provides important insight into this process, including the challenges associated with reconciling environmental values and expectations around collective consumption to the exigencies of inter-urban competition and public sector restraint.

### **Theorizing the Public Transit ‘Fix’**

In this thesis, I conceive transit-oriented reform strategies as attempts to establish an institutional ‘fix’ for dilemmas of urban reproduction. This notion of a fix follows from David Harvey’s famous formulation of the urban ‘spatial fix’. For Harvey, the urban built environment plays an integral role in the reproduction of the capitalist political economy. The urban built environment functions as a store of value and outlet for surplus capital, as a physical platform for production and exchange, and as a site of collective consumption and social reproduction. When the environment coheres and resonates with the institutional logics of the political economy, it helps to provide a ‘fix’ for dilemmas of capitalist reproduction (Harvey 1982).

Any such ‘fix’, however, can only ever operate temporarily. The restless nature of the capitalist system ensures that there is continual pressure to incorporate new technologies, redevelop production relations, and imagine new modes of consumption. These changes resonate in the built environment. Invoking Schumpeter, Richard Florida has argued that the tendency of capitalism to engage in bouts of restructuring has a corollary in the built environment, where policymakers must occasionally subject the built environment to a process of ‘creative destruction’ in order to realign physical landscapes with evolving systems of production, consumption, and state regulation (Florida 2010). In short, urban planning and infrastructure development practices must evolve in relation to wider dynamics in the political economy.

As I explore in Chapter 2, political economists have in recent years theorized the rise of sustainable urbanism as a ‘fix’ for the policy dilemmas created by suburban sprawl in a neoliberal and after-Fordist institutional context. For Harvey, the automobile-centric suburban city was functionally consonant with the institutions of Keynesian-Fordism. The growth of the state sector in the postwar period and the extension of mass production and consumption dynamics aligned closely with the logics of automobility and suburban decentralization. In the 1980s, however, cracks began to form in this institutional system. The emergence of new knowledge-based production sectors, residential migration ‘back-to-the-city’, public sector austerity, and a growing infrastructure gap, combined to undermine the coherence of the suburban growth model. In this context, While et al. have theorized neo-traditional approaches to planning as a ‘sustainability fix’ (While et al. 2004). Sustainable planning norms and practices are an attempt to realign urban development to the institutions of an after-Fordist political economy.

From a critical perspective, an immediate question arises: What is the political content of this emergent sustainability fix? As Mike Raco has pointed out, the urban sustainability turn poses a puzzle for political economists. The concept of sustainable development was born out of a critique of unregulated economic growth. As such, it entails a ‘three pillar’ conception of development in which the priority accorded to economic growth is balanced against or integrated with parallel commitments to environmental protection and social equity. At the same time, however, the rise of sustainable urbanism appears to coincide with the era of neoliberal urbanism, which is supposedly defined by a hostility to non-market constraints and a regulatory race to the bottom. How are we to understand this apparent tension? As Raco explains: “many of the premises and underlying rationalities of the approaches seem diametrically opposed in both conceptual and empirical terms, yet both are variously characterized as the dominant principles underpinning planning and development strategies and agendas” (Raco 2005).

For many critical urbanists, the answer to this puzzle is that sustainable development concepts have been effectively subsumed within the project of neoliberal urbanism. The key here has been to recognize the intimate relationship between sustainable urbanism and various attempts to improve urban growth prospects (Laidley 2007). Sustainable urbanism, on this view, functions as a ‘fix’ because it underwrites attempts both to resolve dilemmas of suburban growth and to direct new forms of inner urban redevelopment. Following Peck and Tickell, sustainable urbanism and ‘smart growth’ can in this way be read as modes of ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism that attempt to shore-up and reproduce the neoliberal urban project (Peck and Tickell 2002).

There are three ways in which ‘roll-out’ sustainability can be seen to operate. The first is as a response to the economic externalities of suburban sprawl, including the crisis of urban congestion. Sustainable urbanism has been embraced by ‘smart growth machines’ as a solution

to increasingly dysfunctional patterns of automobile-centric sprawl, which are seen as a threat to competitiveness and long-term growth prospects (Gearin 2004). The second is as a strategy of entrepreneurial redevelopment, or what Jonas and While describe as ‘greening the entrepreneurial city’ (Jonas and While 2007). Sustainable planning practices are being employed as a framework through which to both encourage and depoliticize mixed-use revitalization strategies in the urban core (Orueta and Fainstein 2008; Bunce 2004). Finally, urban sustainability has emerged as a response to the constraints of urban austerity, and in particular to the crisis of infrastructure provision. In a context where growth interests must struggle to secure the infrastructural conditions for growth, sustainable planning has been embraced as a way to increase the efficiency of development (Pollard 2000; Burchell et al. 2005).

By documenting the connections between sustainable planning and the politics of urban growth, critical scholars have made a compelling case for viewing sustainability and smart growth as features of, rather than as a challenge to, the neoliberal urban project. The ‘roll-out’ of urban sustainability here represents an acknowledgement of the need for non-market coordination to preserve and renew conditions for urban accumulation. The ‘roll-back’ of planning controls and infrastructure programming in the 1980s and 1990s combined to unleash a mode of suburban growth that became progressively detached from the dynamics of sectoral restructuring and state regulation. The ‘sustainability fix’ is an attempt to re-establish the institutional coherence needed to underwrite urban economic development and growth.

As necessary as these insights are, however, it is important that the critical perspective not excise all non-economic factors from its account of urban sustainability. The tendency to engage in an ‘exchange-relations’ reading of urban development has at times obscured the role of other environmental, civic, and equity-oriented concerns in shaping sustainability agendas (Ward

and Jonas 2004). For example, the rise of sustainable urbanism has also coincided with the rescaling of environmental governance – a process that has seen urban regions take on new policy responsibilities in areas related to climate change (While et al. 2010; Bulkeley and Betsill 2005). As a result, policymakers have become much more aware of environmental rationalities, which increasingly inform common sense conceptions of ‘good governance’. In addition, the practices of sustainable urbanism and smart growth have also been taken up by community activists searching for solutions to problems of socio-spatial exclusion. Concepts of environmental justice and just sustainability have embraced the potential for sustainable city-building to enhance opportunities for groups that were historically denied the benefits of automobile-centric suburbanism (Bullard 2005; Agyeman and Evans 2003).

The point here is not to minimize critical insights that demonstrate an intimate connection between the roll-out of sustainable planning and the evolution of urban accumulation strategies. From a critical perspective, it is difficult not to see the economic and fiscal dimensions of sustainable urbanism as institutionally predominant. Nevertheless, in explaining the production of urban public policy it is important to understand the political terrain in its full complexity. To avoid a functional account that reads policy off of our theories of urban neoliberalism, we should remain open to the possibility of ‘hybrid’ policy rationalities that respect certain institutional constraints yet also incorporate to varying degrees non-economic values (Raco 2005).

In this thesis, I explore the development of public transit policy as a window onto this political process of producing sustainable cities. Transit-oriented reform is thus conceived as an attempt to ‘fix’ dilemmas of urban reproduction, one which involves the negotiation of various political demands through the strategically selective institutions of the state. As a whole, sustainable urbanism is simply too broad and multifaceted a process to analyze with sufficient

specificity. To capture the political nuances of sustainable city-building, it helps to focus attention on a particular aspect of the project. Transit policy, I argue in Chapter 3, provides a particularly illuminating view.

Public transit policy serves as a useful window onto the wider process of sustainable city-building for at least three reasons. First, and perhaps most obviously, the problem of urban mobility appears to lie at the very heart of the sustainable city. Perhaps more than any other single concern, it is the idea that automobility has been developed to its socio-technical limit that appears to be driving much of the discussion around sustainable planning. It is because long-term development oriented around the logic of the automobile no longer seems viable that policymakers are willing to take seriously the prospect of the sustainable city paradigm.

The automobile played a unique role in the constitution of suburban Fordism. Historically, the geography of urban development has been conditioned by the state of transportation technology. With the transition from electric streetcar technology to the personal automobile, it became possible to plan cities at much lower densities and to accommodate the spread of single family homeownership (Newman and Kenworthy 1999). This shift, according to Michel Aglietta, was critical to the emergence of the Fordist consumption norm. The suburban home became the site of acculturation to new domestic standards, while the automobile helped to integrate a more distended urban form (Aglietta 1979).

The development in the postwar period of a new transportation planning discipline translated an emerging culture of automobility into a set of planning values and practices. Spurred by a cultural enthusiasm for the automobile, planning became oriented around a maximalist vision of mobility, an ethos described by Low and Gleeson as ‘ever further, ever faster’ (Low et al. 2003). This maximalist planning vision valued mobility as an end in itself and

took as its objective the need to accommodate travel demand through the perpetual development of new infrastructure. The vision became manifest in a paradigm known as ‘predict-and-provide’, which sought to manage circulation through predictive modelling. Through its effect on land use, the predict-and-provide paradigm contributed to a self-reinforcing cycle of decentralization and rising travel demand (Vigar 2002).

The sustainability problematic is intimately bound-up with the need to displace this maximalist ethos of ‘ever further, ever faster’. While predictive road planning was consonant with the dynamics of state Keynesianism, it became increasingly problematic through 1980s and 1990s as concerns about efficiency in urban development became more prominent. Through the reintegration of land use and transport planning, and through an emphasis on mass transit for medium and long-range travel, the transit-oriented development paradigm provides an alternative to the maximalist logic of auto-centric sprawl (Ditmar et al. 2004). By prioritizing accessibility and connectivity rather than mobility, the paradigm promises to both improve circulation and reduce demand for travel.

The second reason that transit policy provides a useful window onto the political economy of urban sustainability is that it is increasingly found at the center of debates over collective consumption under conditions of selective austerity. Since the collapse of the Keynesian consensus, the problem of collective provision has loomed large in the urban sphere, where an ‘infrastructure gap’ has contributed to the intensification of growth dilemmas. The renewal of public transit networks is part of a process of state recalibration. While the constraints of austerity remain very real, policymakers also increasingly acknowledge the need to reinvest strategically in order to reproduce the urban system and preserve the legitimacy of public policy.

Large public transit infrastructure projects have emerged as an important site where these tensions are being negotiated. These capital-intensive projects can require billions of dollars in public sector spending. In an ideological context that remains broadly opposed to taxation and skeptical of public spending, policy advocates must expend significant energy to justify and rationalize new projects. This process of political justification furnishes us with an opportunity to analyze how policymakers understand the dynamics of selective austerity. In particular, it provides an opportunity to consider how various policy objectives are weighed, valued, and prioritized.

A final and related reason to focus on public transit policy is that it provides a powerful view of the distributional stakes at play in the process of sustainable city-building. While policymakers often insist on the post-political logic of transit development, the policy process invariably entails decisions that prioritize some interests at the expense of others. One of the objectives of this thesis, in fact, is to demonstrate the deeply political nature of public transit policy. Decisions about network development priorities, technology, associated land use regulation, operational financing, and fare policy, all combine to create a built environment characterized by unequal mobilities and uneven landscapes of accessibility (Henderson 2006).

In a context of selective state austerity, a critical question becomes: what types of mobility are sufficiently valuable? Which particular objectives are worthy of renewed investment? Transit policy, I argue, helps to shed light on the manner in which a diverse set of political aspirations are managed and negotiated through the process of sustainable city-building. In particular, I show the distinct challenges associated with bringing to life a socially inclusive vision of sustainable urbanism in the current conjuncture, where transit projects are viewed

predominantly as aids to urban competitiveness and tools for encouraging efficient growth and revitalization.

## **Transit Policy and a New Urban Agenda**

In this thesis, I understand the production of urban governance as a multi-scalar process. The state is conceptualized as a multi-scalar institutional ensemble in which state space is mobilized as part of a broader regulatory apparatus. Not only is the urban constituted through practices taking place at scales ranging from the global to the local, but its regulatory function is constantly evolving in relation to institutional contradictions, governance dilemmas, and political conflicts that emerge in the political economy (Brenner et al. 2003; Mahon and Keil 2009). The production of urban public policy represents a state spatial practice that seeks to align urban governance with wider state projects and strategies (Brenner 2004). In Chapter 1, I explore the production of these projects and strategies as part of an ideational-institutional account of urban governance.

In Canada, the re-engagement of the state with public transit policy has taken place as part of a broader attempt to come to terms with the dilemmas of urban governance that emerged as a result of neoliberal restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s. Neoliberalism in Canada was very much a spatial project, involving both program retrenchment and a cascading process of institutional downloading. The effect was to lodge many of the institutional contradictions of neoliberal governance at the urban scale, a site that was particularly weak within the architecture of the Canadian state. In the early 2000s, the failures of urban governance began to attract the attention of a community of scholars and activists influenced by ‘new localist’ ideas and

discourses circulating through transnational policy circuits. At a time when the importance of cities as sites of economic, environmental, and social governance was on the rise, the success of Canadian cities was being undermined, they argued, by the institutional strictures of the Canadian state and the systematic neglect of urban policy (Bradford 2004).

By re-engaging with the problem of public transit, policymakers have acknowledged the threat posed by collective under-provision and have sought to craft a more effective and consensual urban governance regime. The way in which policymakers have conceptualized the problem of public transit thus reveals a great deal about how the Canadian state is trying to come terms with the dilemmas of neoliberal urbanism. In Canada, the search for a transit ‘fix’ has entailed a loosely coordinated process of intergovernmental collaboration and the development of a (contested) multi-scalar strategy of transit-oriented reform. At the core of this strategy, I argue in Chapter 4, has been an emphasis on the connections between urban sustainability, green growth, and systemic competitiveness.

At the federal scale, the problem of public transit emerged on the agenda in the early 2000s. Before this period, the federal government had very little involvement with the development of urban transit. Change was spurred by the publication of two key reports: one developed by the Liberal Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues, commonly referred to as the Sgro Report, and another by the National Roundtable on the Environment and Economy (NRTEE), an arms-length government advisory body. The genesis of these reports were different, but they both were responding to the growing chorus of concern about the state of Canadian cities and the problems caused by federal and provincial disinvestment in the 1980s and 1990s.

In developing their reports, both bodies consulted extensively with leading members of the urban policy community. In this way, they helped to introduce new localist ideas into the

federal policy space and articulated the contours of a new federal urban agenda. This agenda was framed by a vision of ‘sustainable competitiveness’. Both the Sgro and NRTEE reports diagnosed the problem of Canadian cities in the same terms. Canadian cities, they argued, had become engines of national economic competitiveness. The competitiveness of Canadian cities, however, was threatened by dysfunctional forms of auto-centric suburban sprawl. The solution to problems of congestion, deteriorating quality of life, and de-valorized central neighbourhoods was thus to implement new strategies of sustainable, transit-oriented reform.

This vision of sustainable urban competitiveness quickly evolved to become the taken-for-granted formulation of the urban problematic. In subsequent years, organizations including the Conference Board of Canada and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities released reports that echoed the ideas and conceptual connections developed by the Caucus Task Force and NRTEE. According to this formulation, the problem of urban decline was first and foremost a problem of national competitiveness. Sustainable urban reform was conceived as a progressive solution to this problem – one that would resolve problems of dysfunctional growth, while also contributing to complementary civic and environmental policy objectives (Golden and Brender 2007; FCM 2007).

Demands for a new federal urban agenda gained considerable traction during this period. There remained, however, the question of the federal government’s role in a non-traditional policy space and area of provincial jurisdiction. According to the prevailing vision, the ideal role for the federal government was to support the development of sustainable infrastructure, and in particular to increase investment in public transit. This infrastructure-led strategy was endorsed by the NRTEE, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Caucus Task Force, and the

Conference Board, each of whom argued that the federal government should establish a leadership role in funding and developing new public transit infrastructure.

In response to these demands, the federal government began to flow money to public transit projects through two principal mechanisms. The first was the Gas Tax Fund, which committed a portion of the federal fuel excise tax for municipalities to spend on new sustainable infrastructure. While the Fund was not limited to public transit, most large Canadian municipalities used their allocation to fund transit capital projects. The second and most significant mechanism involved the expansion of the government's omnibus infrastructure programs, which had operated on a smaller scale since the 1990s. These programs were expanded over the course of the decade and became the primary vehicle for federal contributions to large urban transit infrastructure projects.

These omnibus infrastructure programs were designed to operate as a cost-sharing vehicle. Federal contributions were conditional on partnership agreements with provincial governments, and also typically included funding commitments from municipal project partners. As a result, the ability of the program to deliver funding for sustainable public transit hinged on the construction of a shared multi-scalar commitment to public transit projects. It required both provincial and local governments to embrace a common, or at least coherent, vision of transit-oriented reform.

At the Ontario provincial scale, the commitment to sustainable urban reform began to take shape after 2003. Before 2003, the province had been governed by a Conservative regime that had worked since 1995 to institutionalize a trenchant, anti-urban form of neoliberalism. Its 'Common Sense Revolution' entailed the rollback of growth management regulations, selective investments in the provincial highway system, and a radical program of institutional

downloading and retrenchment in areas such as social assistance, housing, and public transit (Kipfer and Keil 2002). By the early 2000s, the government's suburban growth agenda was under fire from not only central city reformers, but also from suburban and exurban residents who had become frustrated with the externalities of sprawl, including growing congestion and lengthening commute times. Seizing on this dissatisfaction, the provincial Liberals won the 2003 election in part by promising to curtail suburban sprawl and invest in transit-oriented urban reform (Liberal Party of Ontario 2002; Eidelman 2010).

Like its federal counterpart, the Ontario Liberal government conceptualized the sustainability turn as a form of 'third-way' governance (Coulter 2009). It was responding to the dilemmas of neoliberal urbanism not by deprioritizing urban growth, but by embracing a more statist conception of systemic competitiveness. On this view, the problem of auto-centric suburban sprawl functioned as a political axis around which policymakers could negotiate a new growth consensus. Sustainable urbanism provided a framework through which to manage environmental critiques, quality of life concerns, and, above all, the evolving demands of after-Fordist economic development (see Macdonald and Keil 2011).

The Liberal government's agenda operated along two dimensions. First, the government implemented a series of growth controls beginning in 2005. This included ambitious greenbelt legislation, reforms to the Provincial Policy Statement, and the creation of a growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe region of Southern Ontario. These reforms represented the most comprehensive set of anti-sprawl regulations in the province's history (White 2007). They established new restrictions on greenfield development, intensification targets for municipalities, and policies to encourage mixed-use and transit-oriented growth.

The second dimension of the government's agenda involved dramatic increases in public capital spending. In the infrastructure sphere, the Liberals were responding to what they characterized as an 'era of neglect', extending from the latter part of the 1970s to the early 2000s. This generation of austerity, the government argued, was inhibiting growth and undermining investment in post-industrial sectors. Declaring an 'era of renewal', the government developed a series of infrastructure programs that contributed to an 'infrastructure boom' in the province, increasing spending from a low of approximately \$3 billion in 2003 to an annual high of \$14 billion in 2011 (2011 constant dollars, Government of Ontario 2011; Nugent 2015).

As with its growth management policies, the Ontario government's infrastructure agenda was oriented around a desire to re-establish consensual conditions for growth in the province. Echoing the strategy at the federal scale, the provincial government emphasized investment in environmental infrastructures that promised to contribute to a new era of green and sustainable growth. Infrastructure programs were rhetorically tied not just to concerns around economic competitiveness and growth, but also to the government's climate change agenda and to political expectations around quality of life and daily commuting (Nugent 2015).

Public transit was integral to this consensual growth strategy. Focusing in particular on the problem of intensifying traffic congestion, the government positioned renewed investment in transit infrastructure as a form of 'three pillar' policymaking that attended simultaneously to problems of regional competitiveness, climate change, and daily household reproduction. In 2007, the government unveiled its MoveOntario strategy, which consolidated a series of LRT, BRT, and subway plans across southern Ontario into a single \$11 billion investment program. The following year, the plan was incorporated into an even more ambitious long-term development plan, the Big Move (Metrolinx 2008). These investment strategies put the province

in a position to partner with the federal government and eager municipalities to develop new transit projects across the province.

The growth of federal and provincial infrastructure programs created conditions for expanded investment in transit capital projects. In this thesis, however, I argue that this agenda reflected only a partial engagement with the transit problematic. It was based on a particular understanding of the problems that needed to be solved, one which prioritized concerns related to growth and competitiveness. Absent from this agenda was any meaningful engagement with the social dimensions of the urban agenda in general, or public transit policy in particular. Federal and provincial programs encouraged municipalities to develop large capital projects, but provided few resources with which local governments could pursue a socially inclusive vision of transit-oriented reform.

In this thesis I explore the construction of transit-oriented reform agendas in two Ontario regions: Ottawa and the Region of Waterloo. Each partnered with senior governments to develop transit mega-projects that were central to the roll-out of broader sustainable growth strategies. And each in different ways struggled to reconcile their transit capital agendas with demands for a more equity driven conception of transit policy. My intention is not to argue that local transit policy was determined in any straightforward way by senior government decision-making. Rather, the goal is to explore how local politics interacted with this institutional environment to yield a particular type of policy landscape.

In Ottawa, the subject of Chapter 5, federal and provincial funding contributions supported the development of a \$2.1 billion LRT project that was centered on a tunnel running beneath the downtown core. While the need for a high capacity transit tunnel had been identified at numerous points over a period of decades, the expense of such a project had been viewed as

prohibitive. The growth of senior government funding programs opened a window of opportunity for local policymakers. It allowed them not only to prioritize the downtown tunnel, but also to begin the process of crafting a more consensual approach to the expansion of the city's commuter transit network.

The pursuit of an ambitious LRT development strategy, however, also coincided with a policy push to scale back spending on transit operations and to reduce the rate of property tax subsidy. While the City was empowered to develop new capital projects, the daily operation of an expanding public transit network put increasing pressure on a limited local revenue base. Local policymakers remained susceptible to ratepayer backlash and demands for cost control. As a result, policymakers undertook a variety of measures in an effort to reduce the subsidy rate for public transit. This included a two month labour stoppage, large fare increases, and dramatic service cuts.

In Chapter 6, I consider the case of Waterloo Region. In the Region of Waterloo, enthusiasm for LRT had less to do with growth management objectives (as was the case in Ottawa), than with a desire to promote the revalorization of inner urban areas. Beginning in the early 2000s, the regional government implemented a smart growth planning agenda that was meant to reorient the region's auto-centric growth pattern. Alongside growth control regulations and zoning reforms, the Region approved the development of an \$818 million LRT project along a designated Central Transit Corridor that linked the central areas of the Region's constituent municipalities. The LRT was seen by planners as integral to the Region's intensification objectives and to the promotion of reinvestment in strategic areas.

In downtown Kitchener, the LRT project was embraced as a vehicle for accelerating the city's economic development objectives. After a number of failed attempts to reverse the decline

of the downtown, economic development actors had begun to find success encouraging the growth of new economy clusters. This success was tied in particular to the migration of the region's high technology sector downtown. Economic development officials looked to the LRT project as a vital amenity that would support plans for a new transit-oriented 'innovation district' and cement the area as a central node in the southern Ontario high tech ecosystem.

The LRT project delivered on these intensification objectives, helping to fuel massive reinvestment along the Corridor. Guided by a Community Building Strategy and transit-oriented development guidelines, developers invested billions of dollars in residential and commercial projects in designated station areas. While this investment was largely celebrated as a validation of the Region's LRT agenda, it raised concerns amongst housing advocates, who argued that gentrification pressures were eroding access to public transit and other core area services. Policymakers acknowledged these concerns and implemented modest measures to track and counteract displacement along the Central Transit Corridor. At the same time, however, their ability to develop affordable housing in station areas was constrained, they argued, by a dearth of federal and provincial funding.

The cases of Ottawa and Waterloo Region illustrate the manner in which local politics interact with and help to constitute multi-scalar regimes of transit governance. In both cases, local infrastructure ambitions were empowered by senior government infrastructure programs. And while local rationalizations for these mega-projects differed, they nevertheless reinforced the ideational construction of sustainable competitiveness that predominated at federal and provincial scales. At the same time, the selective nature of federal and provincial policy engagement complicated attempts to align capital projects with a socially inclusive vision of transit-oriented reform. Outside of the infrastructure sphere, local policymakers not only

remained vulnerable to the political demands of ratepayers, but they also possessed fewer resources with which to respond to social policy concerns, such as affordable housing. Once again, however, these conditions were not simply imposed from the outside. They were also negotiated locally in ways that both reinforced and challenged the prevailing governance regime.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

As I noted at the outset, the thesis is motivated by a pair of overarching questions: Why has the Canadian state decided to (re)engage with the problem of public transit, and what does this engagement reveal about the conditions of contemporary urban governance? This overarching concern gives rise to three more specific research questions. First, what is the guiding vision or ideational framework through which policymakers have defined the problem of public transit? In other words, what is the problem for which public transit provides a solution? Second, what policy implications follow from such a vision? That is, how does the dominant policy imaginary translate into particular funding priorities? Finally, how is this policy agenda constructed across scales of governance? In particular, how do local governments interact with and help to constitute multi-scalar transit policy regimes?

In Chapter 1, I begin by developing a middle-range theory that can be used to explain the production of urban politics in a multi-scalar institutional context. The object of the chapter is to explore the interaction between structure and agency in the production of urban governance. In a first move, urban politics is situated within the multi-scalar institutional ensemble of the state, which is conceived as a spatially malleable regulatory apparatus. Urban politics is structured by the evolution of state spatial strategies and projects, mediated through the place-specific structures of the national state formation. In a second move, attention is given to the ways in

which agents make sense of their institutional environment through the selective deployment of ideas and narratives. Through the use of an ideational-institutional approach, the objective is to explore how local politics interact with and contribute to the development of multi-scalar sustainable urban reform strategies.

In Chapter 2 I explore the concept of the ‘urban sustainability fix’. Following Raco, the chapter considers how best to make sense of the tension between neoliberal urbanism and the urban sustainability turn. After reviewing the intimate relationship between sustainable planning and after-Fordist economic development, I consider the non-economic constructions of sustainability that also populate the ideational terrain of urban politics. An understanding of urban sustainability politics must come to terms with the way in which these diverse interests and problem constructions are negotiated in concrete cases. At the same time, I suggest that while there appear to be opportunities to align economic development interests with certain environmental and civic agendas, the challenge of social equity remains a vexing one in the sustainable city.

Chapter 3 extends the analysis developed in Chapter 2 by exploring at a more detailed level how the embrace of transit-oriented reform agendas contribute to the search for an institutional ‘fix’ for dilemmas of contemporary urban governance. Transit-oriented reform strategies, I show, align with a variety of economic, environmental, social policy agendas. In particular, transit-oriented reform agendas appear tied to the search for a new mobility paradigm that is consonant with the need for more efficient modes of urban development. As I argue in Chapter 2, however, while the logic of efficiency creates opportunities for novel political alliances, the problem of social equity remains difficult to reconcile. A key objective of the chapter is to explore what Henderson refers to as a ‘politics of mobility’ (Henderson 2006). An

equitable approach to transit-oriented reform, I argue, requires attending to the distinct mobility needs of dependent transit users, the risks of transit-oriented gentrification, and the problem of affordable access.

In Chapter 4 I begin the empirical portion of the thesis. In this chapter I describe the (re)engagement of federal and provincial policymakers with the problem of public transit. At both federal and provincial scales, engagement with transit policy was rooted in an attempt to come to terms with dilemmas of neoliberal urbanism and a perceived need to re-establish conditions for functional and consensual growth. The way in which policymakers conceptualized the problem of public transit, I argue, resulted in an infrastructure-led approach to transit-oriented reform. By neglecting the broader problem of municipal finances and the social policy dimensions of public transit, federal and provincial policymakers created a selective terrain of institutional incentives and constraints for local actors.

In Chapters 5 and 6 I develop two local case studies of transit-oriented reform in Ontario. The objective in each case is to explore the local specificity of transit politics, including the ways in which local politics articulate to the wider institutional milieu. In Ottawa, I describe the divergent trajectories of transit policy in a city where growth management objectives have driven the turn to sustainable planning. In Ottawa, the transit infrastructure agenda has been embraced as a way to rationalize and make more efficient a growth process that had become increasingly expensive and dysfunctional. Alongside the growth of capital spending, however, local policymakers have also pursued an aggressive agenda of operational cost-cutting. Justified in terms of the need to insulate ratepayers, this agenda speaks to the dynamics of selective austerity and the uneven nature of transit-oriented reform. In Waterloo Region, by contrast, the transit infrastructure agenda has been shaped primarily by redevelopment objectives. The success of the

Region's ION project has spurred large-scale reinvestment along the Central Transit Corridor and supported the urbanization of the region's technology sector. The success of transit-oriented development, however, has contributed to housing affordability pressures that challenge the political legitimacy of the Region's agenda.

**Chapter 2**  
**Neo-Gramscian State Theory:**  
**An Ideational-Institutional Approach to Urban Politics**

**Introduction**

The object of this chapter is to outline a middle-range theoretical framework to support a political-economic analysis of public transit reform in two Ontario cities. The chapter is oriented around what I take to be a central concern of urban political economy, namely how to understand the relationship between urban politics and the wider macro-institutional environment in which it is enmeshed. A fundamental tenet of political economy, of course, is that policymaking does not take place in a political vacuum, but is shaped in important ways by the local and extra-local institutional milieu. This assumption is not terribly controversial and most analysts would likely subscribe to some interactive conception of structure and agency in their explanations of urban politics. Yet, beneath any superficial agreement lies considerable disagreement about how precisely to understand this relationship and how exactly to conceive of political agency. The goal in this chapter is to mine this debate with an eye to identifying theoretical and empirical tools that help to reconcile this theoretical tension. This means identifying the elements of a theory that can, on the one hand, provide real space for political agency, and on the other, explain how urban political practice is conditioned by (and contributes to), encompassing modes of political economic regulation.

The chapter proceeds in three moves. The first section begins by introducing the now not so new 'New Urban Politics' (NUP). The New Urban Politics is a term used to describe a collection of approaches that developed through the 1980s and 90s which were concerned primarily with explaining the politics of local economic development. I take this as a starting

point because it marks an important analytical shift in the study of local politics away from the community power debates of the 1960s and neo-Marxist debates of the 1970s towards an explicit concern with the politics of after-Fordist urban governance. These approaches signalled an attempt to come to terms with the ascendancy of economic development agendas in a context defined by the collapse of Keynesian policy regimes and the exposure of local territories to more intense forms of interspatial competition. This condition remains the touchstone for urban political economy and as such, many contemporary theoretical debates continue to have roots in and connections to the concerns of the NUP.

A defining debate within the New Urban Politics revolved around precisely this question of the relative autonomy of local politics from the macro-institutional logics of the capitalist political economy. On one side were authors who tended to emphasize the singular or structural nature of urban policymaking. This included Logan and Molotch's theory of the 'growth machine' and Paul Peterson's public choice account of inter-municipal competition. On the other side were accounts that sought to preserve space for local political diversity, chief among these being Clarence Stone's Regime Approach. Like other political economists, Stone accepted the disproportionate power of local capital, but he nevertheless insisted that this power was not determinative in any straightforward way. Stone's neo-pluralism, I argue, is instructive in that it treats urban policymaking as conditioned by the wider political economy, but still essentially underdetermined. Local politics continue to matter because contestation and negotiation are necessary features of the policymaking process.

In a second move, I widen the analytical lens beyond Regime's localist perspective to take in a view of the state and the role of national institutional architectures in shaping the contours of urban politics and policy. I discuss two forms of urban state theory which each seek

to provide a corrective to Regime's narrow empirical focus on local politics. The first draws from the 'new institutionalism' in political science and analyses cross-national variation in forms of urban governance. What this literature shows is that the practice of local politics is conditioned in important ways by state-specific institutional forms, including the institutions of federalism, cultural traditions and norms, national and regional urban policies, and electoral systems. The second literature is rooted in a political economy of scale and situates changing modes of urban governance in relation to processes of state-spatial restructuring. For scale theorists, the concerns of the New Urban Politics can only be understood as part of a larger process of institutional transformation associated with the collapse of national regimes of Keynesian-Fordism.

These two forms of state theory are clearly distinct. I argue, however, that they are ultimately complementary. In contrast to the new urban institutionalism, the political economy of scale embraces a much more radical socio-spatial conception of the state. It conceives of the state not only as spatially malleable, prone to occasional periods of geographical restructuring, but it connects such transformations to the state's role in regulating the contradictions of a crisis-prone capitalist political economy. Importantly, though, authors like Neil Brenner have emphasized the path-dependent nature of state-spatial restructuring. New institutional geographies are layered on top of existing architectures and thus reflect historical conditions in all manner of ways. On my reading, then, the political economy of scale entails a radicalization of the new urban institutionalism, explaining competitive city politics as place-specific manifestations of after-Fordist state restructuring strategies.

This state theoretic account provides an important corrective to the localism of the Regime Approach by situating local politics within their proper multi-scalar institutional context.

Of course, in doing so the precise role of agency in urban governance is again obscured in favour of an emphasis on institutional factors. In the final section of the chapter, then, I proceed with a third move that seeks to re-integrate a theory of political agency into a political economic account of state restructuring. In this, I look to Bob Jessop and his strategic-relational approach (SRA) to the state. Central to Jessop's project is a concern with bringing aspects of the 'cultural turn' into materialist political economy by analyzing the interaction between semiotic and non-semiotic aspects of social processes of regulation. According to this conception of cultural political economy (CPE), the political economy is always constituted in part by actors' construal of social reality, their representations of this reality, and by strategic efforts to exercise intellectual leadership. It is in this semiotic realm where much of what we count as political agency resides. Crucially though, these representational practices operate dialectically with material structures that institutionalize uneven relations of power. Actors thus find that the state is relatively more open to some discursive constructions than others.

Methodologically and empirically, this approach points to ideas as a primary object of analysis. In recent years, scholars dissatisfied with institutionalism's stunted conception of agency have begun to emphasize the importance of representational practice as a component of institutional analysis. Following Fairclough, I look to texts, broadly understood to include written documents like research reports, legislative and policy documents, and media reports, as well as spoken texts, such as interviews and speeches, as expressions of ideational politics. For Fairclough, whose approach is aligned with Jessop's project, mining texts allows the analyst to trace ideologically infused semiotic practices. Importantly, what this enables is an analysis of those political practices that aim to link concepts and discourses together into a dominant interpretation of a policy problem and its solution.

## **The ‘New Urban Politics’**

In the 1980s, the study of urban politics underwent a shift away from the resurgent neo-Marxist theorizations of the 1970s and the community power debates that dominated in the 1960s. What Cox referred to as the ‘New Urban Politics’ was distinguished by an analytical focus on the politics of growth and local economic development (Cox 1995). This shift marked an important turning point in the study of urban politics in that it signalled an engagement with new forms of after-Fordist governance. This period in the 1980s was described by Harvey as a transition from a Keynesian era of urban ‘managerialism’ to a post-Keynesian era of urban ‘entrepreneurialism’ (Harvey 1989). While it is certainly true that states reacted to the collapse of Keynesianism in distinct, path-dependent ways, some observers nevertheless detected a common pattern of restructuring across much of the advanced capitalist world. In the Fordist postwar era, urban governance was seen to be concerned primarily with issues of collective consumption and integrated planning. Set within national regimes of Keynesian-welfarism, local states were responsible for translating a host of policies related to housing, education, transport, and suburban infrastructure. With the collapse of state Keynesianism, the local state’s managerial function was marginalized in the face of widespread program retrenchment. In addition, the relaxation of international capital controls and the intensification of global economic relations combined with state austerity to expose localities in new ways to the pressures of uneven development. In this context, local governments became increasingly concerned about their relative competitiveness and debates about economic development rose to the top of local policy agendas.

Observing this shift, scholars began to inquire into the conditions of contemporary development politics. They asked: what political actors are influential under these conditions, on what basis do they derive their influence, and how are processes of political negotiation and coalition-building operating in this political-economic context? A key axis around which much of the debate within the New Urban Politics revolved concerned the relative autonomy of local politics from the disciplinary structures of a globalizing capitalist political economy. In some respects, this represented an existential issue for local politics as a field of study. All of the approaches within the NUP held to some extent that politics were in important respects structured by macro-institutional forces. They emphasized to varying degrees the causal force of interspatial competition in the urban policymaking process. This emphasis on exogenous pressures posed difficult questions about the real significance of local politics in light of the increasing penetration of wider systemic forces.

Responses to these questions could be aligned along a spectrum. At one extreme was Paul Peterson's influential account of policymaking under conditions of inter-municipal competition. Writing from a public choice perspective, Peterson argued that the reality of capital mobility meant that policymakers had little choice but to prioritize investment attraction by foregoing redistributive policies in favour of lowering locational costs for business (Peterson 1981). In Peterson's view, the characteristics of the wider political economy created a singular public interest that policymakers were all but obligated to pursue. A somewhat less emphatic view was developed by Logan and Molotch in their theory of the 'growth machine'. Writing from a critical sociological perspective, Logan and Molotch argued that urban politics had come to be dominated by local rentiers, whose material resources and unique concern with land-use decisions rendered them uniquely powerful in local policymaking arenas (Logan and Molotch

1987). Unlike Peterson, a key concern of the growth machine account was to describe the micro-politics of ideology formation that allowed rentiers to make common cause with other growth-dependent actors in opposition to the use-value concerns of residents. At the same time, however, these politics appeared subordinate to the structural bases of landed power, which were conceived as an integral feature of urban politics tending to produce a common coalitional form across space. Cox and Mair's theory of 'local dependency' struck a similar balance, offering a rich description of local practice that was based in a quite structuralist reading of urban political economy. For Cox and Mair, the predominance of growth agendas was tied to a shared territorial concern with the threat of uneven development. In a context of intense interspatial competition, they argued, residents were pressured to sacrifice use value concerns and to make common cause with locally dependent capital and government in the interests of local economic health (Cox and Mair 1988).

Clarence Stone's Regime Approach constituted the other end of this spectrum. Stone shared with other political economists an appreciation for the changing institutional context governing local politics. He differed, however, in his understanding of what this context implied for the practice of local politics. In his view, it was true that capital wielded a disproportionate influence over the local policymaking process, often setting the agenda and defining the terms of cooperation and compromise. Yet, Stone was also skeptical that this influence should translate into a single form of local policy regime, whether theorized in terms of urban entrepreneurialism, a growth machine, or some other formulation. Even in the context of economic globalization, and despite the reality of uneven relations of power, there remained a real degree of openness in local politics. While Stone agreed that growth-oriented regimes were a common political outcome, he insisted that other alternatives were also possible, including political coalitions that

valued careful management rather than risk-taking, or even progressive regimes that prioritized socio-spatial equity and issues of quality of life (Stone 1989; Leo 1995).

What distinguished Stone's framework above all was a neo-pluralist conception of politics oriented around a 'social production' model of power. Unlike traditional conceptions of power understood in terms of 'power over', the social production model conceived of power in terms of the 'power to'. An understanding of the 'power to' was necessary, according to Stone, because absolute power never resides with any one single actor. Instead, the capacity to govern depends on arranging a mix of public, private, and civic resources appropriate to particular policy objectives. For many policy objectives, particularly in the development arena, private capital is an essential resource. As a result, business interests have considerable power to shape agendas and structure governing coalitions. In pluralist fashion, however, Stone also argued that there are valuable and necessary resources besides capital that often must also be mobilized to successfully govern. To the extent that no single interest can govern independently, negotiation and coordination between actors is an inevitable feature of policymaking, and this means that the outcome of the process can never be predetermined. For Stone, the character of an urban regime is defined by the particular arrangement of resources that coalesce in the act of governing a particular territory (Stone 2005).

In the sections that follow, I discuss the limitations of the Regime Approach. Here, however, I want to emphasize the strengths of the approach and take them as a basic point of departure. With the emergence of the NUP, urban politics began to properly engage with the emerging modalities of after-Fordist regulation, including the empowerment of growth politics, the prioritization of systemic competitiveness, and the phenomenon of public-private governance. Necessary as this move was, the risk was that by focusing attention on macro-

institutional factors, local agency would be deprived of any meaningful role in the constitution of urban governance. The Regime Approach represents a steadfast defense against this danger.

First, it argues that political power, though highly unequal, is nevertheless distributed. The role of capital in the reproduction of territorial communities imbues owners with disproportionate power, and this is surely enhanced when interjurisdictional competition intensifies. Yet capital is not an independent policymaking authority, it depends on cooperation from the state, workers, and other elements of civil society. Second, Regime argues that local policy outcomes are in a fundamental sense underdetermined by structural factors (Stone 2005). As I will argue below, this argument resonates with some contemporary strains of critical political economy that are also working to integrate agency into systemic understandings of institutional regulation.

Capital's reliance on the state for extra-economic support subjects it to the demands of a political sphere that is governed in large part by non-economic concerns. This dependency creates a space where standards of consumption and expectations about quality of life have to be negotiated as a condition for stable reproduction.

This leads to a final point concerning the role of local case study in political economic accounts of urban governance. Unlike more structuralist conceptions of urban governance, the Regime Approach requires an empirical component. This empirical component is necessary not as a confirmation of theoretical abstractions, but as an element of the explanatory framework itself. This is not to deny the importance of theorizations that identify structural relations between actors or between places. However, to the extent that there is a meaningful degree of indeterminacy in urban public policy, explaining outcomes requires an analysis of local specificity. For this reason, Regime has become closely associated with rich case study methodologies that are geared towards uncovering the particularities of place and to describing

the strategic behaviour of local actors. In the third section of the chapter, I explore in more detail why this commitment to empirical case study development is so important, particularly as we work to integrate theories of agency into institutionalist accounts of urban governance. In brief, the argument is that in the absence of case study it becomes impossible to adequately explain the source of, and limits to, institutional power.

### **Urban Governance and the State**

With the Urban Regime Approach, Stone sought to develop an account in which the relative power of local actors is shaped by the wider political-economy, but in which local politics are not reduced in any straightforward way to these power structures. There is an inherent openness to the process of local regime formation in which strategic behaviour matters. To explain how this politics relates to the wider institutional milieu, Stone draws on a metaphor from psychology. He notes that in psychology, stimulus and response models ( $S > R$ ) have evolved over time to include a role for mediating organisms ( $S > O > R$ ). For Stone, a local regime functions much like a mediating organism, translating external stimulus into a contextually specific response (Stone 1993). On this view, local politics matters to the extent that it can modify the nature of this mediating organism, and thus affect how a common external stimulus manifests as a particular urban policy agenda.

While this conception of local political mediation is reasonable on its face, challenges emerge under closer scrutiny. In its desire to emphasize the causal efficacy of the local, Regime insists on bracketing out local politics from its surrounding environment, treating the local arena as a kind of semi-autonomous container. Stone attempts to strike a balance between structure and

local agency by conceiving of exogenous forces as effective but theoretically external; they filter through a system that is essentially independent. The difficulty with this conception is that it assumes a neat institutional separation that rarely exists in reality. In reality, local and extra-local processes mix together in often messy and complex ways. Local policymaking is enacted not in its own container, but rather as part of a broader system of urban governance that spans different institutional sites across the state apparatus (Jessop et al. 1999).

As a second move, then, I want to discuss two forms of state theory that try to embed local politics more firmly within a state-wide conception of urban governance. The first, which might be termed a ‘new urban institutionalism’, draws on the broader new institutionalism in political science, in particular historical institutionalism. The second is rooted in a political economy of scale. It situates urban governance within broader processes of state rescaling and ties these processes of restructuring to the state’s evolving role in the regulation of capitalist society. Though these two approaches are clearly distinct, rooted in different theoretical traditions and concerns, I want to argue that they can function together in a complementary way to provide a coherent account of urban governance as a feature of place-specific modes of state spatial restructuring.

Historical institutionalism emerged in the 1980s as a reaction to the perceived inadequacies of structuralist and behaviourist accounts of politics. Pressing in opposing directions, these approaches privileged either universalist understandings of policymaking or micro level accounts of agent behaviour. Historical institutionalists sought to recapture the space of middle range theory, that is to develop explanations of politics and policy that operated below the level of grand theory but above the level of agents and psychology. They did this by refocusing attention on the institutions of the state as an intervening variable that helped to

explain difference across space. At the core of the approach is the question: why, given a common set of structural conditions related to the reproduction of a capitalist political economy, do states differ so significantly in their response to common exogenous pressures? For example, why do states, in the face of a shared experience of economic ‘globalization’, exhibit such marked differences in levels of welfare expenditure, levels of unionization, or health insurance coverage? The answer, according to historical institutionalists, is that the historically constituted institutional particularities of national state formations impart path-dependent effects that structure political reactions and policy possibilities. Every state is institutionally distinct, and these systems of political and cultural rules mediate the experience of transnational phenomena (Steinmo 2008; Hall and Taylor 1996).

The new institutionalist turn in urban politics developed somewhat later, but was driven by a similar concern with reclaiming the space of middle range theory. The need for a state-centric institutional analysis was suggested in part by problems that were encountered by authors attempting to export the Regime Approach outside of its native US context. The Regime Approach depicts a process of public-private governance driven by the agency of local actors who trade and combine resources to define and realize common policy objectives. In trying to apply this framework to local politics in non-US contexts, however, it became clear to some that many of the conditions that were assumed by Stone to be common did not necessarily extend to other places (Ward 1996). The Regime formulation, in other words, was not a universally applicable account of post-Keynesian urban politics, but rather reflected the distinct institutional conditions of the US case. With this realization in hand, scholars began to inquire more systematically into how national institutional architectures might affect local responses to the common conditions of after-Fordist restructuring.

This inquiry took a variety of forms. One important line of analysis emphasized international variation in national and regional urban policies. This concern built upon an insight developed in the late 1980s by Ted Gurr and Desmond King, who argued that local policy varied across space because cities experienced different levels of ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ autonomy (Gurr and King 1988). With this conception of variable autonomy, Gurr and King identified a key mechanism linking local politics with wider state practices of urban governance. The character or composition of extra-local urban policies, they argued, structured local politics by shaping lines of political influence. On the one hand, national and regional urban policies could constrain ‘vertical autonomy’ by imposing extra-local rules onto local governments and forcing local policy to conform to senior government objectives. On the other hand, however, such policies might also enhance ‘horizontal autonomy’, meaning government autonomy from local social forces (Ibid). On this view, the relative robustness of extra-local urban programs matters to the constitution of local politics because senior government spending influences the exposure of the local state to political pressures.

This key insight was later incorporated by Savitch and Kantor into their influential comparative bargaining framework. Savitch and Kantor were concerned with comparing urban policy regimes according to their capacity to ‘bargain’ with investors. This capacity, they argued, varied widely across space, meaning that some cities were more able than others to negotiate with, and impose costs on, mobile capital. The argument, then, was that local horizons of political possibility depended in significant part on local bargaining power. One important determinant of this bargaining power was state ‘support’, in the form of extra-local urban policies, which helped to insulate localities from the pressures of interspatial competition (Savitch and Kantor 2003). This type of analysis offered an important corrective to the localism

of the Regime Approach. The character of development politics could not be understood as a function of local agency independent of local government's position within a wider state architecture of urban governance. Instead, international differences in extra-local urban policies played an important role in mediating the effects of intensifying competition.

Other authors sought to expand the scope of this state-theoretic analysis to include not just extra-local urban policies, but also factors like national political culture, institutions of federalism, and electoral systems. These studies took as a starting point the observation of a common international pattern of urban restructuring, characterized by new modes of public-private governance and an overarching concern with issues of systemic competitiveness. This common transition, however, was being manifested in distinct ways, producing meaningful differences in the constitution of urban politics and the practice of urban governance. The object, then, of these studies was to unpack more fully the mediating role of a diverse set of national institutional traditions.

International comparisons could be productively arranged around a number of different axes. Writing about the UK, for example, authors like Kevin Ward and Andrew Wood focused attention on differences in institutional decentralization and their effect on patterns of business mobilization. The Regime Approach, they argued, emphasized the role of autonomous business mobilization because US cities, with their history of 'home rule', were institutionally empowered in areas related to economic development. It was this institutional autonomy that created the conditions for a politically engaged local business class. The UK, in contrast, lacked this kind of local autonomy, which inhibited the kind of bottom-up business-led governance common in the United States. Institutions of public-private governance did emerge in the UK, but they were

initiated not by local business but by the central state and its wider project of urban neoliberalization (Ward 1996; Wood 2004).

With their focus on intergovernmental authority structures, Ward and Wood showed important differences in the constitution of urban politics in the US and UK. In another influential study, however, DiGaetano and Strom compared not just systems of federalism and local autonomy, but also national political cultures. They uncovered a more complex picture. While the US and UK differed in terms of federal structures and the autonomy of the local business class, both states nevertheless evolved similar market-led modes of public-private, entrepreneurial governance. The conditions under which business came to assert a dominant political position were distinct, yet both the US and UK followed a shared liberal script in their approach to urban restructuring. DiGaetano and Strom contrasted this market-led culture to public-private governance reforms in France and Germany, where statist traditions produced distinct modes of local partnership. As in other places, local politics became oriented around concerns related to competitiveness and economic development, but the political culture mitigated against the kind of market-led reforms seen in the US and UK. Partnerships instead became rooted in public sector leadership that sought out more balanced and managerial approaches to restructuring (DiGaetano and Strom 2003; and see Sellers 2002).

Taken together, institutionalist analyses challenge the localism of approaches like Regime by demonstrating the ways in which local politics are at least in part constituted through wider state processes of urban governance. There remains, however, something unsatisfying in the way that the new urban institutionalism situates local politics as the product of forces located elsewhere. To return to Stone's stimulus and response schema, the new urban institutionalism broadens our understanding of the mediating 'organism' by highlighting the causal force of state

infrastructures, yet in other respects it retains the same basic spatial ontology. Macro-institutional forces outside the system filter through the pre-existing institutional apparatus of the state until they reach the local arena, where local actors work within a context of imposed constraint. As with the new institutionalism more generally, the emphasis on institutional mediation can be criticized for producing a too static spatial conception of governance, and this limitation becomes particularly apparent when the lens is trained on the urban.

One attempt to better come to terms with the spatial complexity of urban institutional analysis is Jeffrey Sellers' 'de-centered' approach, which conceives of the nation-state as a kind of 'infrastructure' for urban politics. One of Sellers' chief concerns is to challenge simplistic notions of hierarchy at work in institutionalism. National institutional infrastructures, he argues, are more than just hierarchically imposed rules that structure local behaviour, they penetrate local activities in more fundamental and dynamic ways. State infrastructures are conceptualized not just as constraints, but also as political and cultural resources that are actively mobilized by local actors. They draw on these resources to develop institutions, create identities, and to construct interest coalitions. What is more, by conceptualizing state infrastructures in this way, Sellers is able to present a nuanced and interactive spatial conception of urban governance in which causality is neither simple nor unidirectional. Local politics are clearly shaped by hierarchical relations of state authority, but because local actors are able to make use of institutional resources they are able to reflect back onto extra-local structures and thus contribute to the development of wider state systems of urban governance (Sellers 2005).

Sellers' de-centered approach, which draws on literatures of multi-level governance to imagine more complex spatial forms of urban governance, provides a bridge of sorts between mainstream institutionalisms and more critical conceptions of state spatial governance. Through

the lens of multi-level governance, he describes a more dynamic form of causality in which the local figures not just as a mediated outcome but as a site where the state-wide institutions of urban governance also get made. Scholars working within the literature of ‘state rescaling’, or a political economy of scale (Mahon and Keil 2009), have sought to challenge notions of static institutional geography even further, replacing notions of multi-level governance with those of multi-*scalar* governance. Scale theory extends and radicalizes the socio-spatial insights of multi-level analysis to develop a more critical and holistic account of institutional restructuring in which the local figures as one site in a broader transformation of state governance. This approach shares with mainstream institutional analysis a desire to contextualize local politics, but it also produces a somewhat different interpretation of urban restructuring.

The theory of state rescaling traces its roots to the Regulation Theory of the 1980s and 90s, which sought to explain how crisis-prone capitalist social relations are made reproducible through the institutionalization of temporary institutional ‘fixes’. In moving beyond this approach, theorists like Bob Jessop and Neil Brenner began to consider more carefully the role of the state in the transition of advanced capitalism from an era of Keynesian-Fordism to a new after-Fordist configuration. At the heart of this critical theorization was a conception of the state as an institutional ensemble that both internalized contradictions of the social formation and changed as part of strategic efforts to rework past compromises (see Jessop 2008). Unlike mainstream institutionalist understandings, in which the state mediates the macro-institutional dynamics of capitalism, this critical perspective conceived of the state form as intimately connected to the reproduction of the political economy – rather than filter external forces, the state itself changes as part of a systemic process of institutional transformation.

This conception of an evolving state form is directly tied to a critical reading of capitalism as inherently restless and tending towards periodic bouts of creative destruction that undermine the logic of existing modes of institutional regulation. This reading problematizes mainstream post-Weberian depictions of the state as theoretically pre-existing and essentially static (Brenner et al. 2003). If the state is integral to the reproduction of a capitalist political economy, and this political economy is dynamic and evolving, then an appropriate theory of the state must account for its malleability in relation to changing societal demands. Thus, one of the essential objects of the political economy of scale has been to open up to theorization the functional organization of the state's *geography*, to interrogate the restructuring of state space as part of those ongoing processes of institutional problem solving that help to contain the contradictions of a capitalist social formation (Hudson 2001).

To this end, the concept of spatial scale can be contrasted with the more traditional concept of institutional level in two ways. First, unlike a spatial level, which is generally understood as natural, perhaps even ontologically given, a spatial scale is understood to be *socially constructed*. Territories of governance do not exist in nature, but rather are created through social processes. Through this constructivist perspective, the act of creating institutional territories and of (re)locating particular functions – that is of making state space – is conceived as a deeply political process in which actors struggle to define spaces of regulation in order to realize particular policy objectives (Swyngedouw 1997; Brenner 2004). Second, spatial scales are understood as *relational*. In short, what this means is that activities or changes at one scale of action cannot be understood independently of activities or changes taking place at other scales of action (Mahon 2005). Whereas institutional levels are easily depicted as semi-independent

spatial containers, scale theory emphasizes the ways in which the state, though institutionally disaggregated, nevertheless functions as a singular institutional entity.

This multi-scalar conception of critical state theory has made possible a more integrated reading of urban restructuring in which local practices are understood not as mediated outcomes so much as strategic expressions of the search for a new spatial ‘fix’ to dilemmas of an after-Fordist political economy. In the postwar era, the welfare state developed as part of a Fordist regulatory accord that institutionalized a virtuous relationship between capital and labour by expanding consumption alongside productivity gains. This accord was institutionalized at the national scale – it was based on a correspondence between national economies and national regimes of welfare delivery (Brenner et al. 2003). What scale theorists have emphasized is the contingent nature of this institutional configuration, its historical rootedness in a specific assemblage of socio-technological conditions. By the 1970s, these national regimes were being destabilized by declining productivity and profit rates, which set in train a whole series of politically contested transformations of the political economy, including the reorganization of production and the restructuring of welfare accords and related modes of social regulation. This entailed an ideological assault on ‘big government’ and the displacement of demand-side governance with supply-side policy regimes oriented around the new problem of competitiveness.

Crucially, after-Fordist experiments were premised on new post-national spatialities that undermined the national scale correspondence between economic and social regulation. On the one hand, the spatial horizon of *competition* migrated to the global scale where new supranational constitutional arrangements enabled greater international flows of capital and new transnational forms of production and exchange. On the other hand, the space of *competitiveness*

migrated to local and regional scales, where producers and policymakers began to embrace the possibilities of local distinctiveness to cultivate new forms of innovation and social regulation. The result was a ‘hollowing out’ of national scale functions and the emergence of a new ‘glocal’ configuration of economic and social governance (Jessop 2002; Swyngedouw 1997).

This account of institutional restructuring introduces a somewhat different analytical problematic from the one taken up by mainstream urban institutionalism. On this view, the emergence of growth-first, competition-oriented urban governance is not caused by a combination of economic ‘globalization’ and the place-specific infrastructures of the state, but rather is constitutive of the contemporary state forms that bring ‘globalization’ into being. The goal of analysis, then, becomes to explain how local politics and policy are practiced *in relation to* practices of urban governance enacted elsewhere within the state’s institutional ensemble. This means seeking to understand how the multi-scalar components of urban policy come together into a singular, potentially coherent mode of urban governance.

Neil Brenner conceives of this problematic in terms of what he refers to as ‘state (spatial) strategies’ and ‘state (spatial) projects’. State spatial strategies are those which attempt to influence the geographies of economic development and political struggle. Glocalization, he argues, is strategically enacted by states through a variety of policy mechanisms, including industrial policy, infrastructure programs, labour market reforms, and urban and housing policies, with the objective of improving the competitive position of cities within supranational circuits of competition. These strategies are combined with state spatial projects, which redistribute functional responsibilities throughout the state architecture in a bid to imbue multi-scalar governance with a degree of institutional coherence (Brenner 2003).

Brenner also argues, however, that while glocal state spatial strategies and projects represent a common mode of restructuring across Europe and North America, there is nothing singular about such processes. The institutionalization of new geographies of governance never takes place on a blank canvas, but rather is invariably built atop existing architectures. He conceives of this process in terms of layering, with emergent modes of socio-spatial governance laid over and woven through the institutional structures of the state that already exist. A key object of analytical attention, then, must be to explain how glocal strategies are being rolled-out not in the abstract, but in concrete, place-specific contexts (Brenner 2004).

This insight, that state-spatial restructuring follows structural tendencies but is nevertheless shaped by place-specific institutional conditions, suggests a point at which these two distinct modes of state theory can be set in productive conversation. Mainstream urban institutionalism has highlighted precisely those path-dependent institutional effects that ensure common macro-institutional tendencies exhibit meaningful place specific characteristics. Systems of federalism and the intergovernmental organization of authority, patterns of interest mobilization, and cultural traditions combine to form national infrastructures for urban governance that are distinct from one place to the next. The limitation of these accounts lies in their static spatial ontology and consequent inability to engage in a holistic, dynamic way with processes of institutional restructuring. The political economy of scale, by radicalizing our understanding of state space, transcends this limitation. It allows us to situate local politics in relation to wider strategies and projects that seek to transform the functional role of the urban. While local politics exist within institutional hierarchies, they also help to constitute and give direction to state-wide processes of institutional reform.

## **Ideas and Institutions: A Strategic-relational Approach to the Urban Governance**

The chapter thus far has proceeded in two moves. It began first by introducing the New Urban Politics as a set of approaches concerned with analyzing politics under contemporary conditions of growth-oriented governance. It probed the tension between structure and agency inherent in these frameworks and highlighted the contribution that Stone's Regime Approach makes by insisting on the essentially underdetermined nature of politics. In the second section, the perspective was broadened to take in the role of state, first via the mediating role of national institutions, and then viewed as a spatially malleable multi-scalar institutional ensemble. Together, these state theoretic perspectives problematize the localism of the New Urban Politics in general, and of Stone's Regime Approach in particular. It is simply not possible to understand local politics in isolation from the wider state architectures that help to constitute the conditions of urban governance. Local politics are deeply enmeshed within these structures, which shape the stakes at play in local struggles, the relative power of competing interests, and the opportunities available for coalition building.

This section will complete a third move to re-integrate an agency centered perspective into these state theoretic accounts. The institutionalist perspective rightly insists on contextualizing local politics by emphasizing the diverse institutional contributions to urban governance. Local politics needs to be understood in relation to, as a constituent part of, wider programs of glocal re-regulation, mediated through place-specific national institutional architectures. The challenge, however, is that in the very act of contextualizing local politics the role of agency and political strategy tends to become obscured. Even when institutionalists strain to retain a space for agency, the shift in emphasis away from concrete political events and

interactions invariably places the explanatory weight on the structures that shape behaviour, whether conceived in terms of national infrastructures or the macro-institutional forces driving glocalization.

The problem with an institutionalism devoid of agents should be clear. Institutions cannot *act*, they may shape behaviour but they cannot themselves initiate action or change conditions. Without a theory of how agents act through institutional contexts, explanations of social events or processes are hollow. In recent years, scholars in a number of related disciplines have turned their attention to precisely this problem: how to at once acknowledge the role of institutional milieus as strategic contexts while still accounting for the necessary place of agency in any explanation of politics as such.

In policy studies, the search for a richer theorization of agency has been particularly prominent as a response to the perceived limitations of the new institutionalism. As explained, the new institutionalism has been moved by the need to account for the persistence of nationally distinct models of policymaking. In short, the *raison d'être* of the new institutionalism, whether in its rational choice, historical, or sociological variants, has been to demonstrate stability in the face of exogenous pressure. The explanatory emphasis is on constraint and structured behaviour, conceived in terms of incentive structures, historical paths and legacies, or sociological norms. The problem, however, is that because it conceives of institutions only in terms of their effects on actors, it can only produce a static vision of policy. Though institutional analysis can explain why policies take particular forms in particular contexts, it is limited in what it can say about the origin of this context. It says little about where institutions come from or how they might change in meaningful ways (Blyth 2002).

This limitation follows from a shallow conception of actors as simple rule-followers, what Schmidt refers to as a model of ‘unthinking actors’ (Schmidt 2008). In such a model, there is little room for actors to exercise creativity. For example, rational-choice institutionalism assumes that actors operate within the confines of ‘bounded rationality’. This means that what actors want is predictable and their behaviour is determined by the instrumental pursuit of objectives within exogenously defined ‘rules of the game’. Sociological institutionalism employs a different conception of rationality, with behavior shaped by logics of appropriateness, but actors are similarly understood as playing a predictable part within a set script. Because actors act according to established scripts, it is these scripts that have causal force. Again, this is problematic because institutions cannot initiate action. The consequence is that institutionalism must typically point to factors outside of its own framework in order to explain change – exogenous forces affect the system from the outside, altering the ‘rules of the game’ and leading to changes in behaviour (see Lieberman 2002).

Urban political economy has wrestled with this problem from a particular perspective. During the 1990s, scholars devoted a great deal of effort to theorizing changes to urban governance, and in particular to situating urban re-regulation in relation to post-industrial accumulation regimes and supply-side modes of social regulation (Peck and Tickell 1995; Halford et al. 1993; Harvey 1989; Swyngedouw 1997). This work helped to reinvigorate urban political economy by highlighting the central place of the urban within a potentially emergent post-national institutional ‘fix’. A critique of this literature emerged, however, from scholars who, though highly sympathetic to the Regulation-inspired project, questioned the treatment of politics in these institutional analyses. The concern was that by emphasizing the force of state restructuring and the tendency towards a new singular governance type, institutional change was

being allowed to stand as its own explanation. Such an explanation seemed at best partial. Institutional change could not adequately explain urban governance because this change also required explanation (Macleod and Goodwin 1999). For these political economists, there was little question that there were structural forces at work that were transforming the place of the urban within the institutional matrix of advanced capitalist society. Nevertheless, there remained an explanatory gap. How did politics actually *produce* urban governance?

One promising suggestion was to add a modified Regime analysis to the Regulation-theoretic account. Regulation Theory would be used to describe a changing distribution of local resources tied to systemic changes in the political economy, while Regime methods would be used to build an empirical account of the political strategies involved in governing (Lauria 1997; Ward 1996). Despite the intuitive appeal, however, this conceptual solution required an awkward blending of the constructivism of Regulation Theory with the rationalist ontology of Regime (Painter 1997). Stone's description of politics was based on a conception of instrumental actors whose decision-making is governed by bounded rationality. The currency of political negotiation, according to Stone, are 'selective incentives' (i.e. material inducements), which actors distribute to induce those with non-material resources to collaborate. For Stone, actors are understood as essentially pragmatic, oriented towards a desire to achieve 'small purposes'. Their goals are directly linked to what they believe to be immediately feasible under prevailing institutional conditions (Stone 2005; Davies 2002). This rationalist ontology conceives of actors as reactive and mechanical, as 'unthinking', and thus does little to solve the problem of political agency. Regime develops an account of how actors interact within a given context, but the real causal explanation for political and policy outcomes ultimately resides in those institutions that

determine their strategies and objectives. In this sense, the Regime Approach is descriptive rather than explanatory.

In attempting to resolve this impasse and to develop a more accurate conception of ‘thinking’ actors, institutionalists in political and policy studies have increasingly looked to ideas and discourse as a foundation for creative agency. By incorporating ideas, ideational-institutionalists have tried to unsettle common assumptions about the nature of actors and their interests. Specifically, ideationalists have sought to challenge the notion that interests are in any essential sense material, objective, or stable. The concept of a ‘material interest’ traces a direct line between institutions and interests, suggesting that institutions either determine preferences or otherwise provide a set of rules within which actors pursue some universal good, like wealth maximization. The implication is that interests are somehow knowable given sufficient information about a particular institutional context. Ideationalists reject this easy conflation of ‘material’ and ‘interest’, and by extension the mechanical construction of politics that it can imply (Schmidt 2008). Instead, they embrace a constructivist conception of interests that emphasizes the cognitive processes that are involved in forming preferences and developing strategies. Rather than read interests off of the material and institutional environment, ideationalists argue that interests only emerge as actors creatively work to make sense of their world (Béland and Cox 2011).

In the sphere of political economy, this turn to ideas has been taken up most notably by Bob Jessop, who in recent years has sought to incorporate elements of the so-called ‘cultural turn’ into his ongoing critical state theory project (Jessop 2004; 2009). As with other examples of ideational-institutionalism, the basic rationale for developing a ‘cultural political economy’ is to work to bridge the stubborn gap between structure and agency. The object is to create theoretical

space for actors to participate in the production of governance, while remaining committed to the materialist insights of political economy, including its understanding of capitalism as a structural force. Jessop has in particular emphasized the value of a neo-Gramscian approach to state theory. Working with the Gramscian notion of an integral state, Jessop argues that the state, in all its multi-scalar complexity, must be understood not just in terms of its material architectures, but also in terms of the semiotic structures that define the common sense around which governance objects are constructed. This inclusive conception of the state makes it possible to investigate how actors operating at multiple scales of action develop strategies of urban governance through contextualized processes of interpretation and representation.

Jessop's Cultural Political Economy is rooted in the belief that all social processes are constituted in part by a semiotic dimension, a fact that traditional materialist political economy has ignored. The object of CPE, however, is not to depart from this materialist tradition, but to bring the semiotic into view by analyzing the dialectical relationship always at play between the semiotic and material dimensions of social life (Fairclough 2012). CPE takes as a starting point the notion that the material world with which actors are confronted is too complex to be understood in any absolute or fully objective sense. To engage with the world, actors must reduce this complexity in some way, isolating some part and projecting it as the whole. Because the act of complexity reduction is integral to the very existence of social and political life, CPE argues that the cognitive mechanisms through which this takes place are essential to understanding how people engage with each other and build a collective existence. The material and semiotic are thus inextricably linked.

In the policy arena, an ideational approach grounded in the necessity of complexity reduction places the question of problem construction at the center of analytical attention. One of

the objectives of Cultural Political Economy is to denaturalize policy problems, in particular what are referred to as ‘economic imaginaries’ (Sum 2009). Because the environment cannot be fully or properly grasped, policy problems cannot be understood as materially or objectively given. Instead, actors develop understandings of policy problems through intersubjective processes of interpretation and representation. These representations often take the form of an economic imaginary, a semiotic construction that gives meaning to the economic field by marking out a particular set of activities or dynamics as especially relevant. Imaginaries are thus distinct from what we might think of as the ‘actually existing economy’, they are a communicated interpretation of what policy stances or prescriptions are necessary (Jessop 2009). For example, the notion of ‘economic globalization’, depicted as a deterritorialized space of free moving capital, can be read not as an accurate description of the actually existing economy, but rather as an ideological representation that emphasizes particular features of contemporary economic activity (Swyngedouw 1997). Other imaginaries that emphasize different aspects of economic happenings are also possible and would enable very different narratives about the types of policy stances that are necessary or desirable.

A second aspect of the Cultural Political Economy approach is a conception of actors as essentially normative in their worldly orientation (Hay 2011). The process of complexity reduction involves highlighting particular dynamics or relationships as pre-eminent, as distinctly important. These representations invariably entail a normative expression of how the world should be. In urban political economy, there is a structuralist tendency to emphasize the economic dimensions of restructuring, the way in which state space is reorganized as a response to economic crisis. One difficulty with this orientation is that it can be seen to imply a kind of functionalism in which the state acts automatically to resolve fundamental economic

contradictions. A cultural perspective avoids the danger of functionalism because it insists that the state is more than an agent of economic reproduction, it is necessarily and essentially concerned with legitimizing its relations with citizens (Purcell 2002). Effective governance requires a degree of popular acquiescence, and hence a perception that policy is legitimate. As a result, policy interpretations always need to be justified in normative terms as appropriate objects of attention and solutions justified normatively in terms of their outcomes and effects.

For Jessop, following Gramsci, the political arena can be understood as broadly oriented around this process of legitimization, it is a space where sectoral concerns or ‘material interests’ are translated into matters of ‘ethico-political’ concern (Jessop 1997). Political struggle, by extension, can be conceived as a struggle to establish intellectual leadership, which entails the power to define a collective ‘common sense’ about what is required by the current conjuncture. It is around this notion of ‘common sense’, and its assemblage of problematics and policy prescriptions, that coalitions will take form and patterns of inclusion and exclusion will take shape. That is, interests may align around competing interpretations of the institutional environment that rationalize different economic strategies, modes of social regulation, and patterns of resource distribution.

Crucially, however, this struggle around the terms of intellectual leadership is in no way understood to take place at a remove from structures of institutional empowerment and constraint. An emphasis on the semiotic dimensions of governance is not to be confused with a radical constructivism in which the political arena is reduced to a discursive terrain. A key feature of ideational-institutionalism is that while agency is expressed through ideas not all ideas are equal in the face of particular institutional architectures. The infrastructure of the state is

rather more or less receptive to particular ideas according to their resonance with existing modalities and norms (Béland 2005).

In the language of Cultural Political Economy, the structural bias of the state is examined in terms of the movement from ‘construal’ to ‘construction’. There can be many ways of construing a chaotic material landscape that reduce its complexity and make action possible. While these construals may be equally accurate in terms of their selective representation, not all will be given equal weight in the political arena. Instead, some discourses and representations will appear more plausible in relation to the established institutional milieu, and thus are more likely to be operationalized. According to Jessop’s strategic-relational view, the state is ‘strategically-selective’ (Jessop 2008). Structurally inscribed into the architecture of the state are what might be thought of as filters. Some strategic representations will be a poor match for the filter and will simply pass through. Others, however, will cohere enough with established architectures that they remain viable.

This view of the state as constituted through dialectical relations between material and semiotic spheres opens up a productive space for thinking through the multi-scalar politics of urban governance. As Brenner argues, state spatial restructuring is activated through concrete projects and strategies that seek to alter the spatiality of accumulation and the functional geography of institutional regulation, while also seeking to impart a degree of institutional coherence onto the workings of the state’s multi-scalar institutional ensemble (Brenner 2004). A Gramscian infused Cultural Political Economy perspective allows us to analyze the semiotic constitution of these strategies and projects against a strategically-selective institutional backdrop. Actors operating at local and supralocal scales of action contribute to the elaboration of urban governance through interpretive and representational practices that seek to legitimize a

particular understanding of the institutional and normative place of urban public policy within a wider matrix of institutional governance.

The role of ideas can be analyzed in two distinct but closely interrelated ways. The first is in terms of the construction of the urban as an object of governance. Rather than conceive of urban restructuring as a functional feature of some wider macro-institutional process, an ideational perspective requires that we analyze how interpretative and representational practices change through the elaboration of state projects and strategies. As Pauline McGuirk explains, a key aspect of contemporary urban restructuring has entailed a reconceptualization of not just what problems need attending, but the need for them to be attended to *at a particular scale* (McGuirk 2004). This insight has been taken-up and extended by authors like Sarah Gonzalez and Wendy Mendes through the concept of a ‘scalar narrative’. They deploy the concept of scalar narrative to account for the manner in which the semiotic construction of urban policy problems become tied to perceived problems of institutional geography. Such narratives not only identify and frame policy problems, but they also explain why problems should be solved at, in this case, the urban scale (Gonzalez 2006; Mendes 2007).

This brings into focus the struggle over intellectual leadership, which empowers certain interests to define the pre-eminent institutional function of the urban. In the current conjuncture, the construction of cities as ‘entrepreneurial’, ‘competitive’ or necessarily oriented towards growth has been a prominent feature of many state strategies (Dannestam 2008). Such imaginaries have been naturalized through not only depictions of a hyper-competitive global space economy, but through depictions of the urban as an important site for cultivating systemic competitive advantage. Thus, the notion of urban competitiveness has been tied to parallel

representations of a ‘knowledge-based economy’, economic ‘clusters’, and ‘creative’ economies, each of which discursively place the urban at the center of new production dynamics.

Local politics take place in relation to this wider multi-scalar process through which the urban is produced as an object of governance. As discussed above, the relationality of scale theory highlights both the importance of institutional hierarchy and the co-constitution of governance across institutional sites. From an ideational perspective, the practice of local politics can be analyzed in terms of the struggle to define a local common sense that represents the dominant problematics of governance (Jessop 1997). This may include representations about the character of the local economy, the viability of or need for particular modes of economic development, the possibilities for regulating development, the relative importance of extra-economic objectives, and the nature of supply side and revenue-raising constraints.

In interpreting and representing the local governance context, actors are constrained in important ways by the institutional selectivity of the state. Enmeshed within hierarchies that determine the distribution of intergovernmental authority, local actors are obligated to work with the resources that are selectively made available via place-specific state strategies and projects. At the same time, the act of representing local policy problems will often entail arguments about the proper organization of institutional geographies and multi-scalar distribution of resources. In this way, local struggles to assert intellectual leadership, to define the nature of policy problems, become bound-up with the elaboration of wider state practices of urban governance. In other words, institutional hierarchies are very much impactful, but causality is also complex and multi-directional.

## **Some Final Methodological Considerations**

As I have explained, the objective of this thesis is to develop theoretically-informed case studies that reveal how urban policy actors, operating in and through a multi-scalar institutional milieu, struggle to interpret and represent the political economic environment. These cases are developed according to an ideational-institutional approach to policy studies – that is, an approach that attends to the importance of ideas as a basis for any practice of situated agency. In this final section, I want to supplement and clarify some of the methodological considerations highlighted in the discussion above.

There are two issues that require further elaboration. The first concerns the role of textual data or ‘evidence’ as the foundation for case study development. Following Fairclough, I want to emphasize the analytical value of texts, broadly construed, as a window onto the dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the material. It is through the use of textual data that researchers uncover the ways in which agents interpret and represent the environment. The second concerns the rigour of this type textual methodology. There are important perceived limitations associated with the textual methods employed in this thesis. In particular, there may be a concern that the method is too subjective, allowing the researcher to simply ‘cherry-pick’ textual fragments that bolster their narrative, while ignoring other textual data that might support an alternative account. In response to this concern, I draw on the work of Bevir and Rhodes, who have emerged as influential proponents of narrative forms of policy analysis. While narrative and textual methods do provide researchers with a significant degree of flexibility and choice in how they construct case studies, Bevir and Rhodes insist that this need not imply an acceptance of

uncritical subjectivism. Studies, they argue, can be evaluated according to their plausibility, their resonance for other familiar actors, and by the factual breadth and scope of the narrative.

Working within the Cultural Political Economy framework, Norman Fairclough has explored the role of textual analysis as a point of methodological access to the dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the material. According to Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), text is understood not as a discursive construction operating in an ontologically distinct ideational realm, but rather as an aspect of a material social event. In other words, texts form an integral part of a material encounter, they are constitutive of material social relations (Fairclough 2003). Understood in this way, text functions as a unique kind of data. It provides access to that critical political moment when actors creatively engage with the material world in which they are enmeshed.

In Critical Discourse Analysis, the notion of 'text' is construed widely. It includes official documents, government websites, speeches, participant interviews, meeting records, public statements, or any other publicly shared discursive artifact. Texts are expressions of those interpretive and representational practices that actors engage in when they define policy problems and struggle to give form to a collective common sense. In this thesis, case study narratives are developed using a wide variety of textual sources. I draw from non-governmental policy reports, official policy documents and program statements, political speeches, deputations before government bodies, committee minutes, and media reports. I also draw on twenty personal interviews that I conducted with engaged local policy actors. As I discuss below, these sources are stitched together in a flexible and creative way to produce convincing narratives of policy development.

Why should we consider texts a useful object for research? Following Fairclough, there are three reasons that we should focus analytical attention on textual sources. First, textual analysis can allow researchers to identify and de-naturalize the policy ideas circulating in a given terrain. At the heart of Cultural Political Economy is the notion that politics necessarily entails a normative process of complexity reduction. Actors do not simply operate within an objective and pre-defined milieu, they actively interpret and represent their environment in order to make sense of policy problems and solutions. While these interpretations are invariably normative (that is, rooted in a perspective about how things ought to be), embedded values are often implicit, masked by appeals to a taken-for-granted common sense. Textual analysis is a powerful method of critical research because it allows one to, in Wodak's words, 'make the implicit explicit' (Wodak 2014). It is through an examination of policy texts that the researcher is able to investigate the political process through which actors naturalize particular value-laden readings of the world and the place of policy problems within it. Similarly, it is through an examination of texts that the researcher is able to identify those subordinate interpretations and problem constructions that are also circulating in the policy environment.

The second reason to focus attention on textual sources is that it allows the researcher to identify and unpack what Fairclough refers to as an 'order of discourse'. An order of discourse refers to the structured manner in which ideas and discourses are articulated to one another. In the construction of political economic 'imaginaries', actors can exercise agency through the creative appropriation and re-interpretation of concepts and their relations. What Fairclough draws attention to is the way that this process of re-contextualization textures or stitches together concepts in ways that establish relations of dominance and subordination. By investigating textual sources, it becomes possible to identify leading or nodal ideas that occupy a dominant

conceptual position by incorporating or aligning with other discourses and logics. Fairclough, for example, uses textual analysis to document how the ‘knowledge-based economy’, operating as a dominant nodal discourse, becomes articulated to concepts of sustainable economic growth, better jobs, and social cohesion (Fairclough 2012).

This practice of stitching provides a fertile empirical entry-point. By attending to the ways in which webs of ideas become aligned and ordered, we gain insight into the creation of dominant and subordinate understandings of the policy terrain (Fairclough 2012; 2003).

Analyzing the creative articulation of concepts is particularly important in the context of this thesis, which focuses on the production of urban sustainability politics. In recent years, sustainability has emerged as an important post-political imaginary that promises to balance the demands of economic growth with environmental sustainability and social equity. Critical textual analysis can help to penetrate post-political claims by uncovering the structures that order the web of ideas that constitute contemporary understandings of sustainable urbanism. For example, through textual analysis I investigate how notions of sustainability become articulated to discourses of competitiveness, urban growth, and knowledge-based economic development. I also examine how environmental and social objectives remain subordinated within an ordered imaginary that privileges these economic understandings of sustainability.

A third and related reason to employ textual analysis is because it furnishes an opportunity to explore the structural selectivity of the state to different ideational assemblages. This notion of selectivity is central to Cultural Political Economy and its approach to ideational institutionalism (Jessop 2009). In any political arena, there will always be a variety of circulating problematizations, each constituted by a particular set of normative beliefs and conceptual orderings. While some ideational assemblages will achieve a degree of intellectual hegemony,

however, others will remain subordinate. Through textual analysis, we take methodological aim at this dynamic by emphasizing the movement from construal to construction. In this thesis, case studies are developed both with an eye to mapping the landscape of representational claims in a particular policy arena, as well as an eye to exploring the way in which certain ideas are institutionally activated and put into practice. The goal is to investigate the material-semiotic interface by distinguishing between those policy interpretations or representations that are institutionally excluded and those that are incorporated into policy.

In this thesis, a range of textual sources are brought together to develop theoretically-informed case studies of transit-oriented reform. At the heart of this approach is the notion that ideological common sense is secured and contested across a wide variety of textual sites. Ideas circulate and cross-pollinate in complex and messy ways. In accordance with this understanding of politics as inherently interpretive and complex, I employ a narrative approach to case study development, one which assembles textual sources in a flexible and creative way to craft a convincing causal account of urban governance.

This type of narrative approach is of course open to the charge of subjectivism. When evaluated according to the standards of positivist social science methodologies, there may be a perception that flexible and creative approaches to data collection and use lack sufficient rigour. For example, what is to prevent the researcher from ‘cherry picking’ data that reinforces their narrative, while ignoring equally valid evidence that would support an alternative account? To answer this concern, I follow Bevir and Rhodes, whose interpretive conception of social science encourages researchers to push back against the assumptions of scientific naturalism in order to properly account for the causal role of ideas.

Underlying the naturalist project, according to Bevir and Rhodes, are two basic assumptions. The first is that the social world can be readily categorized and made amenable to standardized measurement. The second is that these categories, in and of themselves, reveal important behavioural attributes of actors, that important causal information is implied by membership in a particular category (Bevir and Rhodes 2004). Bevir and Rhodes, however, deny that interest or behaviours can be ‘read-off’ a categorical or institutional position. Reducing the world to stable categories may well yield analyzable patterns, but such analysis will abstract away from precisely those ‘fuzzy’ ideational factors that have real causal force (Bevir and Rhodes 2006). This is not to suggest that actors are free from the constraints of relations of power and strictures of context. Agents are situated, but the significance of the context in which they find themselves is not simply given, it is created through interpretive practices of meaning-making.

Whereas a researcher employing naturalist methods will seek to apply pre-established categories across cases in order to detect standardized patterns, for Bevir and Rhodes, the role of the researcher is to act as an ‘interpreter of interpretations’. The goal of a case study is not to validate a hypothesis, but rather to tell a causal story. Given this objective, Bevir and Rhodes insist on a flexible approach to data collection that reflects the diversity of potential research questions. The quality or utility of data should be determined not by its degree of standardization or objectivity, but rather should be assessed according to its contribution to a plausible account of what actors think and believe and want (Bevir and Rhodes 2004).

But what makes for a plausible account and can such an account be properly critiqued? The answer given by Bevir and Rhodes is both simple and compelling. The success of a narrative is determined by its plausibility and resonance for others also familiar with the case context.

While narrative accounts are not ‘falsifiable’, they are entirely open to critique from competing narratives:

Our accounts of the dilemmas that actors face need to ring true with scholarly and local or practitioner audiences across all different settings under analysis...[T]he theoretical insights we derive still need to resonate more broadly, and still need to stand up to scrutiny when placed against the experiences and patterns established elsewhere in the field (Boswell et al. 2019).

A plausible narrative is likely to be one that effectively accounts for a wide range of empirical facts through a single causal story. It will help to make sense of different aspects of a common policy terrain and provide a kind of narrative coherence that resonates with knowledgeable actors. What is more, even a successful narrative will never stand as the objective last word on the matter. Rather, it must always remain open to challenge by alternative accounts that are more resonant and empirically inclusive.

## Chapter 3

### The Urban Sustainability Fix

#### Introduction

Beginning in the 1990s, urban policy agendas in advanced capitalist states became increasingly oriented around the concept of the ‘sustainable city’ and related notions of urban sustainability, including concepts such as ‘smart growth’. Today, the notion of urban sustainability is so ubiquitous that it would be difficult to find a comprehensive planning document in any large North American city that does not express a commitment to its principles in some form. For Mark Whitehead, sustainability has become the “hegemonic paradigm of metropolitan development” (Whitehead 2003). Michael Gunder makes a similar observation when he refers to sustainability as a new ‘transcendental ideal’ in urban planning which articulates the basic practical and normative assumptions that constitute the contemporary ‘good city’ (Gunder 2006).

The roots of the sustainable city concept can be traced to series of debates that took place in the international development arena in the 1970s and 80s. In the 1970s, concerns about the environmental consequences of global urbanization and economic growth came to prominence through a number of international forums. Most notably, the 1976 UN Habitat Conference on Human Settlement accelerated a debate on problems of urban pollution, sanitation, and the consumption of finite resources. While there was a radical edge to some of this debate, including challenges to the long-term viability of capitalist institutions, by the late 1980s the global consensus had settled on a more moderate reform agenda (Hodson and Marvin 2014). This agenda was influentially articulated in the 1987 report from World Commission on Environment and Development, commonly referred to as the Brundtland Report. The Brundtland Report

mobilized the concept of sustainable development as a way of mediating between the role of economic expansion as an engine of social development and concerns about the socio-environmental implications of unrestrained growth. In its famous definition, the Commission defined sustainable development as that which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987).

The urbanization of the sustainable development concept began in earnest with the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. At the Earth Summit, policymakers developed an action plan, Agenda 21, designed to bring growth into better alignment with principles of environmental sustainability and social equity. Included within this action plan were a set of initiatives directed specifically at local authorities. What became known as ‘Local Agenda 21’ contributed to an important shift in mindset by reimagining cities as not only sites of environmental pollution, but also as sites of creative problem solving. The reasons for this were two-fold. First, as the level of government most closely connected to residents and civil society groups, urban areas were an important arena where public and private actors could convene to coordinate strategies for sustainable development. Second, many of the targets of sustainable development involved processes that were regulated at the local scale. Architecture and building design, energy systems, water and sanitation infrastructure, land use, and transportation policy were identified as promising targets of reform – areas where the rational application of new planning and governance techniques could enable more environmentally benign and socially beneficial forms of development (UN 1992).

In the wake of Local Agenda 21, urban governments began to embrace the language of sustainable cities and the practice of sustainable planning as a new common sense, a taken-for-granted principle of good governance. In advanced capitalist states, this embrace was

conditioned by a particular set of governance dilemmas associated with the collapse of Keynesian policy regimes, the overextension of suburban development, and the exigencies of growth-first planning. Whereas suburbanism had provided a planning framework resonant with the institutional architectures and political demands of postwar society, by the 1990s fractures in the paradigm were becoming more apparent. Growth had become more fragmented and dysfunctional, social exclusions were more entrenched, and the environmental externalities of sprawl far more apparent. It was in this context that the notion of the sustainable city came to prominence.

The concept of sustainable city-building suggested a solution to urban planners and policymakers at a time when there was a need both for new normative direction and a practical guide to policy reform. From a normative perspective, sustainable development's holistic or 'three pillar' conception of policymaking pointed beyond the perennial tension between use and exchange values. At a time when the demands of urban entrepreneurialism appeared to limit the scope of urban reform, sustainability suggested that economic development and growth could be linked to a progressive social and environmental agenda. Problems of environmental pollution, degraded quality of life, and social exclusion were not problems of growth *per se*, but rather consequences of modernist planning, based on suburban decentralization, single-family home ownership, functionally segregated land use planning, and a commitment to full automobility. The solution was to be found in a reorganization of growth according to neo-traditional planning practices, including intensification, mixed-use development, active public realms, and investment in public transit (Hall and Pfeiffer 2000).

For political economists, the urban sustainability turn in advanced capitalist states, with its post-political promise of holistic policy reform (Swyngedouw 2007; 2009), has presented an

intriguing object for research and analysis. This is because it appears to present a puzzle. On the one hand, the embrace of sustainability suggests a political moment in which pressures of urban growth are being moderated by parallel demands for environmental protection, quality of life, and socio-spatial equity. On the other hand, however, questions of ‘balance’ and ‘integration’ would seem to be entirely at odds with what critical scholars take to be another dominant modality of contemporary urban governance - neoliberalism. The neoliberal city is supposedly characterized by an overriding commitment to competitiveness and growth, a market-led approach to planning, public sector austerity, and a supply side approach to social policy. The question is: how can these two seemingly incommensurable frameworks simultaneously operate as dominant modalities of urban governance (Raco 2005)?

In this chapter, I want to engage with this puzzle through the concept of the ‘sustainability fix’ (While et al. 2004). The sustainability fix concept is an extension of David Harvey’s more general account of the urban ‘spatial fix’, through which he has sought to link the character of urban built environments to wider multi-scalar institutional ensembles of regulation (Harvey 1985). For Harvey, the built environment contributes to capitalist reproduction in a number of distinct ways: it produces a physical landscape through which capitalist circulation can take place, it functions as a store of value, and it mediates the relationship between capital and labour in space. To contribute effectively to a wider institutional fix, urban development practices must correspond in some way to broader systems of regulation – that is, they must create environments that are functional for particular modes of production and consumption, they must be consistent with dominant macro-economic and fiscal agendas, and they must respond to prevailing local social conditions (Harvey 1982; 1985).

In his original formulation, Harvey explored the role of suburbanization in the constitution of national systems of Keynesian-Fordism. Suburban modes of infrastructure development and social reproduction, he argued, were integral to the expansion of the state sector and the institutionalization of mass consumption norms. More recently, Aidan While and his co-authors have tried to situate the rise of sustainable urbanism in relation to the collapse of the suburban spatial fix and the search for a new mode of urban development that resonates and coheres with the institutional logics of after-Fordist governance. The sustainable city, they argue, is best understood as a response to the institutional dilemmas that have emerged in and around the postwar planning paradigm (While et al. 2004). The postwar ‘city on the highway’ (Hall 2014), increasingly appears to be out of sync with the logic of cognitive-cultural production, the cultural expectations of urbanizing residential groups, and the emergence of a permanent condition of selective austerity in the state sector. The urban sustainability turn can be read as an attempt to come to terms with these and other governance dilemmas by reconfiguring the built environment and reworking the terms of political conflict and compromise.

For political economists, one particularly influential line of analysis has involved the detailing of an emerging matrix of interlinkages between the practices of sustainable urbanism and the evolution of urban growth politics. This research documents the ways in which growth coalitions draw on sustainable planning imaginaries in response to a changing economic development context. Sustainable planning is understood, according to this view, not as a regulatory check on the excesses of urban growth politics, but rather as a framework through which the contradictions and shortcomings of earlier growth strategies are remedied and re-imagined. For example, the practice of ‘smart growth’ is being employed in many places as a way to mitigate dysfunctional growth pressures and to bring development into better alignment

with the institutional logics of selective austerity (Krueger and Gibbs 2008). In other places, sustainable planning concepts are deployed as part of entrepreneurial revitalization strategies designed to transform devalued industrial, commercial, or residential space into places appropriate for new, higher value forms of post-industrial living and working (While et al. 2004).

This line of analysis has been invaluable in combatting the post-political depictions of sustainable urbanism that dominate mainstream policy-making processes. At the same time, however, they have tended to reduce the sustainability turn to a narrow expression of exchange relations. It is not that the insights generated by such exchange-oriented readings are wrong – far from it – but in their emphasis on sustainability as an aspect of evolving growth agendas, it is possible that they obscure some of the nuance or complexity at play in the negotiation of sustainable city-building. There is certainly an important sense in which sustainable planning practice functions as a mode of ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism, acting to shore-up deficiencies that emerged as a result of deregulated and uncoordinated growth in the 1980s and 90s. Yet, it is also possible to detect other logics at work, other imaginaries that may influence the practice of sustainable urbanism and contribute to the construction of hybrid policy forms (Raco 2005).

Attending to sustainable urban development as an arena through which evolving configurations of political power and rationality are negotiated makes it possible to better account for the diversity of ideational representations at play. There are environmental and social imaginaries that, while articulated to the economic sphere in a variety of potential ways, are grounded in problem constructions that are essentially non-economic in nature. For example, the rise of the sustainable city concept has coincided with the urbanization of environmental governance, a process that has put cities at the forefront of multi-scalar process of ‘eco-state restructuring’ (While et al. 2010). In addition to this environmental problematic, sustainable

urbanism has also become linked to problems of collective consumption and infrastructure provision, quality of life discourses, and concerns around socio-spatial inclusion (Jonas and Ward 2007; McCann 2008).

### **The Spatial Fix: From Suburbanism to Sustainability**

With the concept of the spatial fix, Harvey places geography at the center of crisis theory, arguing that the management of capitalism's internal contradictions is an inherently *spatial* process. The socio-spatial dynamic derives from a basic tension within capitalism between 'fixity and mobility' which is manifested in a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that is continually remaking political and economic geographies. On the one hand, the logic of accumulation drives capital to constantly seek opportunities to accelerate circulation and expand its territorial reach – what Marx referred to as the 'annihilation of space through time' (Marx 1973). This pressure to transcend spatial barriers represents a moment of deterritorialization in that it seeks to escape the territorial limits implied by existing institutional and technological conditions and to resolve problems of overaccumulation by looking outwards for new opportunities for surplus absorption and expanded reproduction. On the other hand, however, the mobility on which capital depends is predicated on the construction of essentially immobile infrastructures that make production, consumption, and circulation possible. This contradictory dependency on assets that are fixed in place gives rise to a corresponding moment of reterritorialization based on the institutional and physical reconfiguration of territorial communities (Brenner 1999; Swyngedouw 1997). The reproduction of the capitalist political

economy requires some form of ‘spatial fix’ which brings into temporary alignment these simultaneous demands for fixity and mobility.

It is in the development of infrastructure and fixed capital that the role of urban territorial management comes into view. Analyzing the (re)construction of built environments in terms of the perennial search for a spatial fix suggests a way to tie the politics of urban development to wider systems of institutional regulation. Understood in this way, for urban managers the production of the built environment is conditioned by a particular set of governance challenges. The first of these challenges is rooted in the need of any urban community to attract and secure in place a certain quantity of capital by providing an attractive mix of fixed capital assets that can support local processes of production, consumption, and exchange. In a capitalist economy, where investment is to various degrees mobile, a fundamental concern of policymakers must always be to match the local built environment to the needs of some group of capitals. For capital, the desirability of a particular urban territory will turn on the degree to which productivity and growth potential is enhanced by local infrastructure conditions, including the supply and organization of industrial and commercial real estate, the adequacy of retail space, the quality of transportation infrastructures, and the sophistication of communication networks.

This is no small challenge, however. In *Limits to Capital*, Harvey theorizes the built environment as a ‘secondary circuit’ of capital which draws on surplus capital created within the primary circuit of commodity production. This secondary circuit channels capital into those built infrastructures which, though integral to the production process, cannot be financed by individuals, either because of the scale of investment or because of the collective and non-excludable nature of the good (Harvey 1982). The state, both as financier and regulator, bears much of the responsibility for ensuring the production of these infrastructures, and by extension

responsibility for speculating on the long term value of assets. This problem of long term value is again tied to the dynamics of fixity and mobility and the restless nature of capitalist accumulation. While capital is essentially mobile, theoretically able to abandon a territory when built conditions no longer suit its needs, urban infrastructures are ‘sunk’, meaning that they are both physically rooted in place and amortized over long periods of time. This implies a great deal of risk for urban managers who must anticipate future economic development dynamics while facing the possibility that investments will be devalued if they prove to be no longer functional. The risk of devaluation is particularly acute because, as Harvey argues, any spatial fix can only provide a temporary resolution to the basic dilemmas of capitalist reproduction (Harvey 2001). In time, the logic of accumulation compels capital to remake technological conditions, to develop new production techniques, imagine new modes of consumption, and to demand new forms of institutional and infrastructural support. Invoking Schumpeter, Florida argues that the tendency for capitalism to engage in such bouts of restructuring has a natural corollary in urban space where territorial managers must occasionally subject the built environment to a process of ‘creative destruction’ in order to discard those fixed capital assets and modes of socio-spatial organization that are no longer functional and to remake physical landscapes in ways which foster new forms of production and consumption (Florida 2010).

Importantly, though, the remaking of physical landscapes is not determined simply by the evolving needs of capital. Capital’s dependence on immobile inputs is not limited to fixed capital, but also includes labour, and this introduces another set of governance dilemmas for urban policymakers. People are of course mobile and able to move from one place to another, including from one territorial community to another. At the same time, they are also territorially rooted in a critical respect – they are tied to a particular place as a site of daily life and household

reproduction. For labour, the city is not just a site for production, it is a living space and a site of civic engagement, and the demands that these uses place on the built environment are often at odds with the narrow demands of economic development. This is the tension between use and exchange value that Logan and Molotch argue lies at the center of urban politics. Capital wants to adapt the urban built environment to its needs in an effort to extract maximum exchange value from land and produced commodities, but residents seek to defend the use value of the built environment as a landscape of household reproduction (Logan and Molotch 1987). Capital's dependence on the social reproduction of labour and requirements for political legitimacy means that a stable urban spatial fix requires some accommodation between the demands of economic development and the demands of household reproduction, such that the urban built environment is at once capable of sustaining accumulation and economic growth and of supporting the daily lived needs of residents.

Arriving at such an accommodation is a complex matter and by no means assured. The urban built environment is a shared space characterized by myriad forms of inter-dependency, overlapping use, and conflict. A road is at once a conduit for commodity circulation and a component of collective consumption, a determinant of land values and a medium of daily household reproduction, an instrument of inclusion and opportunity for some and of exclusion and environmental injustice for others. The management of urban territories is concerned at root with balancing and mediating competing demands over this shared environment and ensuring some form of functional compromise that allows the community to reproduce itself. Observing this, Harvey argues that urban governance tends to develop what he refers to as 'structured coherence', by which he means some functional reconciliation between dominant modes of local economic development and local lifestyles, civic values, and modes of consumption (Harvey

1985). Yet, this coherence should not be understood as a structural tendency, but rather as a contingent and hard-fought political outcome. The construction of a built environment that serves simultaneously a variety of political-economic needs ought never to be confused with an environment that serves all needs equally. Instead, the physical condensation of social compromise within the urban environment will be premised on some selective cross-class territorial coalition that prioritizes the needs of certain fractions of capital and certain residential lifestyles and consumption practices, while marginalizing the interests of others.

The final point is that the construction of social compromise in the material fabric of the urban built environment does not take place in a political-economic vacuum. A crucial insight to which the spatial fix concept gives rise is that planning ideas are taken-up in relation to a broader institutional milieu. Thus an important way in which urban territorial management may contribute to the formation of a spatial fix is by implementing development strategies that cohere with state spatial projects and strategies being elaborated at other scales of governance. In other words, local political regimes contribute not just to fixes that reproduce the local political-economy, but play a role also in crafting social compromises through the built environment that enable the realization of multi-scalar institutional systems.

The contribution of local development to macro-institutional regulation can be readily seen in the relationship between postwar suburban planning and the elaboration of Keynesian-welfarism. Broadly speaking, there were two forms of linkage that cemented this relationship. First was the connection between Keynesian modes of macro-economic regulation and suburban infrastructure development. As a mode city-building, suburbanism was dependent on massive extensions of collective infrastructure, including transport and utility networks, to make possible low density and functionally unbundled land use patterns. The full expression of suburban

development logics was thus predicated on unlocking some new institutional mechanism for directing large quantities of public capital into the urban built environment. With the mid-century institutionalization of Keynesian economic ideas, the state began to take on new responsibility for managing aggregate demand by transferring unproductive capital to the state sector. This, in turn, created a rationale for the growth of public infrastructure spending. Suburbanization, with its voracious demand for new infrastructure, provided a crucial outlet for this public investment and was thus integral to making Keynesianism viable. In the 1950s and 60s, public capital investments expanded dramatically in North America, rising to over 3% of GDP in Canada and the US, and much of this spending was translated directly into suburban-supportive infrastructure, including highway development, utility network extensions, public housing construction, and new education and healthcare facilities (see Mackenzie 2013 and Seccareccia 1995 for a Canadian discussion).

Second, the suburban development paradigm was also intimately bound-up with the elaboration of Fordist production and consumption norms. For Harvey, the diversion of capital through a second circuit is premised in part on a need to develop fixed long-term assets capable of supporting new rounds of accumulation. In the case of public urban infrastructure, unproductive capital can be put to work by the state to restructure the built environment in ways conducive to emerging production and consumption norms (Harvey 1982). In the postwar period, suburban development contributed in this way by creating built conditions functional for a new mode of mass consumption, (which was integral to the virtuous Fordist relationship between productivity gains and effective demand).

In his *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, Michel Aglietta argues that the Fordist ‘consumption norm’ was founded on two core commodities: the standardized single family home

and the automobile, both of which were tied to the normalization of postwar suburbanization (Aglietta 1979). The suburban home and the automobile each functioned as important forms of mass consumption in their own right, and were particularly important examples of consumption through amortization. Perhaps more importantly, though, they combined to create the socio-spatial conditions of possibility for these new consumption practices. The suburban single family home normalized larger living spaces which were specifically designed in relation to a bundle of new household consumer technologies, such as washing machines, kitchen appliances, and television sets. This residential form, however, was achieved at the expense of the functional integration of land use, stretching the urban fabric and creating new spatial divisions between, in particular, places of home and work. It was the extension of mass automobile ownership and norms of flexible personal mobility which made it possible to navigate these new ‘unbundled’ urban environments (Sheller and Urry 2000).

It was against this political-economic backdrop, in relation to state spatial projects and strategies that sought to establish the urban conditions for national variants of Keynesian-Welfarism, that local political coalitions and regimes took shape (see Halford et al. 1993). These wider institutional regimes were not determinative of local politics in any straightforward sense, but they were nevertheless broadly conducive to a suburban-oriented form of political ‘coherence’. On the economic development side, for example, growth actors constructed their interests in relation to wider systems of institutional incentive and constraint. ‘Sprawl machines’, uniting developers, construction firms, utilities, and municipal government boosters, came into being through their indirect connection to extra-local programs that subsidized suburban growth strategies (Savitch 2002). Similarly, the political legitimacy of these machines was dependent on the urbanization of the postwar class accord (Florida and Jonas 1991). Homeownership

subsidies, the extension of core networks, and the growth of ‘soft’ community infrastructures, all contributed to the realization of residential aspirations and helped to cement middle-class support for suburban growth politics.

By the 1980s, however, fractures within the suburban development paradigm were beginning to emerge. These tensions were rooted in a confluence of factors, many of which will be discussed in greater detail below. With the collapse of state Keynesianism, the state absolved itself of much of its responsibility for coordinating growth and managing effective demand. The introduction of supply-side governance, the ascendance of neoliberal ideological norms, and the contraction of the state sector together posed a challenge to the logic of urban managerialism and the role of urban planning. While suburbanization did not end with the collapse of Keynesianism (decentralization in fact intensified through much of the 1980s), it no longer occupied the same position within a coherent regulatory system. The consequences of this de-coherence became manifest in an increasingly dysfunctional system of urban growth. As well, in addition to the retrenchment of the Keynesian state, a series of socio-economic changes associated with the rediscovery of urbanity and the valorization of inner urban neighbourhoods also began to challenge the logic of the suburban fix. A residential ‘back to the city’ movement was combining with new forms of post-industrial production and consumption to create a ‘new economy of the inner city’ (Hutton 2004). The growth of this new economy not only refocused economic development efforts on revitalization opportunities in the core, it also empowered urban reformers in their critique of the socio-environmental externalities of sprawl.

For urban planners and policymakers, the fracturing of the suburban institutional fix posed a real challenge. On the one hand, there was the struggle to come terms with growth management dilemmas in the suburbs, reformist critiques of sprawl, and new economic

development objectives in the core. On the other hand, however, the loss of traditional levers of collective urban management and the exigencies of neoliberal ideology appeared to limit the horizon of institutional or normative response. The sustainable city paradigm emerged at this particular moment to offer a solution – a middle way between the opposing pressures of growth politics and reformism. While accepting the demands of a growth-oriented politics, sustainable urbanism argued that this politics could be re-embedded within a normative framework that also prioritized other environmental and social objectives. The problem of urban development was not growth *per se*, but rather the particularities of automobile-dependent suburbanism. The solution was to be found in a return to traditional planning forms: greater density, mixed-use development, housing diversity, and support for public transit and non-motorized mobility (Satterthwaite 1997; Hall 2014; Gunder 2006).

In their formulation of the sustainability fix concept, Aidan While and his co-authors position the sustainable planning paradigm as a kind of strategic experiment. The sustainable city, understood both as a normative vision of holistic urban development and as an assemblage of neo-traditional planning practices, is constituted through a political and policy process that is seeking to re-establish conditions for the stable and effective reproduction of urban life. The sustainable city, in other words, takes shape as part of the search for a mode of city-building better attuned to the mix of economic dynamics, cultural values, and state capacities that characterize the milieu of after-Fordist governance (While et al. 2004).

Following Harvey, the sustainability fix is seen to operate at two interrelated levels. First, as the authors explain, “[t]he historically contingent notion of a ‘*sustainability* fix’ is intended to capture some of the governance dilemmas, compromises and opportunities created by the current era of restructuring...” (While et al. 2004). The notion of the sustainability fix, in other words, is

meant to draw our attention to ways in which sustainable city-building may resonate or cohere with after-Fordist state spatial strategies and projects. For example, in their original explication of the concept, While et al. argue that sustainable planning is working in conjunction with the practice of urban entrepreneurialism by guiding, rationalizing, and narrating processes of post-industrial restructuring. It is via a logic of sustainability that economic development actors are able to give form to their aspirations for revitalization and sectoral upgrading in the urban core. Others have extended this line of argument by highlighting the role of sustainable planning in the management of contemporary growth dilemmas, as well as its role in adapting development to conditions of public sector restraint.

The second sense in which the sustainable city may contribute to the construction of an after-Fordist institutional fix is by supporting new forms of political collaboration and compromise appropriate to evolving local economic development concerns, civic demands, and modes of social reproduction. By drawing attention to “the particular dilemmas that urban regimes in different cities currently face in balancing economic, social and environmental demands”, the sustainability fix concept is meant to capture the role of sustainability discourses and practices in the construction of intra and cross-class territorial coalitions and governance regimes (While et al. 2004). While suburbanism functioned in the postwar period to ground cross-class compromises between capital and labour in urban space, the dysfunction of automobile-centric sprawl and the emergence of new inner city economies is undermining the political resonance of the paradigm in important ways. Instead, the negotiation of intellectual leadership appears to be increasingly taking place in relation to the principles and practices of sustainable urbanism.

It is this political process of negotiation that I want to turn to in the subsequent two sections. The holistic language of sustainable urbanism suggests that it is possible to address civic demands related to the quality of the living place and the sustainability of the environment, whilst simultaneously responding to the exigencies of interurban competition and selective state austerity (see Hall and Pfeiffer 2000; Berke 2002). For critics, however, appeals to three pillar development represent a kind of post-political discourse, one which attempts to deny the necessarily antagonistic nature of urban development (Swyngedouw 2007; Allmendinger and Haughton 2012). As Peter Marcuse explains, the notion of sustainability depicts planning in rationalist and technocratic terms such that “if we all simply recognized our common interests everything would be fine” (Marcuse 1998). In reality, the sustainable city is constituted through an array of distinct problematizations, each of which articulate a particular set of concerns to the possibilities suggested by a new sustainable planning paradigm. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to begin to map this landscape, to draw out the ways in which problems of growth, redevelopment, environmental protection, quality of life, and socio-spatial equity are in their particular ways becoming attached or articulated to the notion of the sustainable city.

### **Neoliberalism Meets Sustainable Development: Roll-out Sustainability?**

The sustainable city presents a puzzle of sorts. For urban political economists, the basic critical project of the last twenty years has been to identify and explain the various manifestations of neoliberal capitalism in cities. The characteristics of development, the logic of planning policy, the socio-spatial structure of opportunity and exclusion, have all been fruitfully analyzed through the lens of neoliberal urbanism. The rise of sustainable urban planning,

however, appears to run counter to this understanding of development as hopelessly dominated by entrepreneurial planning norms that systematically disregard the socio-environmental consequences of growth. Instead, sustainable cities would seem to herald a return to interventionist planning on the part of the state in order to mitigate the externalities of growth and better align development with community use values. How are we to understand this apparent tension? As Mike Raco explains: “many of the premises and underlying rationalities of the approaches seem diametrically opposed in both conceptual and empirical terms, yet both are variously characterized as the dominant principles underpinning planning and development strategies and agendas” (Raco 2005).

For many critical scholars, the answer to this puzzle is to be found in a fuller understanding of the relationship between sustainable urbanism and the politics of growth. While the assumption is often that growth actors and coalitions are necessarily opposed to any form of planning regulation or guidance that might limit the freedom of market relations, the reality is often more complex. Sustainable planning practices do impose constraints on traditional forms of auto-centric suburban development, but in practice growth in advanced capitalist cities increasingly *depends* on these city-building strategies (Laidley 2007; Brand and Thomas 2005; Jonas and While 2007). Sustainable planning norms, in other words, are increasingly seen by growth actors as necessary in order to reinvigorate growth regimes that have become dysfunctional and disconnected from the wider institutional milieu.

This understanding of the economic function of sustainable urbanism can be read through Peck and Tickell’s schema of ‘roll-back’ and ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism. For Peck and Tickell, contemporary growth politics are characterized by a tension between, on the one hand, an impulse to dismantle public sector regulation and extend the scope of market-led coordination

and, on the other hand, a simultaneous recognition of the need for state sanctioned institutional supports (Peck and Tickell 2002). Since the 1980s, neoliberal ideology has emphasized the superiority of private markets, and hence on the need to abandon traditional forms of public provision and reduce the scale and scope of regulatory control. Efforts to ‘roll-back’ state functions, however, often lead to externalities that necessitate the ‘roll-out’ of new forms of public sector engagement and re-regulation. The essential insight here is that capitalist growth depends in myriad ways on non-market modes of coordination. When this dependency is neglected, neoliberal governance invariably leads to instabilities and contradictions that call forth new negotiated strategies to manage growth (see Gough 2002).

Broadly speaking, we can distinguish three routes by which sustainable urbanism contributes to the renewal and realignment of urban growth politics (though in practice, these pathways often overlap and intersect). First, ideas of sustainable planning have been taken up in response to a crisis of growth management in many large urban regions. This crisis, which is manifested in problems like intensifying traffic congestion, has pointed to a rupture between the modernist planning paradigm and the after-Fordist institutional milieu. The logics of universal automobile dependency, functionally segregated land use planning, and radical suburban sprawl no longer appear effective as a framework for organizing urban growth.

The postwar ‘city on the highway’ (Hall 2013) came to maturity in an institutional context defined by Fordist-era commitments to state led socio-economic coordination. At the local scale, these commitments took the form of ‘managerial’ policy regimes concerned with translating infrastructure and welfare spending into rational modes of city-building (Harvey 1989). A hallmark of this approach was a commitment to comprehensive planning, often located at metropolitan or regional scales, designed to anticipate growth trajectories and to coordinate

land use and transportation policy (see Hall 2014; Brenner 2002). By actively dictating the geographies of urban growth and coordinating development with infrastructure policy, the state was able support suburbanization whilst ensuring that labour markets and transportation systems remained functionally integrated.

The neoliberal turn of the 1980s, however, ushered in two interrelated changes that contributed to the collapse of this mode of rational suburban development. The first involved the replacement of comprehensive planning by new forms of collaborative public-private planning. This shift was part of a wider push for deregulation in the planning sphere, based on a belief that planning rules were imposing unnecessary constraints on growth. Planners were expected to abrogate their traditional role as a counterweight to markets and instead work actively with the private sector to facilitate development 'by any means necessary' (Hall 2014). The result was an erosion of metropolitan-scale coordination, the intensification of inter-municipal competition, the opening-up of more greenfield development opportunities, and a greater overall deference towards developers in determining the where and when of urban growth.

The second change involved a shift in modes of urban infrastructure provision. In the postwar period, urban infrastructure policy was governed according to what Graham and Marvin referred to as the 'modern infrastructural ideal'. An aspect of comprehensive planning regimes, this ideal held that urban space should be knit together by common access to a core set of bundled infrastructures (Graham and Marvin 2001). With the collapse of Keynesianism and the neoliberal turn towards state austerity, however, universalism was displaced by a more circumscribed, targeted, project-oriented approach. A combination of retrenchment and supply-side reform saw infrastructure policy reoriented away from basic network provision and towards

a concern with maximizing the economic impact of selective public investments (Dodson 2009; Kirkpatrick and Smith 2011; Haughton and McManus 2012).

There was a basic tension embedded within this growth model, which sought to expand the scope of market-led planning and constrain the financial and regulatory reach of the state sector. By rolling back the state's capacity for comprehensive planning and by promoting inter-municipal competition for development, neoliberal urbanism encouraged more chaotic and functionally fractured forms of suburban and exurban growth (Filion 2001; Desfor et al. 2006). In the absence of public sector coordination, developers and consumers took advantage of low cost lands and rapidly stretched metropolitan regions further than integrated planning would have allowed. Perversely, though, one of the principal effects of this exaggerated form of low density decentralization was to increase demand for public infrastructure, in particular for roads and highways.

In contrast to many early postwar suburbs, residential and commercial suburbs built during the 1980s and 90s were almost entirely automobile-dependent, and integrating these spaces into the metropolitan fabric put enormous strain on public road networks (see Perl and Pucher 1995). As a result, neoliberal planning regimes pressed in contradictory directions. On the one hand, public-private planning denied the state a meaningful role in controlling the where-and-when of development or the capacity to require efficient infrastructure practices. On the other hand, the state's ability to respond to rising infrastructure demand was constrained by prevailing austerity norms (see Filion and Kramer 2012).

Over time, this contradiction generated a crisis of growth management, manifesting in an array of much maligned urban policy problems. Traffic congestion intensified, labour and housing markets fractured, infrastructure deficits mounted, and local governments faced

increasingly tenuous fiscal situations. For policymakers, it was unclear how to resolve this dilemma. While it was apparent that conditions for growth had become divorced from the capacities of the state (that is, the state no longer had the resources or regulatory tools needed to solve collective action problems in the development arena), the supply-side pressures of after-Fordism continued to limit government's ability to reactivate traditional levers.

Sustainable planning reform is being mobilized as a response to this institutional dilemma, as an attempt to bring conditions for urban growth back into alignment with the capacities of the state. Critical scholars have been at pains however to emphasize that the dominant interpretation of sustainability, particularly as instantiated in the concept of 'smart growth', remains firmly rooted in a growth-first development ideology. Smart growth emphasizes the benefits of compact growth, mixed or integrated land use planning, and transit-oriented development. In this sense, it is clearly opposed to the logic of neoliberal sprawl, which it depicts as irrational, inefficient, and unlivable (Burchell 2005). At the same time, however, the notion of smart growth has often been articulated in such a way that it seems to sustain rather than truly challenge the practice of neoliberal urbanism.

There are two aspects of this conception of smart growth that have made it particularly amenable to integration into existing systems of neoliberal urban governance. First, smart growth has commonly been depicted as a paradigm designed to work with rather than against markets. That is, rather than impose onerous regulations or prohibit certain types of development, smart growth promises to create the conditions under which *smart* growth can compete against sprawl in the marketplace (Burchell et al. 2005). Within such a paradigm, the job of the state is not so much to reprise its role as comprehensive planner, but rather to create an institutional framework in which market actors (and developers in particular), come to associate their interests with the

project of compact, integrated, and transit-oriented growth. The objective is to make sustainable development profitable. This can be seen in the kinds of planning tools and incentives commonly associated with smart growth: tools like brownfield remediation subsidies, zoning allowances and density bonuses, tax abatements, and public investment in neighbourhood infrastructure and amenities (Krueger and Gibbs 2008). Here, the state functions in the role of collective capitalist, working to foster the conditions needed to construct of a new kind of growth coalition: the ‘smart growth machine’ (Gearin 2004; Dilworth and Stokes 2012).

The second way in which smart growth becomes reconciled to the neoliberal project is via a self-conscious adaptation to conditions of austerity. In the 1980s and 90s, many North American municipalities were pressed into a tenuous fiscal position by a combination of senior government cuts and the ideological empowerment of conservative ratepayers hostile to the property tax and associated levies (Slack 2006; 2013). In this context, governments eager to support local economic development began to search out novel ways to finance growth. One manifestation of this was the proliferation of public-private partnerships, privatization measures, and speculative financing instruments designed in various ways to channel private capital into the built environment for collective purposes (Kirkpatrick and Smith 2011; Haughton and McManus 2012). The other manifestation was a renewed interest in improving the efficiency of growth as a means of reducing public sector obligations. Smart growth has emerged as an important piece of this strategy.

The articulation of smart growth to concerns about fiscal sustainability has helped to align the movement in somewhat surprising ways with a local political consensus, led by homeowners, ratepayer associations, and their political representatives, around the need to ‘do more with less’ (Pollard 2000). While the high per capita costs of suburban infrastructure and

service provision were compatible under expansionary conditions of postwar Keynesianism, many smart growth advocates have sought to position the paradigm as a rational response to a contemporary logic of restraint (Katz and Muro 2003). This has involved both an accounting of sprawl's fiscal costs and a comparison of these costs against a more compact and integrated alternative. A meta-analysis developed by a leading national organization, for example, argued that the fiscal benefits of smart growth included: a reduction of infrastructure capital costs of over one-third; a ten percent reduction in spending on municipal emergency services; and a ten-fold increase in per acre tax revenue (Smart Growth American 2015; Burchell et al. 2005).

This ideational relationship between smart growth and the logic of neoliberal urbanism has led Rob Krueger and David Gibbs to describe the paradigm as a form of 'third wave sustainability'. With this allusion to a 'third wave', the authors mean to locate this conception of sustainable city-building in relation to a broader institutional trend towards the decoupling of state and market. Smart growth, according to this view, is part of a broader matrix of policy frameworks that eschew a more interventionist, command-and-control approach to regulation in favour of a more facilitative role. It is a strategy that tries to encourage more coherent and rational development whilst remaining firmly within a market-oriented institutional script (Krueger and Gibbs 2008).

This leads to a second route by which sustainable urbanism becomes enmeshed with the renewal of urban growth politics. This involves an alignment between sustainability and the logic of urban entrepreneurialism, or what Jonas and While have referred to as 'greening the entrepreneurial city' (Jonas and While 2007). Whereas suburban growth management strategies have been concerned with mitigating the externalities of auto-centric sprawl, including its excessive fiscal burden, entrepreneurial strategies draw on sustainable planning discourse and

practice as part of a more proactive programme of economic development. This programme involves the use of sustainability as framework or architecture through which to organize a ‘new economy of the inner city’ based on the revalorization of urban lands and investment in cognitive-cultural sectors.

The interpenetration of sustainable urbanism and entrepreneurial economic development is tied to the evolving geography of post-industrial capitalism and its rediscovery of urbanity. The so-called ‘new economy’ is comprised of leading cognitive-cultural sectors that have taken root in central cities for a variety of reasons, including benefits of agglomeration, access to skilled labour, and even an aesthetic preference for industrial-era building stock (Hutton 2004; Barnes and Hutton 2009; Scott 2008). For entrepreneurial cities eager ascend the post-industrial value chain, the problem of economic development has become closely bound-up with a perceived need to create supportive conditions for this kind investment. According to the new conventional wisdom, this requires not just attention to local business costs, but also an emphasis on developing appealing place qualities. Firms and workers in these high value cognitive cultural sectors are increasingly drawn to multi-use environments that are vibrant and walkable, mixing public gathering spaces easily with retail, housing, and workspaces (Florida 2002; Katz and Wagner 2014). For policymakers, this demand has translated into a focus on amenity-oriented economic development strategies, which mobilize zoning policies, public institutional anchors, beautification initiatives, and strategic infrastructure investment to craft hospitable environments (see Clark et al. 2002).

The interpenetration of entrepreneurial and sustainable urbanism has been seen as working in two directions. In one direction, sustainable planning regimes are becoming the preferred institutional framework through which inner urban redevelopment initiatives are

enacted (Krueger and Buckingham 2012). The practice of built restructuring depends on the existence of planning regimes to institutionalize appropriate zoning reforms (to enable, for example, building stock conversions and mixed-use development), to organize new transportation infrastructures (like cycling lanes and public transit), and to develop public space amenities. What critical scholars have observed is that large-scale redevelopment initiatives increasingly take form via the practices of sustainable planning. In its prioritization of intensification, integrated planning, and mixed use development, sustainable urbanism offers a resonant set of planning concepts and modalities for economic development officials eager to transform inner urban space. The discourse and practice of sustainable planning gives form to the contemporary post-industrial imaginary and its vision of ‘clean, green’ urban regeneration (While et al. 2004).

In the other direction, the logics of amenity-oriented economic development, including ideas associated with Florida’s creative class thesis, are also reflecting back onto the logics of sustainable urbanism. In the process, these ideas are colouring mainstream policy understandings of what sustainable city-building can and should look like. In his influential account of smart growth reform in Austin, for example, Eugene McCann argues that the social vision of sustainability, structured around concepts like ‘quality of life’ and ‘livability’, is being informed primarily by economic development officials’ assumptions about the lifestyle aspirations of affluent, educated, and ‘creative’ workers (McCann 2008). These elite-defined visions of urbanity extend a narrow and privatized cultural conception of what is missing from the urban milieu, one that stresses the importance of activity-filled street life, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, access to commuter transit, diversified home ownership forms, an expanded menu of local retail, and a sanitized public realm. This understanding of ‘good’ development is

increasingly being coded directly into the vision statements, zoning reforms, and transportation policies that constitute sustainable planning (Krueger and Buckingham 2012). As a result of this convergence, the mainstream understanding of what is required by the social pillar of sustainability is more and more being reduced to a concern with developing live-work-play spaces for affluent professionals employed in strategic sectors.

Finally, a third and closely related point of interpenetration is associated with the mobilization of sustainability discourses as instruments of ideological legitimation. Sustainability speak, according to critical scholars, is contributing to a new post-political condition at the urban scale, whereby the strategic deployment of holistic discourses works to minimize the space for political critique (Allmendinger and Haughton 2014; Swyngedouw 2007). This post-political condition can be read as a point of departure for the ‘new urban politics’ in which the traditional tensions between use and exchange values are effaced by new modes of ideological consensus-building (Macleod and Jones 2011).

Historically, entrepreneurial redevelopment has been a highly contested process, with civic groups attempting to combat the exchange-oriented interests of growth coalitions either by defending the existing community fabric or demanding protection against social exclusions. In the 1970s and 80s, for example, urban renewal schemes and megaproject development fell out of favour in many places often due to effective political opposition from neighbourhood associations and social justice groups. The return of large urban redevelopment initiatives in recent years has thus been marked by efforts to mitigate this kind of oppositional politics. One of the ways in which boosters and land developers have attempted to do this is by positioning revitalization projects within progressive or holistic discourses that try explicitly to transcend the

value-free ideologies of traditional growth machines (Orueta and Fainstein 2008; Clarke et al. 2002).

Representations of sustainable city-building have become particularly prominent and effective examples of this depoliticizing strategy. The essence of this strategy has been to frame projects as a progressive and necessary alternative to auto-centric sprawl, with its attendant socio-environmental externalities. Traditionally, the ideological strategy of growth actors has been to depict growth as ‘value free’ – whatever consequences development might bring, the benefits of growth, it was suggested, would outweigh the costs. The language of sustainability enables a different type of ideological framing. Distended suburban sprawl is acknowledged as a dysfunctional mode of development, but as a result ‘smart’ or sustainable development, as the alternative, becomes imbued with a progressive sheen. By shifting the conceptual terrain in this way, critical scholars have argued that entrepreneurial actors are able to short circuit concerns about, in particular, the exclusionary effects of development. Once planning distinguishes between good and bad growth, the particularities of ‘good’ growth no longer seem a matter of real political concern (Bunce 2004; 2009; Laidley 2007).

In this ideological context, concerns about social inclusion and neighbourhood preservation do not disappear, but they become harder to sustain because they are forced to compete against a broader narrative that celebrates the benefits of ‘smart’ growth. To oppose redevelopment, even in the name of socio-spatial justice, is to line up in opposition to all the other progressive forces aligned against the social and environmental effects of automobile-centric sprawl. This effect has been particularly pernicious in debates around gentrification and displacement. The incorporation of sustainability discourse within state led regeneration schemes

has had the effect, according to critical gentrification scholars, of muting or marginalizing voices concerned about the effects of economic upgrading in the inner city.

Noah Quastel, for example, has probed the role of sustainability discourses in propelling processes of state-led or third wave gentrification. State-led gentrification, one of the hallmarks of late neoliberal urbanism, has been characterized by a more direct role for state actors in large-scale redevelopment initiatives designed to change the socio-economic composition of the inner city (Rose 2010). For Quastel, an important aspect of this process is the use of sustainability discourses to justify the extension of intensification policies into vulnerable neighbourhoods. The use of such discourses help to change the face of gentrification, covering over the exclusionary effects of development by insisting on the progressive necessity of sustainable planning objectives. This is an ideological project he refers to as ‘eco-gentrification’ (Quastel 2009; Quastel et al. 2012).

### **A Place for Politics? Sustainability as Social and Environmental Policy**

Critical sustainability studies has sought to position itself in opposition to mainstream or normative accounts of sustainable city-building. This normative perspective begins from the premise that it is possible to align economic, social, and environmental demands in some ideal way by implementing an appropriate mix of planning reforms. Underwritten by a technocratic and rationalist mode of policy analysis, mainstream study asks: what measures are required to make cities more sustainable, and what are the institutional barriers to implementing these measures? The progressive content of the sustainable city, in other words, is taken for granted.

The concern for analysts and policymakers is to discover and implement the ‘right’ planning agenda (see Whitehead 2003).

Critical sustainability studies, by contrast, are rooted in a tradition of urban political economy that understands the practice of city-building as necessarily mediated by political and ideological struggle (Brenner 2009). This tradition is characterized by a deep skepticism about the possibility of post-political reconciliation through technocratic management. Post-political representations of sustainability as a mode of holistic or three pillar policymaking treat as contingent conflicts that are in fact an inherent feature of built restructuring under capitalism (see Swyngedouw 2009; Allmendinger and Haughton 2012; Marcuse 1998). The objective of critical sustainability scholarship has been to bring these conflicts into the open by uncovering the distributional stakes at play, thereby exposing the deeply ideological content of the sustainable city and related concepts.

Motivated by this concern with the post-political ideology of sustainable-city building, a natural tendency of much of this work has been to emphasize the ways in which sustainable urbanism actually works with rather than against the logic of neoliberal and entrepreneurial urbanism. In answer to the puzzle or paradox of sustainable development, this line of analysis suggests that sustainability is embraced precisely to the extent that it contributes to the renewal of urban growth politics. This tendency has been described by Kevin Ward and Andrew Jonas as rooted in an exchange-relations view of the city, a view in which the city is understood first and foremost as a site of production and competition (Ward and Jonas 2004; Jonas and Ward 2007). Because such analyses privilege the dynamics of territorial competition, the intuition is to emphasize the ways in which sustainability functions to shore-up the externalities of a neoliberal political economy.

The difficulty with this exchange-oriented reading, however, is that it will often discount the demand or use-oriented dimensions of the political-economy, denying any proper place to a politics concerned with the character of urban life or the demands of social reproduction. The point is not that exchange-oriented accounts of ‘roll-out sustainability’ are wrong – they expose very real aspects of ideological hegemony in many cities. The point rather is that such accounts are *partial* as they fail to properly account for the diversity of state imperatives and the necessarily political constitution of the sustainability fix (Raco 2005). Key here is an account of the state as not simply a guarantor of capital, but also a site for the legitimation of the political economy and the negotiation of use and exchange values (Ward and Jonas 2004; Purcell 2002). The sustainable city is produced at the intersection of a number of distinct imaginaries, each of which understands sustainability as a solution to a particular subset of governance problems. The construction of a dominant or hegemonic vision of sustainable urbanism involves some degree of negotiation or struggle over the articulation or interpenetration of these various strands.

In this section, I want to draw out in some detail the social and environmental imaginaries that also populate the space of sustainable urbanism. Though these problematizations are distinct, they are united by the fact that they are in important respects non-economic – they are rooted in ideational concerns related to the socio-environmental qualities of the city. Of course, this does not preclude their incorporation into broader economic imaginaries, particularly in a context in which understandings of systemic competitiveness have become more encompassing. Yet, the fact that non-economic concerns might be interpreted in economic terms does not imply that such concerns can or should be *reduced* to the demands of entrepreneurial growth or neoliberal urbanism. How various ideas are managed, contested, aligned, or re-articulated is an inherently

political process, and one that can only be grasped once the complexity of the ideational terrain is given its due.

First, I want to begin with the place of environmental imaginaries in the constitution of sustainable urbanism. Historically, the environmental problematic has received scant attention in the political economic study of urban development. According to the New Urban Politics, for example, the principal axis of conflict involves struggles over use and exchange values. Environmental concerns have tended to fit uneasily within this schema. For a number of reasons, however, this exclusion no longer appears tenable. In the current conjuncture, the relationship between the environment and the urban has undergone a profound shift, with the result that environmental narratives occupy a much more prominent place in debates about urban development and reform. The constitution of the sustainable city as a new ‘hegemonic paradigm of metropolitan development’ (Whitehead 2003), is in significant part a reflection of this process of incorporation.

The under-theorization of environmental policy has been taken-up by a number of urban political economists who see environmental governance as a key site of after-Fordist restructuring. While regulation-inspired accounts of ‘glocalization’ have pointed to the reorganization of economic and social regulation in areas related to competitiveness, labour markets, and social policy, they have tended to neglect questions of environmental governance. Yet, the environmental sphere has similarly been a site of state spatial restructuring, including the localization of regulatory responsibility. This dynamic has been described by While, Jonas and Gibbs as ‘eco-state restructuring’ (While et al. 2010). The state’s experience with the process of ecological modernization, through which the state has accepted new obligations related to the threat of, in particular, global climate change, has involved a search for new policy

configurations that reconcile environmental norms with other state imperatives. The urban has figured as a prominent site in this process of state restructuring.

The urbanization of environmental agendas has been made possible by a radical reconfiguration of how cities are conceptualized vis-à-vis the natural environment. In general, the rise of popular environmentalism in the 1970s tended to be associated with a pejorative conception of the urban, one in which cities were conceived primarily as a source of environmental harm and an expression of the late capitalism's neglect of ecological relations. The urbanization of the sustainable development agenda, particularly through initiatives like Local Agenda 21, helped to transform this understanding of the urban. In contrast to traditional environmental accounts of the urban as a kind of anti-nature, the notion of sustainable urban development recast cities as important sites for cultivating solutions to the environmental crisis. Drawing on the ideas and values of neo-traditional urbanism, cities were re-imagined as sites for reforming the excesses of automobile dependency and decentralized sprawl, replacing them with a new vision of efficient and environmentally sensitive urban growth.

The mainstream acceptance of local sustainability concepts has been accompanied by a profound shift in the normativity of urban governance. The logic of the Fordist built environment was made possible by an externalized view of nature, one which worked to mask the ecological effects of urban life. The embrace of auto-centric sprawl was dependent on an understanding of the city as independent and isolated from the surrounding natural environment, and thus immune from and unconcerned with the degradation of environments 'outside'. With the rise of sustainable urbanism, this externalized view of nature has given way to one that brings environmental concerns directly into the planning and development process (Keil and Graham 1998). With the explosion of research on the environmental effects of auto-centric sprawl,

environmental concerns have become an inescapable feature of planning debates such that decisions are increasingly expected to address in some way their relation to environmental problematics.

In the political sphere, one of the important effects of this shift towards an internalized conception of urban natures has been to alter the terrain of alliance building and coalition formation. As norms of environmental sustainability have become increasingly taken-for-granted, actors and imaginaries representing these concerns have acquired a greater degree of influence. More and more, the legitimization of development depends on the incorporation of environmental discourses and interests into local governing regimes. As a result, alliances between local environmentalists and growth actors (alliances that would have been viewed as politically and theoretically problematic in the past), are increasingly being formed around state projects of smart growth reform (Gibbs and Jonas 2000).

To be clear, the local environmental turn does necessarily herald the transcendence of neoliberal urbanism or preclude the incorporation of environmental norms within neoliberal growth regimes. Many critical scholars, for example, have observed a tendency for environmental concerns to be taken up in relatively shallow or cynical ways, often in terms designed to advance complementary economic objectives (While et al. 2004; Portney 2003;). The essential point, however, is that these environmental norms are tied to a set of policy concerns that, though potentially reconcilable with certain modes of economic development, are not themselves reducible to problems of growth or competitiveness. As While et al. make clear, “even if the reality of implementation has so far had a mixed record, issues of the environment and sustainability are becoming central concepts of ‘good governance’ ...” (While et al. 2010).

The same argument can be made with respect to the articulation of sustainability agendas to problems of collective provision and urban quality of life. Above, I argued that one of the important ways in which sustainable planning articulates to the economic sphere is as a perceived solution to problems of growth management. The contradictory tendencies of neoliberal urbanism have produced a crisis of collective provision that threatens to slow circulation and fracture labour and housing markets. For the ‘smart growth machine’, sustainable city logics of efficiency, reintegration, and intensification can be mobilized as an answer to the dilemmas of suburban sprawl that threaten to undermine long term growth prospects. Yet, as pointed as the economic consequences of these growth dilemmas are, the crisis of collective provision is clearly not one that is limited to the economic sphere. As Kevin Ward and Andrew Jonas argue, the pressures that states face to resolve contemporary growth dilemmas also emanate from corresponding and partially overlapping concerns in the sphere of daily social reproduction (Ward and Jonas 2004).

For Ward and Jonas, the politics of collective provision involves the management of both exchange and use value demands on the state. The contradictions of neoliberal growth challenge the expanded reproduction of capital, but they also have profound effects on the city as a place for living, effects that the state must also come to terms with. To take one obvious example, the politicization of traffic congestion in recent years has involved not just local chambers of commerce and boards of trade, but also residents and workers who are looking to the state to act on an intensifying ‘crisis of mobility’ (Docherty et al. 2004). For capital, the problem of congestion is perceived in terms of labour access and turnover time, but for residents, congestion exposes a very different set of issues. It is experienced as a challenge of social reproduction – that is, as a challenge of coordinating the spatio-temporal complexities of work and home life.

The sustainable city, on this view, is a response not just to the economic dilemmas of after-Fordist urbanism, but also the failures of collective provision under conditions of neoliberal development. More than this, the sustainable city might best be understood as a space through which the politics of economic development and social reproduction are negotiated (Krueger and Savage 2007). This more encompassing perspective is in effect a return to Harvey's original conception of the spatial fix, with its attention to the structured coherence between capital and labour in space. The holistic language of sustainable development operates as a strategic space in which the state is seeking to re-establish conditions for both functional and *legitimate* development.

Again, attending to the interaction between the politics of economic development and social reproduction is not to suggest that this meeting takes place on an even terrain, that the state is not strategically selective in the way that it incorporates ideas and institutional logics. One of the key criticisms of sustainable urbanism, for example, is that, while it may seek to redress social concerns related to collective provision, the tendency has been to do so in ways that reinforce rather than mitigate existing structures of socio-spatial inequality. This has been particularly apparent in the mobilization of discourses around 'quality of life' and urban 'livability'. As Eugene McCann has argued, one of the principal ideational constructs employed by sustainable governance to address concerns around collective provision has been to articulate lifestyle concerns to a more expansive conception of systemic competitiveness. The result is that the social dimension of sustainability becomes construed in very narrow terms, as a way of ensuring that the city's core labour force is able to live and work with relative ease and in accord with prevailing cultural norms (McCann 2002; 2008; Krueger and Buckingham 2008).

Here too, however, we need to be careful. It is certainly true that the marrying of quality of life discourses with the norms of sustainability has resulted in a prioritization of concerns related to suburban commuting, access to recreational greenspace, housing diversity, and middle class affordability, as well as a corresponding neglect of concerns related to socio-spatial equity and inclusion. The ambiguity of sustainability's social lens has left the paradigm open to post-political forms of co-optation. At the same time, by re-introducing equity norms into the policy process the concept of urban sustainability, has created an ideational terrain that invites new progressive imaginaries. The mobilization of sustainability by dominant interests or classes has not precluded its simultaneous use by subordinate interests, who have sought to tie the principles of sustainability to social policy agendas (Davidson 2010; Raco 2005; Krueger and Agyeman 2005).

The notion of the sustainable city, in other words, introduces a new avenue by which actors can articulate their demands for equitable city-building. Mark Davidson, for example, has documented the ways in which community organizations have worked to adapt their projects to the logics of sustainable urbanism. This has meant articulating the concept of social sustainability to more familiar concepts, such as social inclusion, social capital, cohesion, and equity (Davidson 2009). By embracing the notion of sustainable city-building, including its premise of three pillar development, planners and policymakers implicitly or explicitly acknowledge social development as a necessary objective. This, in turn, creates space for progressive actors to make demands on the state by drawing connections between the modalities of sustainable planning and the possibility of more equitable urban forms.

This dynamic is perhaps most clearly visible in the engagement of the environmental justice movement with the politics of sustainability and smart growth. The environmental justice

(EJ) movement emerged in the United States in the 1980s and 90s as part of a broader mobilization against the expression of class and race-based inequality through the environmental planning process. The movement originated in campaigns against the siting of toxic and polluting facilities, which were shown to locate disproportionately in proximity to low income minority communities. The concept of environmental justice was intended to highlight the ways in which privileged classes dominate the practice of environmental planning, appropriating the benefits of resource exploitation while externalizing costs onto communities excluded from the process (Bullard et al. 1997).

With the urban sustainability turn in the early 2000s, groups associated with the EJ movement began to engage with the emerging practices of sustainable planning. This engagement was informed by an underlying critique of the socio-spatial exclusions of suburban sprawl. While the postwar class accord incorporated a growing middle class into a new suburban consumption norm, it had a corresponding parasitic effect on inner city communities who were denied the opportunity to participate equally in suburban mass society (Beauregard 2006). The modernist wave of decentralized sprawl not only starved inner urban communities of jobs, investment, services and amenities, it reorganized the landscape of urban opportunity around the spatio-temporalities of auto-centric suburbanism. Low income and minority communities were structurally shut out from this world of suburban opportunity through an exclusionary mix of zoning, labour market, housing, and transport policies that institutionalized race and class polarization in the fabric of the built environment (Bullard 2000).

For many community organizations, there appeared to be a natural affinity between this equity-oriented critique of suburban sprawl and the logic of sustainability and smart growth. Both emphasized the externalities of automobile-centric development and envisioned a new

planning paradigm based around a reintegration of land use and support for public transport. Viewed from this perspective, the sustainability turn suggested an opportunity to counteract the exclusions of the postwar accord and establish a more equitable and less commodified pattern of urban development. Yet, there was also an acknowledgement on the part of many scholars and activists that smart growth as manifest in mainstream planning practice demonstrated little substantive concern with problems of socio-spatial equity. There was clearly progressive potential latent within sustainable urbanism, but the problem became how to realize this potential in conceptual and practical terms.

One influential response to this problem has been the concept of ‘just sustainability’, developed by Julian Agyeman and colleagues, including Robert Bullard and Bob Evans. The concept of just sustainability was designed to bring the historic concerns of the environmental justice movement into closer alignment with the practices of urban sustainability. Whereas mainstream sustainability was concerned overwhelmingly with issues of resource efficiency, the objective of the just sustainability paradigm was to give equity considerations equal weight alongside, in particular, environmental concerns (Agyeman et al. 2003). Using the lens of ‘just sustainability’, Agyeman and his colleagues have documented a wide range of examples in which community organizations are using the concept and practice of urban sustainability to advance goals of social and environmental justice. Examples include community design programs that assist low-income neighbourhoods in guiding sustainable regeneration in their communities, energy retrofit funds for low income households, and the use of community benefit agreements to promote local employment and affordable housing in transit-oriented developments (Agyeman and Evans 2003).

For Agyeman, the point is not to ignore the inequalities of mainstream sustainable urbanism. Rather, it is to acknowledge the diversity of ‘actually existing’ political activity. When we do this, the reality of sustainable urbanism begins to look more ‘schizophrenic’; that is, characterized by a range of different discourses and practices (Krueger and Agyeman 2005). Clearly, it is essential that we attend to the institutional context within which sustainable cities have emerged and draw out the role that planning reform plays in the reproduction of neoliberal modalities of governance. At the same time, however, it is also important that we attend to the complexities of political production in the real world and allow for the possibility of ‘hybrid’ policy rationalities in which the demands of neoliberalism exist alongside and in tension with other logics of governance (Raco 2005). This calls, I would argue, for empirical case studies that treat cities as genuine places for politics.

## Chapter 4

### The Sustainability Fix and the Political Economy of Public Transit:

#### Searching for a Transit Fix?

##### Introduction

The object of Chapter 2 was to explore the contours of an emergent ‘sustainability fix’. Sustainable urbanism is on this view understood as a response to the dilemmas of after-Fordist urban governance, an attempt to re-orient the practices of urban development in ways that render them more coherent with contemporary state strategies and projects. It argued that ideas of sustainable urbanism are constituted through different imaginaries, each oriented around a different understanding of pre-eminent policy problems. In the current conjuncture, the dominant interpretation of sustainable planning articulates it to problems of growth and competitiveness and conceptualizes it in terms compatible with market-led development. It ‘rolls-out’ the sustainable city, legitimizing it through discourses related to amenity-oriented development, creativity, the knowledge-based economy, and the dilemmas of sprawl. There are, however, imaginaries that, rather than begin from a concern with sustainability’s relationship to economic and growth-related dilemmas, begin from a concern with environmental sustainability or conditions of socio-spatial equity. Here, social and environmental policy objectives are not co-benefits of economic reform, but the primary object of governance, a condition of policy legitimacy.

The object of this chapter is to extend this analysis by probing at a finer scale the political economic dynamics of sustainable urbanism. This refinement is necessary in order to bring into fuller view the politics of sustainable city-building. The sustainable city writ large is too complex and multifaceted a construct to evaluate at a fine grain of analysis and so in this chapter I engage

with the specificity and nuance that inheres within one particular aspect of sustainable urbanism: transit-oriented reform. Critical sustainability literature provides an essential context for understanding the state's re-engagement with public transit policy – the proliferation of transit-oriented reform agendas only makes sense within the context of a wider search for an after-Fordist sustainability fix. At the same time, however, I want to make the case that attending more carefully to the intricacies of transit policy, to its specific material practices and ideological representations, can also help to illuminate important features of sustainable urbanism.

Transit policy provides a particularly useful window onto the wider dynamics of sustainable urbanism for at least three reasons. First, and perhaps most obviously, the problem of public transit seems to lie at the very core of the sustainable city agenda. The failures of postwar urbanism are inextricably bound-up with its relation to the automobile, which made possible the radical decentralization and fragmentation that characterize North American suburban sprawl (Sheller and Urry 2000). More than anything else, it is the perception that automobility has been extended to its socio-technical limits that is propelling the search for a sustainability fix. The perception that sustainable urbanism is inextricably bound to the transcendence of automobility has given rise to strategies that place a special priority on re-imagining the logic of mobility, moving away from the maximalist disposition of postwar planning towards a more balanced and integrated view of the relationship between transportation and land use.

This is exemplified in the contemporary embrace of ideas related to transit-oriented urban reform, most notably concepts like 'transit-oriented development' (TOD). Transit-oriented development and related approaches have emerged in close association with the smart growth movement but place more explicit emphasis on the importance of integrated transport and land use reform. For advocates of transit-oriented reform, the success of sustainable urbanism

depends on its ability to challenge the modernist prioritization of the automobile relative to all other forms of mobility. This priority is the original sin of modernist planning, the choice from which all other failures flow. Urban sustainability requires first and foremost attending to the overwhelming dominance of the automobile in urban life, to intervening in the forces that have propelled rising rates of automobile travel from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward.

Reform strategies like transit-oriented development attempt to invert the modal hierarchy that places the automobile at the apex of transport planning. TOD, for example, prioritizes mass transit for moderate and long distance travel, and walking and cycling for shorter distances. And like smart growth more generally, TOD emphasizes the importance of land use planning and neighbourhood design to transportation reform. The prioritization of mass transit depends on designing neighbourhoods at appropriate densities, fostering walkable and cycle-friendly environments, and concentrating activity in nodes linked through expanded mass transit networks (Ditmar et al. 2004). Together, these practices challenge the modernist notion that *more* mobility is inherently desirable, that the object of transport policy should always be to facilitate maximal movement. Instead, transit-oriented development suggests that smart growth should prioritize accessibility rather than mobility, emphasizing transport and land use policies that connect people and places in ways that require less travel.

Second, transit-oriented reform offers a useful window onto the political-economy of sustainable urbanism because it occupies an increasingly prominent place in after-Fordist debates about the governance of growth. In recent years, transit has emerged as a primary site for large-scale strategic public investment, often in association with land redevelopment projects. In the United States, for example, when measured in 2015 constant dollars, federal appropriations for public transportation have increased from approximately \$6 billion in 1995 to nearly \$11 billion

in 2015. This spending has helped to spur the development of over 2000 miles of new urban rail since 2005 (APTA 2015; Ditmar et al. 2004; Banister et al. 2007). In Canada, transit infrastructure spending has increased from approximately \$1 billion in 2001 to nearly \$4.5 billion in 2010 (2010 constant dollars, CUTA 2011). The scale of investment has imbued public transit policy with special strategic significance because it has become a principal means by which public capital is being used to leverage change in the built environment. As a result, transit is operating as a flashpoint for struggles over the role of the state in collective provision and consumption.

An important reason for this new strategic significance is the evolving relationship between transit-oriented planning reform, urban growth, and economic development. As discussed in the previous chapter, the embrace of sustainable urbanism has been driven in significant part by the demand for new development modalities that address the growth management dilemmas of suburban sprawl and better align with post-industrial production dynamics and consumer preferences. Transit-oriented development is being positioned as a powerful response to these demands. With the articulation of a ‘new realism’ in transport planning, road building has been challenged as a solution to suburban congestion. Investments in transit and supportive land use planning are increasingly viewed as a preferred response to an intensifying ‘crisis of mobility’ (Docherty et al. 2004). Furthermore, transit-oriented development is also emerging as an instrument of urban revitalization, tied to visions of ‘creative’, knowledge-based sectoral upgrading. For urban boosters, public transit projects are more and more seen as a part of a valuable post-industrial brand, as well as a lever for attracting capital and promoting reinvestment.

Finally, transit-oriented policy reform provides a particularly useful lens through which to evaluate the complex distributional politics of sustainable city-building. The extension of public transit networks can be, and often is, credibly represented as an example of ‘triple-bottom-line’ policymaking. As I will show, transit-oriented reform is being actively promoted by growth interests as a response to the institutional dilemmas of after-Fordism, by environmentalists as a sustainable alternative to automobility, and by advocates of socio-spatial justice as a more inclusive approach to transportation and land-use planning. Yet, while it is true that transit policies can be directed towards various economic, environmental, and social objectives, it is not at all clear that these objectives can be pursued simultaneously or on equal terms. In this sense, the re-engagement of the state with transit policy constitutes an example of sustainable development *par excellence*: it aspires to the post-political and in this process masks efforts to re-legitimize an elite-defined conception of the common good.

A careful examination of the transit policy arena reveals a more complex matrix of interests than suggested by post-political notions of holistic development, one defined as much by tension as by synergy. What I show is that there is no simple or singular effect that follows from the turn towards transit-oriented reform. The distributional effects of policy are complicated and tied to decisions made along a number of intersecting dimensions. Choices about technology, the spatial-temporal organization of networks, housing and adjacent land use policy, user fees, and sources of public finance, interact in deeply political ways. These choices are rooted in particular representations of the transit problematic and, in turn, to representations of how transit-oriented solutions contribute to the realization of particular visions of sustainable urbanism.

The chapter proceeds in four parts. The object is to trace a line from the emergence of automobility in the postwar period to the political negotiation that is taking place today over the contours of transit-oriented reform. It begins by describing briefly the role of automobility in the constitution of the postwar spatial fix and its translation through the planning paradigm of ‘predict-and-provide’. Predict-and-provide planning, I argue, cohered with the logics of Keynesian-Fordism, but it also contributed to a problematic cycle of road building, decentralization, and automobile dependency. This dynamic has become increasingly problematic under conditions of after-Fordist urbanism.

The turn towards transit-oriented reform is a response to the dysfunction of contemporary automobility. It signals an attempt to come to terms with the problems of predict-and-provide planning, particularly as they have manifest in an era of deregulated neoliberal planning. In sections two and three, I describe the distinct economic, environmental, and social imaginaries that have developed in and around the transit policy arena and the ways that different assemblages of actors have represented the value of transit-oriented reform. In the previous chapter, I argued that though it is tempting to read sustainable urban development as a mode of roll-out neoliberalism, it is important to acknowledge the role of subordinate discourses and problematizations that operate across the political terrain to shape, and even hybridize, restructuring efforts. Transit-oriented reform, as a component or type of sustainable urbanism, exemplifies this need. There are, I will show, powerful economic forces driving the contemporary transit policy agenda. Yet, there are also influential environmental and equity-oriented imaginaries that are competing for representational space and influence.

In the final section I consider how the political tensions between these visions and constructions manifest. The object here is to expose in greater detail the constraints on post-

political aspirations in the transit policy arena. Specifically, I highlight three axes of conflict that in the current conjuncture appear to work against the prioritization of socio-spatial equity in transit-oriented reform agendas. The first axis of conflict concerns the divergent needs of different transit constituencies. Following a line of critical transit scholarship, I argue that the prioritization of growth management, congestion, and even environmental sustainability concerns, can lead to a narrow focus on the mobility needs of ‘choice’ commuters at the expense of so-called ‘dependent’ users, who rely on transit for a wider array of daily needs. The second axis involves a competition for ‘spatial capital’ (Lees and Rerat 2011). As public transit projects have emerged as anchors for mixed-use redevelopment, access to transit has been rendered less equitable by rising land values. The practice of transit-oriented development has become linked to processes of ecological gentrification that exclude low income households from areas of greatest connectivity. Third, and finally, I argue that the negotiation of selective austerity in the transit sphere is leading to the prioritization of capital projects designed to improve modal share or spur redevelopment. Such investments can be rationalized in terms of the state’s responsibility for managing and underwriting the collective conditions of growth. The prioritization of capital projects, however, is coming at the expense of equity-oriented investments, which are harder to rationalize according to the institutional calculus of selective austerity.

### **Ever Further, Ever Faster: Mobility and the Political Economy of Postwar Planning**

The object of this initial section is to situate postwar transportation planning practices in relation to the political-economic dynamics of Keynesian-Fordism and the constitution of a suburban spatial fix. The goal is to show how the elaboration of auto-centric planning interacted

dialectically with the wider political-economy. On the one hand, the expansion of the Keynesian state put into place the institutional conditions that were needed in order to fully realize auto-centric suburbanization. Though the automobile had begun to influence popular culture and urban development as early as the 1920s, it was only with the development of Keynesian-era infrastructure policy that the automobile came to dominate the logic of North American city-building. On the other hand, systems of Keynesian-Fordism were also supported by the practices of automobile-centric urban planning, fuelled by popular conceptions of the automobile as a progressive instrument of liberal autonomy. Through the construction of auto-cities, planners and designers created an important outlet for public capital spending and institutionalized a system of mobility integral to the elaboration of suburban mass consumption norms.

Following from this, I also want to explain how the combination of Keynesian infrastructure policy and modernist attitudes towards mobility conspired to produce a particular mode of transportation planning. This postwar planning paradigm sought to safeguard urban circulation through the perpetual development of more infrastructure and the promotion of ever more travel. Enamoured by the flexibility of the automobile, it expressed an attitude towards mobility that demanded to go ‘ever further, ever faster’ (Low et al. 2003). I want to draw out a relational understanding that sets this planning paradigm in conversation with the institutional context in which it emerged. This relational perspective is opposed to simplistic notions of cause and effect, pointing instead to dynamics of institutional resonance and coherence. The object is to describe the postwar planning ethos, and its material manifestation in fragmented landscapes and travel-intensive household routines, as deeply enmeshed within the institutional milieu of Keynesian-Fordism.

The importance of the automobile sector in the restructuring of 20<sup>th</sup> century Atlantic capitalism has been well documented by Regulation theorists who, following Gramsci, gave to this era of development the suggestive name of ‘Fordism’. For Regulationists, the auto sector was an important site where a number of key institutional innovations central to the elaboration of mass production and consumption were developed. On the production side, it was in Ford plants that Taylorist management principles were first applied, which introduced new divisions of labour associated with assembly production techniques, and at General Motors where these mass production techniques were made flexible through ‘Sloanism’. On the consumption side, Ford introduced the idea of managed wage inflation through his ‘5 dollar a day’ initiative, which helped to match productivity increases with consumer demand (Patterson 2007). What is more, as the automobile developed over time into a true mass commodity, the auto sector evolved a dominant position within the Fordist industrial hierarchy, sitting at the center of a web of key inter-sectoral linkages with finance, steel, oil, and rubber industries (Whitt and Yago 1985).

Important as these contributions were to Fordist accumulation, however, it was the automobile’s implication for urban mobility that may have had the greatest political-economic import. In short, the significance of the automobile can be seen most clearly in its relation to the organization of the built environment. As noted in the previous chapter, the suburban spatial fix made two essential contributions to the constitution of Keynesian-Fordism: it helped to create spatial conditions that were conducive to the formation of a new mass consumption norm and it created an outlet for demand-side Keynesianism by rationalizing large-scale investment in the built environment. The automobile was integral to both of these processes.

In his analysis of American Fordism, Michel Aglietta identified the basis of the Fordist mass consumption norm with two essential items: the suburban home and the automobile

(Freund and Martin 1996). The generalization of mass production in the postwar period depended on the institutionalization of complementary patterns of mass consumption and for Aglietta it is the suburban home that is the site where labour becomes acculturated to Fordist norms of household reproduction. It is in the suburban home where nuclear families incorporate the suite of consumer durables and labour saving technologies that are the fruit of a new family wage. The translation of mass consumption through suburbanism, however, posed a crucial socio-spatial problem. While the expansion of suburban homeownership made possible the larger living spaces associated with Fordist cultural and consumption norms, the shift to a more space-intensive domestic form entailed a decentralization of urban development and a greater spatial separation of places of home and work. The automobile provided a technological fix for this problem of urban integration (Aglietta 1979).

Historically, urban density and decentralization has been constrained by the state of urban transportation technology. While workers' commuting tolerance has remained relatively stable, technological development has allowed cities to become more spatially extensive while maintaining a constant temporal relationship between home and work. For example, while 'walking cities' ranged between 5 and 8 kilometers in diameter, the introduction of the electric streetcar in the 1880s made it possible for cities to extend 20 or 30 kilometers, enabling an initial wave of suburbanization and new forms of landed growth politics. The automobile created the technological potential for more radical changes to the spatiality of urban growth. It made it possible not only to integrate labour and housing markets across a distance of 60 kilometers, but the flexibility of auto networks allowed development to extend into the interstitial areas between transit lines (Newman and Kenworthy 1999). It was this radical new development potential that formed the link between the automobile and the Fordist consumption norm. The automobile

made new, larger domestic living spaces possible because it allowed cities to develop at much lower densities than had been possible even in streetcar suburbs. Whereas streetcar cities supported densities of between 50 and 100 people per hectare, the flexibility of individualized automobility enabled development densities as low as 10 people per hectare (Newman and Kenworthy 1999).

The advent of mass automobility in the postwar period also played a critical part in supporting the growth of state Keynesianism, which relied on infrastructure programs to stimulate the demand side of the economy. As explained, the institutionalization of state Keynesianism from the middle of the 1940s through to the middle of the 1970s was associated with a ‘golden age’ of infrastructure development that saw a greater share of GDP channelled into public capital spending (Seccareccia 1995 for Canadian discussions). Urban road networks were a principal outlet for this spending. One of the central pillars of US Keynesianism, the 1956 Interstate and Defense Highways Act, committed a historically unprecedented \$41 billion to the development of highway infrastructure (Hall 2014). In Canada, despite a more limited federal presence, robust investment in road and highway infrastructure through the 1950s, 60s, and 70s also played an important role in the formation of state Keynesianism (Seccareccia 1995; Roy 2007).

The technological transition from streetcar urbanism to mass automobility resonated strongly with the growth of public capital formation in the postwar period. Electric streetcar systems had since the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century operated primarily as private utilities, funding capital and operating costs in exchange for monopoly service contracts. Automobility, by contrast, entailed a very different division of public-private responsibility. Unlike collective transit systems, the private automobile could only function effectively across a non-excludable

network of public roads. Profits were extracted at the vehicle manufacturing stage, rather than in exchange for network access. This system of mobility thus required that the state socialize the massive costs associated with a ubiquitous and freely accessible road network (Wolfe 1996, cited in Patterson 2007).

Changes at the level of urban transport were thus intimately bound-up with the wider transformation of the political-economy, enabled by and contributing to the institutionalization of Keynesian-Fordism. It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that these processes of institutional restructuring *caused* in any direct or straightforward way changes in the urban transport sector. Causality was more complex than this, rooted in reciprocal relationships, institutional resonances, experimentation, and political adaptation, rather than any kind of functional unfurling. This point is important to emphasize. One of the principal arguments that I want to develop is that the logic of transport planning as it evolved in the postwar period has come into tension with the modalities of after-Fordist urbanism. While this logic was resonant with the institutional context in which it first came to predominate, its persistence eventually brought practices of urban transport policy into conflict with changing political and institutional expectations.

As early as the 1920s, a combination of factors were conspiring to undermine broad-based support for private streetcar systems. Rising fares, labour strife, exploitative development practices, and regulatory conflicts were contributing to growing public and private disaffection. At the same time, rising rates of early automobile adoption were creating new forms of competition (see Fulton 2001). In this context, the automobile appeared a natural and inevitable technological successor to the streetcar. Yet, until the 1950s, there remained considerable debate as to how the tensions of streetcar urbanism should be resolved and more modest reform

trajectories were still very much under consideration. This included proposals for extending and improving transit networks through municipalisation.

A transit-first trajectory was foreclosed in the early postwar period, however, when larger segments of the working class opted to embrace theretofore exclusive suburban lifestyle norms, including automobility, as part of the postwar class accord (see Florida and Jonas 1991). Modernist reformers and corporate advertisers presented a vision of suburban reform that associated new modes of middle class consumption and domestic reproduction with the flexibility and freedom of the automobile. The ability to move where and when one chose was tied to a liberal ethos of autonomy and progress and this ideological association proved to be enormously attractive to a postwar generation coming to terms with the opportunities of a mass society (see Hall 2014; Holtz Kay 1998; Rajan 2007). In this way, the constitution of a shared postwar class subjectivity became about more than just the extension of common consumption practices down the socio-economic hierarchy. It involved the internalization of a new common attitude towards mobility (Manderscheid 2016).

This new attitude was steeped in a modernist imagination that viewed mobility in ways that were quite distinct from traditional conceptions of urban transport. For modernist reformers, the promise of the automobile transcended any narrow concern with accessibility or connectivity; more than this, the automobile was conceived as an instrument of empowerment, freedom, and autonomy. By equating mobility with empowerment, modernism insisted that mobility itself had a kind of inherent value. The power to move, and to move *more*, was embraced as an end unto itself, an ethos described by Low et al. as ‘ever further, ever faster’ (Low et al. 2003). This was a maximalist conception of urban transport that implied a new set of governance techniques and rationalities.

These techniques and rationalities took shape in the emerging discipline of urban transport planning, which from its inception became inscribed by a basic concern with the problem of rising travel demand. Transport planning came of age as an autonomous discipline in the postwar period specifically as a response to the growth of automobile use, which gave rise in cities to new demands for area-wide planning and a need to understand traffic flows. With the advent of new computer modelling techniques in the 1950s, it became possible to depict in ever more complex and detailed ways the relationship between origins and destinations across a network. With this new knowledge, transport planners acquired the capacity not only to depict traffic patterns at a given time, but to *predict* demand and project it into the future (Weiner 1997). This power to predict future demand became integral to the maximalist logic of the new discipline. Operating from the premise of rising travel demand, the objective of transport planning was construed in terms of the need pre-empt network congestion through anticipatory infrastructure development. This paradigm came to be referred to as ‘predict-and-provide’ (Vigar 2002).

With the benefit of hindsight, the predict-and-provide paradigm appears to have occupied a contradictory position within the wider system of Keynesian-Fordism. On the one hand, the paradigm cohered with, and in many ways reinforced, the infrastructural logic of state Keynesianism. Predictive planning was made possible, for example, by the postwar growth of public capital spending, which freed planners to adopt a more permissive and anticipatory approach to infrastructure development. The predict-and-provide paradigm also supported the growth of collective consumption assets according to universalist principles of common access. On the other hand, however, the relationship between state Keynesianism and predictive planning also generated a kind of latent tension. Keynesian policy regimes created the

institutional space within which the predict-and-provide paradigm could operate, but this space in turn allowed the paradigm to extend itself in counterproductive ways. That is, Keynesianism allowed centrifugal tendencies that inhered within the paradigm to impose an irrational and coercive force onto urban life.

The paradigm of predict-and-provide was predicated on the notion that infrastructure planning was an effectively neutral practice. The role of planners was simply to accommodate the independent choices and behaviours of residents. In a context of mass automobility, road development appeared to represent a straightforward response to societal preferences, informed by predictive models of natural demand trajectories. In reality, however, this belief in planning neutrality relied on a one-dimensional view of the relationship between infrastructure, land use, and transport demand. That is, while transport planners understood the influence of development patterns on travel behaviour, incorporating these relationships into their predictive modelling, they generally failed to account in a reciprocal way for the influence of infrastructure development on land use (Vigar 2002). This oversight blinded planners to the ways in which the practice of predict-and-provide could itself induce demand and contribute to rising rates of travel.

In failing to grasp the reciprocal and dynamic nature of transport planning, the predict-and-provide paradigm became implicated in a self-reinforcing cycle of progressive decentralization and rising automobility. For example, one of the important dynamics neglected by predictive transport planning concerned the relationship between infrastructure development and housing demand. By making distant parcels more accessible, new transport infrastructure tended to lower the costs of suburbanization. Lower costs would induce further decentralization, which would, in turn, lead to a growth in travel demand. According to the maximalist logic of

predict-and-provide, however, this growth in demand was taken as an indication of the need for new infrastructure capacity, continuing the cycle. In this way, the seemingly neutral logic of predict-and-provide planning set in train a perverse dynamic in which transport planning evolved to become its own source of ever increasing demand.

The institutional separation of transport and land use planning became entrenched over time and was a hallmark of the sprawl-oriented development that eventually emerged across North America. The centrifugal dynamic that was unleashed by this separation and the embrace of a maximalist conception of transport planning has put the lie to the naïve notion that planning for the automobile has operated as a simple response to pre-existing preferences. Instead, what critical perspectives have increasingly sought to draw attention to is the *coerciveness* of predictive automobile-centric planning and its ethos of ‘ever further, ever faster’ (Sheller and Urry 2001). In a radically decentralized and functionally ‘unbundled’ environment, automobile-dependent daily routines have become for many an inescapable condition of urban life – they are a structure as much as a choice (Sheller and Urry 2001; Newman and Kenworthy 1999). In the middle of the 1960s, an average Canadian travelled by car an average of between 6 and 7000 kilometers per year. By 1990, this average had increased to well over 10 000 kilometers and by 2005, the average Canadian travelled nearly 14 000 kilometers per year (Schimek 1996; Steenhof and McInnis 2008). This scale of growth cannot be reduced to a question of choice – it is rather an expression of a kind of systemic excess, of a mode of development overtaken by its own centrifugal tendencies

The question that I turn to now is: what becomes of this maximalist planning paradigm in an institutional context after Keynesianism and Fordism? In this section, I have situated predict-and-provide transport planning in relation to the wider architectures of Keynesian-Fordism,

tracing the lines of institutional resonance and co-constitution. The predict-and-provide paradigm was enabled by the robust capital spending characteristic of state Keynesianism, but it also played an integral role in creating an outlet for this spending, helping to reinforce the rationale for roadway expansion. Today, however, these institutional conditions no longer prevail. Retrenchment in the public capital sector and demands for more efficient development modalities are at odds with the maximalist logic of auto-centric planning, while the economic and cultural dynamics of a cognitive-cultural economy appear to emphasize integration rather than fragmentation.

It is here that I want to situate the turn towards transit-oriented urban reform strategies. While predict-and-provide planning cohered with the logic of postwar urban governance, its practice through the 1980s and 90s produced an array of contradictions and political tensions that ultimately led to the search for alternative approaches to transport planning. The embrace of transit-led strategies, most notably ‘transit-oriented development’, is constitutive of this search. In the following two sections, I work to map the economic, environmental, and social tensions that have emerged around predict-and-provide planning and describe the ways in which transit-oriented reform is seen to respond to these problems. As was suggested in the previous chapter, economic, environmental, and social policy perspectives yield distinct problematizations and thus distinct understandings of the promise of transit-oriented reform. The political content of any transit-oriented ‘fix’ depends on the negotiation of these visions. The object of these sections, then, is to map this policy landscape.

## **Economic Imaginaries and Transit-oriented Restructuring**

In this section, I want to focus specific attention on the economic-oriented problematics and representations that are fuelling a renewed interest in public mass transit. As I discussed in chapter 2, there are, broadly speaking, two avenues by which problems of economic growth and urban competitiveness have become linked to the promise of sustainable city-building. First, sustainable urbanism has been constituted as a strategy for managing growth. The turn to new modes of urban growth management is taking place in a context in which postwar planning regimes no longer resonate with the wider institutional milieu in the way that they once did. This problem of institutional resonance has been rendered particularly acute by practices of neoliberal urbanism. Growth interests have become increasingly attuned to these frictions and have embraced strategies like ‘smart growth’ in an effort to re-establish conditions for functional and efficient urban growth. Second, sustainable urbanism has also become closely connected to the construction of post-industrial urban imaginaries. ‘Smart’ and sustainable planning norms are being mobilized as part of entrepreneurial revitalization strategies that aspire to attract ‘creative’ firms and workers in high value cognitive-cultural sectors. Here, I want to probe at a finer level of resolution the role that transit-oriented reform is playing in these processes.

To begin, I want to interrogate why growth actors might be turning towards transit-led planning or transit-oriented development as a fix for problems of growth management. The embrace of public transit by chambers of commerce, boards of trade, and other associations of corporate interests has been one of the hallmarks of the urban sustainability turn (see Henderson 2006; Solevad Nielsen 2014). This strategic reorientation, I want to argue, can be traced in significant part to what Docherty et al. refer to as a ‘crisis of mobility’ in many large cities and metropolitan regions. This crisis is evidenced by worsening traffic congestion, lengthening commute times, and growing concerns about the effective integration of labour and housing

markets (Docherty et al. 2004). Experiments in transit-oriented reform can be understood as a response to the failure of predict-and-provide planning to come to terms with this problem of urban circulation.

As explained in the previous chapter, the urban occupies a complex position within the flows of a capitalist political economy, situated at the intersection between contradictory demands for fixity and mobility. Capital is driven by a demand to, in the words of Marx, ‘annihilate space through time’ (Marx 1973). The inherent spatiality of circulation creates within capitalism an unceasing drive to reduce the friction of distance and carve away any socially unnecessary barriers to the free movement of capital. This mobility, however, depends on transport and communications infrastructures that are necessarily fixed in place. The urban functions in part as a site for developing these fixed capital assets that enable circulation at scales ranging from the local to the global (Harvey 1982; Smith 1984).

For local growth actors, this dynamic presents a fundamental challenge. On the one hand, the competitiveness of the territorial economy is determined in significant part by local rates of circulation. On the other hand, however, successful growth tends by its very nature to slow this process of circulation. This is a foundational contradiction of the urban. Capitalism’s drive to urbanization is a function of the productivity benefits that accrue from agglomeration. It is through spatial concentration that economies are able to refine and optimize divisions of labour, disseminate ideas, foster creativity, and rationalize public fixed capital. Yet, these benefits are simultaneously undermined by the ‘externalities’ generated by this very act of concentration (Downs 2004). While the value of agglomeration increases with local economic growth (larger labour markets, for example, lead to more productive skill matching), this growth places pressure

on local transport networks. Congestion, in other words, is the dark side of agglomeration (Hanson 2003).

Today, in the context of a generalized crisis of mobility, the problem of congestion and growth management has emerged as a particularly important axis of interspatial competition (Farmer 2011; Henderson 2006). Evidence of this can be seen in the proliferation of research and position documents developed by local business associations that problematize the ‘costs of congestion’ as a barrier to growth and investment attraction (for Canadian examples, see Toronto BOT 2011; Board of Trade Metropolitan Montreal 2010). Though congestion is the common condition of urban life, it is a relative cost and in a context of a generalized crisis of circulation, efforts to mitigate its effects have become particularly important. To compete, cities must invest in new transportation infrastructures and elaborate new modes of planning regulation in an effort to create the most favourable conditions for growth.

What is crucial here is that in the current conjuncture traditional forms of automobile-oriented development are no longer seen in many places to be a viable response to problems of congestion and growth. There is a belief that automobility as it has been practiced has been extended to its useful limits and is no longer functional in the way that it once was. Instead, transit-oriented reform has been put forward as an alternative to predict-and-provide planning, one that has the potential to mitigate problems of circulation and sustain new rounds of urban growth. Transit-oriented city-building is seen not only as a more efficient mode of development, but one that is better able to integrate labour and housing markets across large and growing city-regions (see Keil and Young 2008).

To understand why precisely growth coalitions are seeking to experiment with transit-oriented alternatives to postwar automobility, it is necessary to probe the tensions that have

emerged between the profligate logic of predict-and-provide planning and the institutional conditions of after-Fordist state governance. One of the basic tensions, I have argued, of neoliberal planning has been its tendency to press in contradictory directions. On the one hand, deregulated planning has empowered suburban growth machines to stretch the limits of decentralization and place ever greater demands on urban infrastructure systems. At the same time, however, demands for retrenchment in the public sector have undermined the state's ability to provide the fixed capital assets needed to sustain the fragmented suburban growth model. In the transport sphere, predict-and-provide planning has exacerbated this tension not only by reinforcing trends towards fragmented decentralization, but also by placing excessive demands on the state in terms of infrastructure investment. The very qualities that lent coherence to Keynesian-era governance have become liabilities that need to be redressed.

This incoherence can be glimpsed in the institutional chasm that has opened up between the infrastructural demands of predict-and-provide planning and the rate of public capital investment in road networks after 1980. As explained, the predict-and-provide paradigm operated according to a storyline that reduced problems of urban circulation to problems of network capacity. As such, the solution was to use modelling techniques to identify areas of network friction and to build new infrastructure to accommodate growing demand (Low et al. 2003). Because this conception concerned itself only with questions of infrastructure supply, (and not, for example, with questions of efficiency or accessibility), it entailed the premise that infrastructure financing was, for all intents and purposes, unlimited. Under conditions of state Keynesianism, such assumptions were relatively unproblematic and it was this coherence that allowed planners and policymakers to ignore the centrifugal forces that inhered within the paradigm. This coherence, however, was shattered by the collapse of the Keynesian consensus,

which challenged the role of the state in collective provision and undermined the assumptions of demand-side planning. From the 1980s onwards, then, the continuation of automobile-centric planning practices proved increasingly at odds with the wider institutional milieu, and this in turn manifested in the progressive detachment of rising rates of travel demand from rates of infrastructure development.

The deregulation of planning after the 1970s, exemplified for example in the deterioration of metropolitan-scale coordination, combined with complementary economic and demographic forces to trigger a sharp increase in commuting distances and automobile travel through the 1980s and 90s. In the 1980s, the largest Canadian cities saw increases in per capita vehicle travel ranging from nearly 20% to as high as 45% and absolute increases ranging from 25 to 65% (Raad 1998). In the United States, the intensification of automobile use was equally dramatic. Between 1980 and 2000, personal vehicle registrations exceeded population growth by 18%, while the number of miles driven per vehicle increased by 28%. Together, this resulted in an 80% absolute increase in vehicle travel (Downs 2005).

Yet, whereas decentralization had in the 1960s and 70s been supported by adequate rates of network development, the contraction of public capital spending during the 1980s meant that planners were no longer able to develop road capacity sufficient to meet soaring demand. In Canada, for example, the national stock of road infrastructure rose between 1961 and 1980 from \$2000 to over \$3000 per capita. Between 1980 and 2005, however, half of this increase was eroded by declining rates of investment (constant 1997 dollars, Roy 2007). The combination of rising travel demand and shrinking rates of road development resulted, quite naturally, in rising congestion, measured in terms of vehicles per kilometer of road and road length per capita (Raad 1998). In the United States, vehicle travel increased between 1982 and 2000 by nearly 75%, yet

total lane miles increased by only 36%. Travel, in other words, increased by twice as much as network supply. The inevitable result was a deterioration in rates of urban circulation. According to one measure, congestion during this period increased by an average of 43 percent across metropolitan areas (Downs 2005).

In addition to this problem of institutional underinvestment, the profligacy of predict-and-provide planning also contributed to problems of technical exhaustion, problems which exacerbated tensions with logics of state austerity and posed an even more pointed challenge to the automobile-centric growth model. Underlying the paradigm of predict-and-provide was the assumption that congestion could always be alleviated by building new capacity – if the network became too busy, the solution was to build new lanes and roads. Intuitive as this assumption was, evidence began to emerge in the late 1980s suggesting structural limits to automobile-oriented growth. Automobility appeared to be entering a stage of development, characterized by saturation and overextension, in which the rules of predictive planning would no longer apply.

These concerns were articulated most rigorously by a school of thought referred to as the ‘new realism’ in transport planning. The new realism developed through research conducted for the UK government in the 1980s and 90s and was motivated by a perceived need to better understand the evolving trajectories of automobile-oriented growth. The central insight of the new realism related to what researchers referred to as ‘latent’ or ‘induced’ demand. In areas where automobility was highly developed, the new realism showed that new road capacity, rather than alleviate congestion, simply activated drivers who were otherwise discouraged by high traffic volumes. Once automobile-oriented growth reached a particular level, the new realism showed that the problem of congestion could no longer be resolved from within the paradigm of predict-and-provide (Goodwin et al. 1991; Duranton and Turner 2011).

The new realism suggested that automobility had been extended in many places to a point of exhaustion. The unbundling of urban environments through predictive planning and sprawl had contributed to rates of per capita travel that were very different from conditions in the 1960s. As a result, the public sector costs associated with supporting automobile-oriented growth were now of a very different kind (Goodwin et al. 1991; Vigar 2002; Downs 2005). In this way, the new realism amplified the institutional problematic of automobility by highlighting the diminishing returns of predict-and-provide planning. Automobile-oriented development had made possible novel forms of urban growth in the postwar period, but its trajectories no longer appeared manageable within contemporary institutional parameters.

Together, these problems of underinvestment and technical exhaustion have posed a profound problem for growth interests concerned about the constraining effects of rising congestion. Confronted by a deepening tension between growth, circulation, and collective provision, they have been forced to reconsider the logic of urban mobility, including the guiding ethos of 'ever further, ever faster'. The maximalist, disintegrative approach to planning is no longer consistent with the demands of urban growth. Not only does automobility appear to be running up against technical limits, it is increasingly at odds with the logics of efficiency and restraint that prevail under conditions of permanent austerity. It is in this context, in response to the perceived limits of predict-and-provide planning, that growth actors have begun to embrace the prospect of transit-oriented reform.

For growth actors, transit-oriented reform appears to offer two responses to the contradictions of postwar maximalism. First, in contrast to predictive planning, transit-oriented planning strives to manage rather than anticipate and accommodate travel demand. Transit-oriented reform promises to support economic activity and connectivity, but in ways that are

much more efficient and thus consistent with the demands of long-term growth (see Litman 2011; Nasri and Zhang 2014). By emphasizing greater density, functionally integrated land use planning, and investment in pedestrian and cycling infrastructures, transit-oriented planning seeks both to mitigate the need to travel long distances and to distribute travel more effectively across a coordinated multi-modal network (Ditmar et al. 2004). This logic of rational and efficient connectivity, it is hoped, will support growth while mitigating the frictions of congestion.

Second, and relatedly, the transit-oriented vision of rational and efficient connectivity also appears to respond to the contradictions of urban growth under conditions of selective state austerity. With the dissemination of new realist insight into the current and future public sector costs of predict-and-provide planning, transit-oriented planning has been positioned as an essential piece of new cost-effective growth strategies. To be sure, there is something counterintuitive in this view (a matter I will return to below). The renewal of public transit would seem to imply the need for massive state expenditure. Yet, while the costs of transit infrastructure are often exceedingly large, they are nevertheless being justified in terms of a perceived need to rationalize public sector spending. First, investments in public transit are now commonly compared against savings that might be realized in road budgets. By shifting a share of future travel away from the road network, governments hope to realize efficiencies in long-term capital expenditures. Second, and perhaps more significantly, investments in public transit are increasingly depicted as necessary in order to anchor more compact, and hence more cost-effective, growth patterns. Here, transit-oriented reform, by constraining fragmented sprawl, is seen to reduce a host of growth-related government expenditures on things like infrastructure, public amenities, schools, and emergency services (see Burchell et al. 2005; Muro and Puentes

2004; Bellas 2016). Through these connections, transit-oriented reform takes on a somewhat ambiguous position in relation to the project of state austerity – investment in large-scale infrastructure development becomes justified in terms of its role in anchoring more cost-effective growth trajectories.

Alongside this growth management function, transit-oriented policy reform is also being mobilized in the construction of post-industrial economic development imaginaries. In Chapter 2, I documented some of the ways in which entrepreneurial growth actors depict sustainable planning as aligned with the socio-spatial logics of post-Fordist economic development. Sustainable urbanism's emphasis on intensification and functional integration, for example, aligns with trends towards economic agglomeration and social networking, while the embrace of neo-traditional planning resonates with the post-suburban lifestyle preferences of many young professionals. This perceived resonance has encouraged policymakers to use sustainability as a planning framework through which to ground amenity-oriented economic development initiatives and entrepreneurial revitalization projects. In the remainder of this section, I want to probe in more detail precisely how and why public transit projects have become integral to this wider strategic process of territorial restructuring.

Key to this evolving understanding of the relationship between economic development and public transit is a now-familiar account of the socio-economic dynamics driving processes of re-urbanization and re-concentration. According to theories of post-Fordist production and 'creative' capitalism, firms and workers in many leading-edge sectors are choosing to congregate in central or other mixed-used and urban-oriented neighbourhoods (Scott 2008; Florida 2002). These locational dynamics are informed both by changes to production dynamics, which prioritize human capital, social interaction, and knowledge sharing, and by evolving cultural

preferences, particularly amongst younger professional cohorts, who appear to be less attached to traditional suburban lifestyle norms. The combination has led to a resurgence of inner urban neighbourhoods and the development of new inner city economies (Hutton 2004).

From a cultural perspective, attitudes towards the automobile and transportation appear to be an important dimension of this shift. In accounts of the ‘new middle class’ and the return of young professionals to the inner city, the desire for post-suburban lifestyle and consumption practices has generally been analyzed apart from transportation-related concerns. Yet, increasingly there is evidence that locational decisions are being shaped by preferences for transit-oriented neighbourhoods that offer a greater diversity of modal choices. For example, the millennial cohort appears to be much less attached to the automobile than previous generations – they own fewer automobiles, drive less, and are less likely to acquire a driver’s licence. For these residents, access to high quality public transit is becoming a valuable amenity that is influencing decisions about where to live and work (Dutzik et al. 2014; Moos and Revington 2017).

The desire of many young professionals to take on less automobile-centric lifestyles has in turn had important implications for firms, who are increasingly looking for ways to attract and appeal to higher-skill employees. In the postwar period, there was a strong trend that saw firms follow residential migrations to the suburbs, which contributed to self-reinforcing cycles of decentralizing auto-centric development. In the current conjuncture, scholars are observing a kind of countertrend. In an effort to appeal to and co-locate with these cohorts of young professionals, employers in knowledge-intensive sectors appear to be prioritizing transit-accessible sites. In effect, firms in the cognitive-cultural economy are following residents back to transit-oriented areas of the central city (Smart Growth America 2015; Noland et al. 2014; Blais 2015).

In addition to these cultural changes, changes in post-Fordist production dynamics also appear to resonate with the logic of transit-oriented reform. In contrast to the dynamic of decentralization that spurred the suburbanization of employment in the postwar period, post-Fordist production is driven by logics of agglomeration and economic clustering. From a transport perspective, the implications of this shift can be seen perhaps most clearly in the devalorization of suburban office parks and the rise of what Katz and Wagner refer to as ‘innovation districts’ (Katz and Wagner 2014). In the postwar period, knowledge industries tended to situate in campus-type locations. These were segregated office complexes surrounded by a sea of employee parking. In recent years, however, many cognitive-cultural sectors have transitioned away from these types of suburban locations, choosing instead to locate in dense, mixed-use and transit-accessible environments. This includes central cities and repurposed industrial districts, as well as newer transit-oriented suburbs (Florida 2014; Duvivier and Polese 2016). In addition to labour access, these locations are prioritized because of their density and the economic benefits that accrue from a concentration of activity, including knowledge spillovers and the cultivation of soft institutional supports that help to drive innovation and productivity (Katz and Wagner 2014).

The relationship between transit and agglomeration is tied to the challenge of circulation in areas of high density. In areas like traditional downtowns and central cities, the expansion of transport infrastructure is limited by strict space constraints. In automobile-oriented environments, the space intensive nature of road and parking infrastructures render this problem particularly acute – once density reaches a certain level, congestion undermines any potential for growth. Public transit functions as technological fix to this problem. Because it provides a much

more space efficient mode of transport, it allows for a much greater concentration of human capital and economic activity.

In a production environment where the benefits of agglomeration have become both wider and more valuable, public transit is imbued with greater strategic significance. Automobile-centric environments will surely remain a fixture of the urban landscape for the foreseeable future, but there is an idea that such spaces are beginning to migrate down the regional economic hierarchy. By contrast, transit-oriented areas are expected to become increasingly important centers of activity. Because of their ability to accommodate higher densities and sustain a greater concentration of activity, it is transit-oriented areas that will increasingly attract the highest value sectors and foster disproportionate levels of productivity and economic development (see Duncan et al. 2016; Weisbrod et al. 2013).

Entrepreneurial actors have, quite predictably seized upon this emerging link between transportation and economic restructuring. This should be understood in the context of the broader attempt to articulate sustainable urbanism to practices of amenity-oriented and knowledge-based economic development. Coalitions of entrepreneurial boosters are increasingly looking to transit projects as an economic development tool because of the perceived value placed on these networks by firms and workers in cognitive-cultural sectors. In the current conjuncture, that is, entrepreneurial actors argue that public investments in rapid transit infrastructure can function as a lever for redevelopment of surrounding neighbourhoods and to attract high value economic activity.

The use of public transit as an economic development tool is not entirely new, of course (see Altshuler and Luberoff 2003; Robertson 1995). Nevertheless, there has been an important strategic and representational shift in how these projects are conceived. In the past, transit

projects were typically conceived as instruments of intra-regional competition – downtown rentiers, for example, might advocate for a transit project as a means of combatting decentralization and luring investment from the suburbs (Adler 1988). Today, however, projects are more likely to be represented as part of large-scale revitalization strategies and in terms of a competitive inter-urban struggle for investment (Farmer 2011). In the 1970s and 1980s, rapid transit was typically conceived in isolation from land use and development consideration – that is, strictly in terms of their effect on the transportation network (Ditmar et al. 2004). In recent years, however, a new generation of rapid transit infrastructure has become enmeshed within new modalities of mega-project development, which are characterized by a more encompassing concern with the transformation of socio-economic landscapes through strategies like mixed-use redevelopment and revitalization (Orueta and Fainstein 2008). In this context, rapid transit facilities have become valued not just in terms of mobility and accessibility, but also in terms of their wider economic effects in the surrounding built environment.

In a context in which growth coalitions must struggle to secure the infrastructural conditions for redevelopment and growth, Stephen Hall and Andrew Jonas have described the entrepreneurial embrace of public transit as part of a ‘speculative spatial fix’. Entrepreneurial coalitions, they argue, are collaborating with the state and other quasi-public bodies to generate investments in rapid transit infrastructure as a condition for the revalorization of surrounding lands (Hall and Jonas 2014). For rentiers, there is a belief that transit projects have become an effective lever for attracting investment and raising land values. When infrastructures are fixed in place, as in case of rapid transit facilities, they can function as a long-term guarantor of land values. This appears to be particularly the case when infrastructure is combined with transit-oriented neighbourhood design features (see Kahn 2007; Hess and Almeida 2007). This

combination of sunk infrastructure, accessibility advantages, and neo-traditional planning appears to align in synergistic ways to create environments that are uniquely desirable to a new generation of cognitive-cultural firms and their workers.

By way of conclusion, it is clear that transit-oriented reform has become bound-up with the evolution of urban growth politics. As a growth management tool, transit-oriented reform is seen as a solution to the problems of congestion and mobility, as well as a way to mediate between the tensions of growth and austerity. And for entrepreneurial growth coalitions, transit-oriented development is seen to be associated with the project of sectoral upgrading. Not only does transit serve to attract mobile firms and workers (thus acting as a lever for land-based revitalization), but transit-oriented planning also appears to offer a ‘fix’ for problems of circulation in dense, multi-use environments. These connections are of course critical to any understanding of the contemporary politics of public transit. Important as they are, however, they are not determinative in any straightforward sense. In the following section, I want to extend the discussion to include the role of social and environmental imaginaries in the constitution of political landscapes. Here, the value of transit-oriented reform is understood not in terms exchange-values, but rather in terms of non-economic values related to the quality and character of the urban environment.

### **Environmental Reform and Social Inclusion: Alternative Imaginaries**

It is certainly possible, and not entirely unreasonable, to read transit-led transportation reform as a mode of ‘roll-out sustainability’. It is clear that growth and economic development interests are playing a pivotal role in re-imagining the role of public transit in the after-Fordist

city. Understood as a solution to problems of growth management in a context of public sector restraint and as an entrepreneurial lever for promoting economic development, growth coalitions increasingly see mass transit as part of an urban spatial fix designed to shore-up the deficiencies and vulnerabilities of neoliberal urbanism.

Yet, as with the urban sustainability turn more generally, it would be a mistake to reduce the turn towards transit-oriented planning to narrow economic concerns. As I argued in the previous chapter, these economic imaginaries, which articulate the practices of sustainable urbanism to the logics of urban growth, entrepreneurialism and austerity, exist alongside alternative imaginaries. These imaginaries favour sustainable urbanism not because it enhances systemic competitiveness, but because it contributes to non-economic objectives related to climate change, socio-spatial equity, and quality of life. This is equally true in the transit policy arena where there also exist parallel problem constructions that envision improved public transit as a solution to, first and foremost, non-economic concerns. Here, I want to consider two such constructions: one that situates transit-oriented reform as a mode of environmental governance and another that envisions transit-oriented reform as a response to the socio-spatial exclusions of automobile-centric sprawl.

To begin, I would like to consider the place of the transit-oriented development concept in relation to urban environmental imaginaries. In Chapter 2, I argued that the turn to sustainable urbanism has been constituted in part through the rescaling of environmental governance. Whereas planning in the Fordist city was associated with an externalized view of nature that masked the environmental effects of development, after-Fordist urban governance has internalized new environmental rationalities as cities become reconceptualised as important sites of environmental policymaking (Keil and Graham 1998). Urban policymakers have increasingly

acknowledged, and in many cases even embraced, the notion that planning and development should be informed by norms of environmental responsibility. The resurgence of interest in transit-led planning and transit-oriented development is very much tied to this evolving urban environmental rationality.

The link between transit advocacy and urban environmentalism is longstanding. It can be traced to a period in the 1980s and 90s when environmentalists began to collaborate more closely with urban planners and designers in imagining alternatives to automobile-dependent suburban sprawl. Urban environmentalism became highly mobilized in the 1970s, empowered by the global oil crisis and a burgeoning environmental consciousness. In North America, an important dimension of this environmental politics was its cross fertilization with inner city neighbourhood associations as part of a broader urban reform movement. These alliances were formed through overlapping memberships and, importantly, the cultivation of a common middle-class progressive agenda opposed to the socio-environmental logic of automobility.

This common agenda was made possible by developments in the design field that were coterminous with the rise of urban environmentalism. In the 1970s, neo-traditional planners inspired by the example of Jane Jacobs began to actively experiment with community plans that were intended to minimize the place of the automobile in daily life. This neo-traditional planning movement, which came to be known as the ‘new urbanism’, argued for a return to mixed land use planning, increased development density, and an emphasis on pedestrianism and the public realm. For new urbanists, the critique of postwar suburbanization revolved primarily around quality-of-life concerns and a desire to re-articulate the values of integrated community design. In time, however, the resonances between these quality-of-life concerns and the concerns of urban environmentalists came into focus. Though approaching the problem from a different

direction, environmentalists saw in neo-traditional planning, with its insights into land use and transportation connections, a solution to automobile-centric problems of energy use, land preservation, and pollution (Carlton 2007; Hall 2014).

The concept of transit-oriented development emerged directly out this collaborative movement. The TOD concept was developed and popularized by the planner Peter Calthorpe, who was an academic leader in environmentally sustainable community planning. Calthorpe had been involved in the 1970s and 80s with experiments in neo-traditional neighbourhood design and collaborated with other new urbanists to think through alternatives to conventional suburban sprawl. Over time, however, Calthorpe came to focus in particular on linking neighbourhood design to the problem sustainable transportation. A limitation of neo-traditional planning, Calthorpe observed, was its narrow focus on the neighbourhood scale. While the concern with pedestrian-oriented neighbourhood design was necessary, it was insufficient because it neglected the problem of metropolitan integration. Transit-oriented development was conceived as a solution to this problem of intermediate-range transport. While neo-traditional design reduced the need for automobile use at the neighbourhood scale, transit-oriented planning sought to limit the role of the automobile at the city or regional scale by connecting these community nodes through a wider network of environmentally sustainable mass transit (Carlton 2007; Ditmar et al. 2004).

The roots of the transit-oriented development concept can thus be traced to an earlier incarnation of urban environmentalism. In light of this lineage, it is not surprising that the concept has found its way onto mainstream policy agendas precisely at a time when cities are being recruited into new multi-scalar architectures of climate governance. Because it was conceived as a solution to the problem of excessive automobile dependency, it has found a

natural place in the matrix of reform proposals that imagine a form of development that is better aligned with the rationalities of ecological modernization or eco-state restructuring.

From the perspective of sustainable development, the problem of urban transport has presented a particular challenge. Whereas the logic of sustainable development seeks policy integration through the ‘growth of limits’ (by making growth more resource efficient), automobile emissions have remained tightly linked to rising rates of consumption. Meaningful emissions reductions in the passenger transport sector have thus proven to be particularly elusive, even in developed states where car use appears to be reaching a point of saturation. In Canada, for example, between 1990 and 2015, carbon emissions from passenger vehicles increased at nearly twice the rate of population growth, in large part due to rising rates of travel (Steenhof and McInnis 2008). Because the sector is responsible for nearly a quarter of global carbon emissions, and because this share is projected to increase with growth, the prospect of sustainable development has become closely tied to the question of how to de-link transport emissions from development (Banister 2005).

The potential for transit-oriented reform to contribute to this de-linking has been one of the key factors in the re-imagining of cities as sites of environmental problem solving. The role of cities as regulators of the land use and transportation planning nexus, for example, was a principal area of interest highlighted by the UNEP in its early conceptualization of local sustainable development (UNEP 1987; 1992). The Agenda 21 framework not only highlighted the contribution of rising automobile use in developed states to global energy inequalities, it emphasized the role of cities in resolving the twin challenges of decentralization and automobile dependency. The key to a more resource efficient mode of urban growth was conceived broadly in terms of the principles of transit-oriented reform: a paradigmatic shift away from maximalist

planning, a renewed concern for accessibility, integrated planning, and investment in public transit systems (UNEP 1992).

The notion that transit-oriented reform might help to expand limits to growth in the transport sector has made it an important area of concern in the context of emerging eco-state restructuring projects. In their account of eco-state restructuring, While et al. argue that, though the drive to reconcile environmental rationalities with wider systems of institutional regulation is clearly not independent of the economic dilemmas of after-Fordism, neither is it reducible to them. Instead, the extension of environmental logics is tied to a post-1970s search for a new societal relation to nature that better accounts for the impacts of capitalist development (While et al. 2010). This search is informed by the political imperative to legitimize state systems of institutional regulation (Low 2002). In the transit arena, this has meant a broadening of the normative terrain and the introduction of new modes of political negotiation and alliance-making.

At the local scale, the logic of eco-state restructuring can be seen in the evolution of public transit politics and the cultivation of new axes of coalition formation. Jason Henderson, for example, has observed that the transit arena is becoming home to alliances that in the past might have been seen as surprising or theoretically problematic. Where environmentalists have historically been relegated to the margins of urban regimes, the mainstreaming of transit-oriented reform strategies have seen environmental interests more consistently brought within local governing coalitions (see Henderson 2004; 2006). This is not only because environmentalists are in favour of transit-oriented reform, but because environmental norms and narratives have acquired much more political potency. For example, by linking public transit projects to global concerns around climate change, associated local problems like congestion take on much greater

normative weight. Narratives that position transit-oriented reform as an aspect of eco-state restructuring imbue local strategic projects with greater urgency, helping to focus attention and draw resources (see Bulkeley 2005).

This dynamic operates in the other direction as well, with transit policy increasingly incorporated into national environmental strategies and climate change plans. Here too, the pressure to reconcile environmental norms and international commitments with the perceived exigencies of a competitive global economy has helped to raise the profile of public transit on senior government agendas (Barry and Paterson 2004). This entails not just the identification of urban transport as an object of environmental regulation, but the use of a wide array of institutional levers to shape transport planning and modal distribution at the local scale. Bulkeley and Betsill, for example, note the variety of techniques that senior governments employ to bring local transport planning into alignment with their own climate action strategies, including revisions to planning legislation, mandated CO<sub>2</sub> reductions, and changes to infrastructure investment priorities (Bulkeley and Betsill 2005; Banister et al. 2007).

The second construction that I want to consider concerns the articulation of public transit policy to problems of socio-spatial inequality and exclusion. Here, the problem of public transit is framed in very different terms than those in the environmental sphere (or those related to quality of life, which will be given more attention in the final section). What is shared in common, however, is a perspective that begins from essentially non-economic concerns, that places a demand on the state to legitimize its projects and support social reproduction. In this case, transit-oriented reform is conceived as a strategy for equalizing mobility resources by redistributing public spending towards less commodified systems of collective public transit.

Earlier in the chapter, I discussed the mass commodification of the automobile as part of the broadly progressive postwar process of middle class expansion. The turn towards automobile-oriented planning helped to constitute the Fordist social pact through which the forces of economic liberalism were brought to terms with demands for social protection and expanded opportunity (Low 2002; Florida and Jonas 1991). During this period, improvements in personal mobility took place within the context of the welfarist push for redistribution through collective consumption. This was reflected in a logic of development rooted in what Graham and Marvin refer to as the ‘modern infrastructural ideal’. This ideal was defined by its normative commitment to socio-spatial integration through universal network development – it assumed that all residents would be served by shared access to a common network (Graham and Marvin 2001).

In the transport arena, this ideal was never fully realized in practice. While the automobile became the de facto mode of transport for a postwar middle class, there remained a significant minority for whom a lack of job and housing opportunities precluded participation in the new mobility paradigm. In the suburbs, daily life became tied to the spatio-temporalities of the automobile, but in the central city, daily life remained tied to the constraints of public transit. Importantly, however, under conditions of postwar infrastructural governance, the recognition of this uneven pattern of participation provided a powerful justification for the ongoing support of public transit. There was an acknowledgement on the part of policymakers and planners that transit retained an important social policy function, rooted in the understanding that automobility brought with it opportunities, but also significant exclusions (Grengs 2005).

This balance between the demands of automobility and public transit became more difficult to sustain as the modern ideal gave way to a new neoliberal infrastructural logic in the

1980s. Within this new logic, concerns about public coordination, universal integration, and inclusion were overwhelmed by demands for deregulation, privatization, and austerity (Docherty et al. 2004). One of the principal consequences of this shift, according to Graham and Marvin, was the normalization of more exclusive forms of automobile-centric planning and design. In the early postwar period, predict-and-provide planning had been contained by norms of coordination and balance, which made possible forms of suburban development designed to be accessible by both car and transit, (albeit rarely on equal terms). Under a new neoliberal paradigm, this expectation around complementary access was relaxed and planning became increasingly hostile to mass transit. New suburban development became characterized by its insertion into a web of highways, car parks, and ‘defensive’ landscape architecture – designs that were often intended to discourage access by non-drivers (Graham and Marvin 2001).

The development of increasingly ‘splintered’ transport networks gave greater urgency to equity-oriented critiques of automobile-centric planning. These critiques were informed by a growing body of research that documented the profound differences in opportunity enjoyed by automobile drivers and public transit users. More than anything else, this research put the lie to the notion that public transit provided an effective modal alternative for those who were unable to drive. Instead, what critical transport scholars documented was the way in which the transport system functioned to exacerbate and entrench broader patterns of inequality and exclusion (Bullard et al. 1997; 2000).

Much of the critical transport scholarship that emerged in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s could trace its roots directly or indirectly to John Kain’s theory of ‘spatial mismatch’ (see Kain 1992), which emphasized the disjunctions caused by the suburbanization of employment opportunities for marginalized communities. The problem of spatial mismatch was rooted in

three interrelated dynamics: the growth of suburban employment opportunities, the systemic segregation of low income minority communities in the central city, and the lack of effective public transit connections between the two. In practice, mismatch scholars focused primarily on the first two elements of the thesis, and in particular on the effects of housing segregation on employment and wage levels in African American communities. It was left to transport scholars to eventually refocus attention on the dynamics of mobility and connectivity.

Addressing this third element of the mismatch thesis, transport scholars reframed the problem in an important way. In a way that was already implicitly recognized, transport scholars insisted that the problem was less a matter of spatial mismatch than it was a problem of ‘modal mismatch’. In other words, inequalities of opportunity and access were a function not only of spatial distance, but also a function of the relative ability to coordinate daily life across this distance. Affluent suburbanites had the privilege of living far from work because access to a personal automobile conferred the power to manage distance. Low income communities in the central city, by contrast, were more likely to rely on public transit, a mode which was much less flexible, efficient, and effective.

Re-constructed in spatio-temporal terms, the objective of critical transport scholarship became to unravel the constraints and disadvantage faced by public transit users relative to drivers. The splintering of urban transport systems led to a divergence in the relative speed of auto and transit networks. Compared to the automobile, equivalent trips by transit became progressively longer, and as a result, individuals dependent on transit became confined to a much smaller ‘activity zone’. This spatio-temporal constraint had a range of negative effects. It translated into fewer job opportunities and depressed wages, more burdensome commutes, and restricted access to services and amenities (Paez et al. 2009; Blumenberg and Manville 2004).

Importantly, the constraints of public transit dependency were also shown to intersect with other systems of inequality and disadvantage. One potent line of critique emerged from within the US environmental justice movement, which had traditionally used the language of civil rights to challenge the unequal distribution of pollution and environmental harms. For environmental justice scholars, urban transportation policy reinforced the parasitic character of suburbanization by exacerbating socio-spatial processes of segregation and marginalization. Not only had postwar transportation spending flowed overwhelmingly into suburban auto networks, but public transport networks had themselves become increasingly oriented towards the demands of suburban commuting (Bullard et al. 1997; 2000). In the transit sphere, the redirection of investment away from local transit networks towards radial rapid transit lines in the 1970s and 1980s had compounded systems of unequal mobility. In response, environmental justice groups mobilized aggressive campaigns to improve the quality of local bus networks (Mann 2006; Soja 2010).

Making matters worse, the diminishment of local bus networks also intersected with spatio-temporal dynamics in the labour market, augmenting the challenge of securing and preserving employment. A number of transport scholars, for example, investigated the role of transportation resources in the transition from welfare to work. While access to public transit provided some degree of benefit, the ability to find work was shown to be much more strongly correlated with access to a personal automobile (Cervero et al. 2002). Access to an automobile was necessary in order to reach a greater number of job opportunities, particularly in low density suburban areas where transit service was poor or non-functional. Furthermore, the prioritization of peak-hour commuting service, and the corresponding diminishment of off-peak local service,

undermined the ability of many low wage workers to maintain jobs requiring irregular or nighttime shifts.

Finally, an equally pointed line of critique emerged around the problem transit dependency and gender-based exclusion. In some respects, the gender-based critique posed the most profound challenge for dominant modes of transport planning. Whereas class and race-based critiques challenged the priority given to peak-hour suburban commuting, gender-based critiques raised a more fundamental challenge to the supposed division between home and work. This critique struck at the very heart of transport planning, which understood its role primarily in terms of bridging the spatial divide between these two spheres. What gender-based analysis showed, however, was that for many women this barrier was porous (Hanson and Pratt 1995). An unequal division of household labour meant many women had to incorporate household tasks into their daily work life, leading to much more complex and constraining transportation patterns.

Scholars observed, for example, that women tended to take more trips than men, perform more household-related trips, and were more likely to ‘trip chain’ as part of the commute (Kwan 1999; 2000). In addition, women tended to be more constrained by the demands of childcare, including the need to coordinate daily drop-off and respond to illness. As a result of these demands, women were differentially and more profoundly affected by the splintering of urban transport and decline of public transit. Employment opportunities and wage levels for women, and low income and racialized women in particular, were constrained by the need to align household trips and responsibilities with the demands of commuting and the workday. While public transit failed to provide an effective alternative for non-drivers, it failed women in an even more pronounced way.

The transit-oriented development paradigm has been embraced by many groups as a response to these transport-related exclusions and the problem of modal mismatch. To understand why, it is useful to compare TOD to an earlier conceptual solution, so-called ‘reverse commute’ programs. While public transit systems have become effective at delivering suburban commuters to central employment locations along radial networks, much less attention has gone towards supporting access to decentralized suburban jobs for residents of the central city. Beginning in the late 1960s, policy advocates, particularly in the US, embraced the idea of special transit services designed to operate against the traditional commuter flow, connecting central neighbourhoods to suburban employment areas. Reverse commute programs have operated in the US to varying degrees since, gaining new momentum in the 1990s. While scholars have documented some notable successes, research suggests that the efficacy of these programs has been limited (Cervero 2004). This should not be surprising. Mass transit is a poor match for the highly fragmented and decentralized geography of suburban employment, which was designed with the flexibility of the automobile in mind.

As a way to connect marginalized transit users to employment and amenities, transit-oriented development is rooted in very different logic. Reverse commute programs were designed to operate within the paradigm of suburban sprawl and maximal mobility. Accepting the geography and modal logic of postwar development, the programs attempted to mitigate its exclusionary effects by adapting public transit service. Transit-oriented development, by contrast, is premised on the coordinated reform of both transport and land-use policies. Rather than focus solely on improving the mobility of disadvantaged residents, TOD has the potential to improve accessibility and connectivity while also reducing travel demand. By investing in new transit facilities and by concentrating new housing and commercial development in station areas,

TOD may support employment connectivity and trip-chaining in a much more effective way (Belzer et al. 2011).

The prioritization of accessibility over mobility, for example, has helped to strengthen the connection between TOD and the environmental justice movement, which has embraced sustainable urbanism as a pathway for equitable built reform (Bullard 2007). The conceptual logic of transit-oriented development resonates in important ways with the equity objectives of environmental justice groups (Agyeman et al. 2002). Like the environmental justice movement, transit-oriented development envisions a less commodified system of urban mobility that is based on the prioritization of mass transit over suburban auto infrastructures. TOD's approach to integrated development also seems to echo the movement's desire to return jobs, services, and amenities back to communities that have experienced disinvestment and fragmentation at the hands of suburban growth politics (Chen 2007). In this sense, TOD goes considerably further than earlier approaches to transportation equity. Rather than just enhance the transportation resources available to marginalized residents, TOD provides a framework through which to imagine a much more holistic form of community and built renewal.

The challenge for transportation equity advocates has been to insist that the potential inhering within the transit-oriented development model is realized in practice. This has meant resisting naïve or post-political conceptions of TOD that view equity as an inherent feature of reform (Bullard 2007). Economic and environmental imaginaries privilege the problem of modal shift – that is, the problem of encouraging drivers to select other modes of travel. While this problematization certainly does not exclude the possibility of equitable forms development, it does not prioritize them either. Rather, the priority is to attract and appeal to existing drivers, those who are in a position to make more sustainable transportation choices. An equity-oriented

perspective necessarily conceives the problem of transit-oriented reform in a different way, as first and foremost a solution to problems of poverty, socio-spatial exclusion, and community disinvestment.

This imaginary is expressed most influentially in the Equitable Transit-oriented Development framework, or eTOD. ETOD is an approach to development designed to ensure benefits for low and moderate income households, including better mobility, access to jobs, and lower household living costs (Hersey and Spotts 2015). It incorporates the common tenets of transit-oriented development, including transit priority and integrated station development, but it also entails specific policy enhancements meant to ensure that public and private investment translates into a more equitable built form. At its core, eTOD argues that concerns around modal shift cannot take precedence over the need to support mobility and access for existing, dependent public transit users. Instead, these distinct priorities need to be actively and deliberately reconciled (see Pendall et al. 2012).

ETOD is typically oriented around a number of intersecting objectives. First, it emphasizes the potential for transit-oriented development to reverse patterns of community disinvestment, but in ways that respond to the interests and needs of existing residents. Whereas traditional transit-oriented development is planned according to elite-defined conceptions of live-work-play urbanism, eTOD is planned through a more participatory process based on community priorities. In some cases, these processes have been enshrined through mechanisms like community benefit agreements that guarantee local employment and community-oriented services. Perhaps most importantly, eTOD stresses the need to incorporate affordable housing objectives directly into the station-area planning process. The problem of transit-oriented gentrification poses the most obvious and direct barrier to equitable and inclusive reform. As will

be discussed in more detail below, the more successful planners are in designing attractive and effective station areas, the more inflated land values are likely to become. Equitable transit-oriented development thus depends on offsetting or counteracting gentrification pressures in the housing market through public investment in social housing or other measures, like inclusionary zoning (Sousourian 2010).

ETOD presents a vision of reform that takes seriously the specific demands of transportation equity. It constitutes an imaginary through which transit-oriented reform can function as a solution to the exclusions of splintered cities and the problem of modal mismatch. In the following section, however, what I want to consider are the challenges associated with realizing this vision in practice. What distinguishes eTOD's vision is its insistence on supplementing traditional conceptions of transit-oriented development with measures explicitly designed to ensure that the benefits of reform are equally shared and contribute to a more inclusive urbanism. The challenge, however, is that these measures may conflict with other prevailing institutional logics or planning objectives. The social promise of transit-oriented reform, I argue, may be constrained by its need to negotiate with competing political priorities, which tend to value public transit primarily as an instrument for efficient rather than equitable development.

### **The Politics of Mobility: Negotiating the Search for a Transit-Oriented 'Fix'**

The mainstream depiction of sustainable urban development holds that objectives of economic development, environmental sustainability, and social equity can be reconciled

through rational and holistic policy-thinking. Sustainable urbanism is, on this view, a form of post-political engagement that transcends the oppositions that have historically made urban development so conflictual. It is a move that simultaneously recognizes, on the one hand, the exigencies of competitiveness and the demands of economic development, and on the other, the excesses of neoliberal urbanism and the need to re-establish collective modes of regulation that respond to problems of environmental degradation and socio-spatial inequality.

State projects of transit-oriented reform are, when viewed through this mainstream lens, an example of sustainable urban development *par excellence*. As the discussion above demonstrates, visions of transit-oriented reform span a diverse set of economic, environmental, and social imaginaries. It is at once a strategy for resolving dilemmas of growth and collective provision in a context of selective austerity, a strategy for bringing about post-industrial socio-economic transformation, for mitigating the climate effects of automobility and combatting inequalities of mobility and access. The seeming complementarity of these imaginaries makes it possible to credibly represent improvements to public transit infrastructure and service as a form of triple-bottom-line policymaking.

The political-economic critique of sustainable urbanism challenges this post-political depiction. Sustainable city-building, like all forms of city-building under capitalism, is characterized by various manner of political tension and institutional contradiction. Conflict is intrinsic to the capitalist mode of urban development, and as such any ‘spatial fix’ will invariably privilege a conception of the general will premised upon a particular organization of dominant and subordinate interests. In this final section, I want to consider how the superficial appearance of post-political holism in the transit policy arena gives way in reality to very real tensions that must necessarily be resolved through political determinations. In this, I follow Henderson in his

description of a 'politics of mobility'. For Henderson, the construction of urban mobility regimes entails decisions about who is empowered to move and why (Henderson 2006). Any decision about transport reform inevitably turns on a value judgement, one which prioritizes certain types of mobility at the expense of others.

Thus far, I have described various ways in which transit-oriented reform might respond to the failures of automobility in an era of after-Fordist regulation. Now I want to turn my attention to the tensions that have emerged within the transit policy arena as a feature of the negotiation of these various imaginaries. As I argued in the previous chapter, in the search for a sustainability fix, it is the social dimension of sustainability that has proven the most difficult to reconcile. The demands of competitiveness and growth, coupled with the logic of selective austerity, have created powerful institutional barriers to those visions of sustainable urbanism that prioritize socio-spatial equity and inclusion. The negotiation of contemporary transit policy offers a compelling illustration of this dynamic tension at work. In this section, I focus on three particular areas of conflict which, while not exhaustive, do highlight the most potent axes of political tension and demonstrate the challenges associated with realizing the progressive social potential of transit-oriented reform.

The first concerns the political tensions that inhere in the process of network development, that is, in decisions about the spatio-temporal and technological organization of the transit system. At issue here is the extent to which the demands of different transit constituencies can be brought into alignment. In contrast to post-political representations of the transit arena, critical transit scholars have in recent years worked to demonstrate the ways in which particular modes of network development privilege particular types of mobility. By problematizing the notion of a universal transit rider, the critical perspective challenges the idea that investments in

public transit benefit users equally. On this view, while it is true that public transit can be directed towards a variety of ends, these ends are unlikely to be pursued on equal terms within a single network. Instead, the process of network development is invariably shaped by the negotiation of competing values and interests.

In the critical literature, the politics of network development have been analysed primarily in terms of the conflict between ‘dependent’ or ‘captured’ transit riders and ‘choice’ riders. Though this is a simplified depiction, the distinction has been useful in helping to come to terms with the different and, in some sense, incommensurable functions of public transit in the contemporary auto-city. In this city, though driving has become the overwhelmingly dominant mode of transport, public transit has retained an important role in the lives of two distinct constituencies. First, transit has come to function as a mode of last resort for those who for reasons of income, age, or ability have been excluded from the dominant culture of automobility. For these ‘dependent’ users, public transit is essential to much of the spatio-temporal coordination that makes up the process of daily social reproduction – going to work and school, organizing childcare, shopping, attending appointments, and meeting friends. In addition, however, public transit systems have also developed a specialized function serving downtown commuters. These ‘choice’ users are distinguished from ‘dependent’ or ‘captured’ riders in that they have access to an automobile but may choose to use public transit when it is sufficiently convenient, comfortable, and non-stigmatized (Garrett and Taylor 1999).

It is perhaps not surprising that these types of riders place very different demands on the public transit system and thus benefit from different types of network configuration. For example, because dependent users rely on transit to perform a wide range of daily activities, they benefit from a network that is configured on a many-to-many basis, meaning that it connects a

web of diverse origins and destinations (Vuchic 2007). This is the type of service that has traditionally been supplied by local bus networks. Choice commuters, by contrast, are more likely to use public transit primarily for the journey-to-work, in particular if travelling to central employment districts, where high densities can provide transit with a comparative advantage. These types of riders are better served by radial rapid transit networks with fewer stops that connect residential areas to a single central location (Garrett and Taylor 1999).

Observing these very different demands, critical scholars have noted the ways in which underlying values or policy concerns lead to the prioritization of particular modes of network development. These underlying concerns dictate policy objectives and these objectives, in turn, give rise to particular network priorities. For example, where transit policy is conceptualized primarily as an instrument of equity planning, network development will prioritize basic mobility or accessibility for non-drivers, often by improving the intensity and reach of local bus networks. The difficulty, however, is that other legitimate policy concerns, including those related to congestion, environmental protection, or quality of life, privilege network considerations that are often at odds with the demands of equity planning. Uncovering this tension has been one of the central insights of critical scholarship. Unlike equity planning, which prioritizes need, these other metropolitan planning objectives are oriented around the problem of how to attract discretionary users. They are united around a concern not with basic mobility, but rather with the effects of automobile-centric sprawl (Grengs 2005).

This tension between equity planning and growth management has been central to the ‘splintering’ of public transit networks in North America since the 1970s (Graham and Marvin 2001). In their review of postwar ridership trends, Perl and Pucher distinguish between three distinct policy periods that trace a kind of ebb and flow in patterns of state engagement. The first

period, spanning the 1950s and 60s, was characterized by the precipitous decline of transit patronage in a context of rapidly rising rates of automobile ownership. It was during this period that public transit acquired much of its residual social policy function serving communities excluded from the suburban social compact. The second period was characterized by a reaction to this decline. In the period between 1970 and 1990, planners sought to rescue transit ridership by adapting public transit networks to the realities of residential suburbanization (Perl and Pucher 1995). By extending networks into the suburbs, planners succeeded in stabilizing per capita ridership, but in establishing public transit as a valuable growth management tool they also created new pressures for traditional local transit services.

The prioritization of growth management during this period became reflected most clearly in changes to transit funding practices. Over the course of the 1980s and 90s, senior governments in both Canada and the United States scaled back support for transit operating subsidies, which were used to finance labour, fuel, and maintenance costs, and instead began to prioritize funding for capital expenditures (Taylor and Samples 2002). The growth of capital funding made possible the development of new grade separated rapid transit infrastructures in, for example, places like Ottawa, Edmonton, Calgary, Atlanta, Washington, and the Bay Area. These investments supported considerable growth in commuter transit ridership at a time when overall transit ridership was stagnating. At the same time, however, the loss of operating subsidies had serious consequences for local bus services, which were increasingly forced to compete with resource-intensive commuter systems for scarce resources (Garrett and Taylor 1999; Soberman 2010; Taylor and Morris 2015).

The ‘splintering’ of public transit was illustrated most famously by the case of the Los Angeles Bus Riders’ Union (BRU). An exemplar of auto-centric postwar development, the Los

Angeles metropolitan region began to experiment with commuter transit initiatives in the 1980s in response to intensifying problems of road congestion and local air pollution. In 1994, however, the community organized BRU filed a lawsuit against the Metropolitan Transit Authority, alleging that its network development practices discriminated against low income minority communities. What the Union sought to draw attention to were the distributional effects of the Authority's singular concern with growth management and ridership growth. In its attempt to develop an alternative to suburban highway commutes, it invested a vastly disproportionate share of system resources in its developing rail network. Though 94% of metropolitan transit patrons were bus riders, 70% of the Authority's budget was used to finance the commuter rail system. This was problematic not simply because it disadvantaged bus riders, but because it exacerbated the disadvantage of minority communities who were dependent on local bus networks for their basic mobility needs. Whereas 80% of bus riders were minority residents, 72% of commuter rail patrons were white (Grengs 2005; Soja 2010). In its desire to grow transit ridership and reduce the socio-environmental stresses of sprawl, the Transit Authority had created a two-tier transit system that intensified rather than mitigated regional inequalities.

The suburbanization of transit slowed in the 1990s as transit policy regimes entered a period of retrenchment. Though deregulated land use planning and competitive inter-municipal growth politics encouraged the continuation of auto-dependent sprawl, austerity in the public sector led to reduced support for public transit. The era of 'roll-back' neoliberalism was associated with subsidy reductions, a moratorium on new development, and service contractions, all of which helped to further undermine the role and efficacy of public transit (Raad and Kenworthy 1998). After a period of relative stability, won through investments in commuter

transit, ridership again began to fall, signalling an end to the tentative experiments of the 1970s and 80s (Perl and Pucher 1995).

The re-embrace of transit-oriented reform agendas in a context of sustainable urbanism can be read as a fourth era of policy development, one that continues the ebb and flow of state engagement. These agendas are a response to the experience of neoliberal retrenchment and uncoordinated growth that characterized much of the 1990s and early 2000s. But what kind of response? In light of the experience of network development in the 1970s and 80s, there is a question as to how contemporary transit-oriented development strategies articulate to the dynamics of splintering urbanism. Will sustainability-inspired reinvestment in public transit help to mitigate socio-spatial inequalities or exacerbate trends towards two-tiered network development?

Clearly, there is a dimension of the transit-oriented reform agenda that is motivated by growth management concerns. For the smart growth machine, the renewal of public transit systems is understood as an instrument for reducing congestion, improving circulation and creating the conditions for continued growth and development. For environmentalists, the goal of transit-oriented development is to reduce automobile dependency and transport-related carbon emissions. These concerns are oriented around a shared sense of the transport problematic, understood primarily in terms of efficiency. To the extent that transit-oriented reform is guided by these concerns, the objective of transit policy must necessarily be to attract users, grow ridership, and improve public transit's modal share. Viewed from this perspective, there is clearly reason to think that in the sustainable city, transit policy will continue to prioritize modes of network development that favour the needs of discretionary users, and in particular the needs of peak hour commuters.

Yet, contemporary forms of transit-oriented development differ in important ways from the suburban transit experiments of the 1970s and 80s. In the spirit of fragmented planning, these initiatives were typically conceived in narrow terms, as transportation projects designed to extend the reach of networks into areas dominated by automobile travel. Not only did this fragmented approach undermine ridership and service efficiency, it reinforced existing patterns of socio-spatial segregation and inequality. Contemporary approaches to transit-oriented development, by contrast, emphasize the importance of integrated development. Transit infrastructure development is expected to be combined with intensification around station areas, mixed-used redevelopment, and pedestrian-oriented design (Ditmar et al. 2004). This kind of integrated development holds out the possibility of increasing the supply of housing in proximity to rapid transit and creating new opportunities to foster inclusion. Unlike previous approaches, TOD seeks not just to adapt to land use patterns, but to change them in ways that could reintegrate urban space on more equitable terms.

The relationship between transit-oriented development and neighbourhood change, however, raises a second set of equity concerns. In Chapter 2, I reviewed recent critical scholarship pointing to the role of sustainable planning in processes of third wave gentrification, what Quastel refers to as ‘ecological gentrification’ (Quastel 2009). The process of ecological gentrification is born out of a tension between the economic, ecological, and quality-of-life objectives of intensification and mixed-use redevelopment and objectives of social inclusion and affordability. Entrepreneurial regeneration initiatives are driven by changing cultural preferences and production dynamics at the leading edge of the economy, amongst the workers and firms that populate the most productive cognitive-cultural sectors. As these workers and firms embrace the redeveloped spaces of the sustainable city, lower income residents can be excluded or displaced

in the process. Transit-oriented development has been identified as an important planning paradigm through which this state-led process of ecological gentrification takes place and this association raises complex questions about how investments in public transit are interacting with wider dynamics of socio-spatial exclusion in the after-Fordist city.

One of the principal indicators of transit-oriented gentrification has been rising land values and real estate prices in station areas. Though there is no straightforward relationship between the introduction of new transit service and land values, research has documented not only many instances of transit-induced gentrification, but also the factors most closely associated with neighbourhood revalorization. Earlier generations of rail development, which were often built on the model of ‘park and ride’, tended to be less associated with land value uplift. By contrast, contemporary forms of TOD appear to be more clearly associated with both residential and commercial gentrification (Kahn 2007; Ko and Cao 2013). The difference stems from TOD’s integration of transit infrastructure development with a broader vision of pedestrian-oriented, live-work-play urbanism. These elements of transportation and land use reform appear to come together in synergistic ways to produce desirable, amenity-rich neighbourhoods (Duncan 2010).

Redevelopment and gentrification in transit-oriented neighbourhoods appear to be rooted in a number of interrelated dynamics. The state has begun, through the practice of transit-oriented development, to use more actively investment in transit infrastructure, and in particular in rail, to leverage private sector investment in neighbourhood redevelopment. Perhaps most obviously, investments in transit infrastructure provide a direct subsidy to future development by improving accessibility and increasing the value of surrounding of lands. In addition, however, a hallmark of transit-oriented development is its commitment to integrated land use change

through station area planning. One of the functions of station area planning is to prime the surrounding environment for development through a combination of density increases, permissive zoning reforms, and strategic investments in the public realm. These plans not only create new opportunities for investment, but they create an intelligible platform to guide and coordinate private sector activity. Taken together, the practice of transit-oriented development allows the state to signal to residents and investors its commitment to redevelopment and restructuring in particular neighbourhoods (Zuk et al. 2015).

Station area planning helps to ensure that surrounding environments are built at densities and with a mix of uses that support future transit use. But just as important, plans also provide an opportunity for the state to express a vision of how neighbourhood development should evolve alongside expanding public transit infrastructure. As I argued in the previous chapter, the problem of gentrification in the sustainable city is tied to the articulation of sustainable planning concepts to elite-defined visions of urban livability (Krueger and Buckingham 2012; McCann 2008). Transit-oriented planning has emerged as important vehicle for this articulation or ideational linking. In an effort to attract residents and developers to the opportunities of station areas, plans often present a vision of urban life based on an active public realm, condominium development, upscale retail, and professional employment. Thus, not only does state led TOD help to prime station areas for reinvestment, there is a tendency for planning visions to coalesce around an exclusive definition of neighbourhood development, one which telegraphs to residents and developers the expected trajectory of redevelopment.

This state led process is reinforced by the actual locational decisions of residents, who are increasingly choosing to live in transit-oriented communities (Moos and Revington 2017). These locational decisions are influenced in part by neighbourhood qualities generally associated with

gentrification and which are encouraged through TOD – vibrant, pedestrian-oriented street life, mixed use development, and a diversity of housing forms. But more than this, gentrification in transit-oriented communities is also influenced by the pressures of spatio-temporal coordination and the challenges associated with managing complex household routines. In his theorization of the creative class, for example, Florida observed that one of the class's distinguishing features is its desire to minimize commute times as a way of managing the stresses of daily reproduction (Florida 2005). For the creative class, then, living in a transit-oriented neighbourhoods is in many cases part of a strategy for navigating the complex spatio-temporal constraints of contemporary urban life.

Patrick Rerat and Loretta Lees have described this process as a competition for what they call 'spatial capital'. They argue that an important, though underappreciated, aspect of gentrification is an attempt by more affluent residents to reclaim locational advantages (Rerat and Lees 2011). While the locational advantages of the central city were in the postwar period traded for suburban lifestyle benefits, the functional unbundling of urban environments and the intensification of a generalized mobility crisis has increased the value of central locations and locations that are strategically situated in relation to transport infrastructures. Rerat and Lees, for example, note the value placed on access to diverse transport modes by dual income households, whose spatio-temporal routines may be particularly complex (Rerat and Lees 2011). For these residents, the attraction of transit-oriented development appears to be the flexibility afforded by these types of neighbourhood, the opportunity to mix and match transport modes to craft a more livable, functional, and even ideologically gratifying, routine. In these types of neighbourhoods, it becomes possible to walk, cycle, drive, or take transit, depending on the relative convenience of each for particular needs (see Moos and Revington 2017).

The effects of transit-oriented gentrification can be particularly perverse in that they exacerbate already existing inequalities of mobility and access. This is a compound process. First, through the gentrification of transit-oriented neighbourhoods, affluent residents outcompete lower income households for access to these strategic mobility zones. Relatively affluent households not only improve their mobility in this way, but also have the opportunity to reduce their transportation spending through improved access to public transit and pedestrian and cycling supportive environments. Lower income households, by contrast, who could benefit considerably from the combination of better mobility and lower transportation costs, may be excluded or displaced from these neighbourhoods (Revington 2015). What is more, through this act of exclusion, transit-oriented development can contribute to the more generalized process of suburbanizing poverty. As inner urban areas have revalorized through a ‘fifth migration’, low income households have increasingly been pushed into the inner suburbs. These ‘in between’ zones are more likely to be disconnected from both local and commuter transit networks (Young and Keil 2010; Kramer 2013). In this competition for spatial capital, then, transit-oriented gentrification contributes to a pernicious form of inequality in which the affluent enhance their mobility further at the direct expense of disadvantaged and dependent households.

This problem of transit-oriented gentrification has given rise to an active body of policy research concerned with mitigating the exclusionary effects of redevelopment. The focus of this research has been to articulate strategies for integrating affordable housing into the TOD process (Pendall et al. 2012). By promoting the development and preservation of affordable housing in station areas, it is possible to mitigate the pressures of gentrification and ensure a degree of equity in transit-oriented development. There are a variety of tools that can and have been used to this end, including inclusionary zoning provisions, tax credits, public-private partnerships, and

proactive acquisition and development funds (CTOD 2009). The challenge, however, is that in the current conjuncture, public funding for affordable housing has been scaled back dramatically, leaving housing providers with few resources with which to finance inclusionary development initiatives. The move to sustainable urbanism and transit-oriented development has coincided with the retrenchment of welfare-era housing programs, undermining the potential for aligning the economic and environment benefits of TOD with equity-oriented objectives of affordability (Jones and Ley 2016).

This introduces a third axis of institutional and political tension that has complicated efforts to reconcile the equity dimensions of transit-oriented reform. The search for a sustainability fix, I have argued, is closely connected to the neoliberal problematic of how to both provide essential collective consumption assets whilst respecting the constraints of supply-side governance. In particular, sustainable urbanism is, at least in part, a response to the perceived need to imagine alternative forms of urban growth that place less public expenditure demand on the state. Transit-oriented development occupies a contradictory position in this regard. On the one hand, the development of grade separated rapid transit infrastructure entails a demand for large-scale public infrastructure spending, which is clearly at odds with neoliberalism's logic of permanent austerity (see, for example, Flyvbjerg 2005). On the other hand, such spending may be necessary in order to establish the conditions for systemic competitiveness and more cost-effective modes of urban growth.

This tension speaks to the ways in which the state may seek to navigate the landscapes selective austerity. In an after-Fordist context, pressure for public sector restraint comes from a number of sources: the structural pressures of transnational capital mobility, ideological opposition to 'big government', and populist resistance to taxation, all combine to create an

institutional and political context hostile to expansive public policy. Yet, in the wake of virulent expressions of neoliberalism there is a renewed expectation that the state will engage constructively in problems of collective provision. It is this tension that is highlighted in various theorizations of roll-out neoliberalism, third-way urbanism, or a new politics of collective provision (Peck and Tickell 2002; Keil 2000; Jonas et al. 2010). What these theorizations capture are experiments with new forms of social and collective provision that attempt to reconcile with underlying after-Fordist constraints on demand side public policy. They are defined by a perceived need to articulate the social and environmental to the economic, to justify public spending in supply side terms.

What might this mean in the transit sector and how does it relate to recent policy trajectories? I would argue that the influence of selective austerity is evidenced in the prevailing emphasis on capital spending in combination with downward pressure on operating costs. Investments in rapid transit infrastructure are very often rationalized in terms of their contribution to job creation, redevelopment opportunities, reduced congestion, systemic competitiveness, and the rationalization of urban growth. These objectives resonate with demands for the state to re-engage with the problem of securing the collective conditions of growth, competitiveness, and economic reproduction. Certain types of economic and environmental objectives also appear consistent with capital-intensive strategies of transit-oriented reform. As noted, environmental concerns about emissions reductions, the concerns of commuters frustrated by the journey-to-work, and the lifestyle expectations of affluent urbanites cohere with the promise of extended and enhanced rapid transit networks.

Equity-oriented concerns, by contrast, are not easily justified in supply side terms. The goal of improving mobility and access for residents living in poverty, for example, is more

difficult to rationalize in terms of competitiveness and growth, and certainly more difficult to justify in fiscal terms. This tension can give rise to a superficially counterintuitive dynamic. On the one hand, capital investments are leading in many cities to a renaissance in transit infrastructure development, with a wave of new rapid transit facilities being developed across North America. At the same time, however, many cities are simultaneously struggling to lower operating expenditures in response to political and budgetary pressures (Freemark 2012). Downward pressure on operating expenditures can have a profoundly negative effect on transit service equity. Rising fares, which increase operating revenues, become coupled with selective service reductions, in particular off peak and evening services, with the result that networks become both less accessible to and functional for those who depend most on decommodified transport.

This tension, I would argue, strikes at the heart of the matter. The politics of mobility is constituted through a web of decision-making that determines who is empowered to move (Henderson 2006). When viewed through a political lens, the question of urban transport is the question of whose movement is privileged through the policymaking process, of the ideas and discourses that determine the relative value of particular mobilities. The dynamics of selective austerity cast a particularly illuminating light precisely because they are premised on a notion of strictly limited resources. In a context of selective austerity, state provision is conceived as both necessary and necessarily limited. In the transport arena, then, the question becomes: what types of spending are considered necessary and what types are considered necessarily limited?

## Chapter 5

### Sustainable Competitiveness?

#### Exploring Federal and Ontario Provincial Transit Policy

##### Introduction

Chapter 1 developed an ideational-institutional framework that explains urban politics as the outcome of representational practices that take place through the institutional architectures of the state. Such representative practices articulate policy problems in particular ways and create an ideational and material basis for political conflict and coalition building. As cities are embedded within complex ensembles of state governance, urban policymaking is inherently multi-scalar, constituted through the negotiation of state strategies and projects that aim to direct urban governance in particular ways. In practice, then, the construction of urban policy problems often entails a mix of representational practices concerned with both the orientation of policy change and the relative efficacy of particular institutional architectures.

The objective of this chapter is to explain the production of transit-oriented reform agendas in two Ontario cities. More specifically, I will describe the manner in which the federal and Ontario provincial governments have become (re)engaged with the problem of public transit, a process constitutive of the search for a broader urban sustainability fix in Canada. This (re)engagement has taken place at the intersection of closely interrelated debates that have linked concerns about the condition of urban development to critiques of the infrastructures of Canadian urban governance. Debates about the problems *in* Canadian cities have become understood as related to the problems *of* Canadian cities within the federation (Bradford 2004). This nexus will be a principal focus of the chapter.

The first section introduces the problem of Canadian urban governance as it arose in the early 2000s in the wake of neoliberal restructuring. The rise of a ‘new urban agenda’ sought to reconcile the ideas of a ‘new localism’, in which cities were conceived as key sites of after-Fordist policy intervention, with the institutional architecture of the Canadian state, which subordinated municipalities to the more dominant machinery of federal-provincial relations. In seeking to improve the conditions of urban development, governance, and quality of life, Canadian scholars advocated for changes to the infrastructures of urban governance and modes of federal-provincial policy engagement.

There were, however, different visions of what reform would entail, some more ambitious than others and some more challenging to existing state architectures. One vision, preoccupied with the constitutional weakness of municipalities, advocated for the institutional empowerment of large cities. A second vision focused on the problem of policy integration and included a strong emphasis on addressing ‘wicked’ social policy problems through place-based intervention. This approach advocated for innovative forms of multi-level governance designed to transcend narrow policy silos and align economic development with new modes of social programming. A third vision focused more narrowly on the regulation of urban growth and deficits in urban capital assets. This was a more conservative vision, both in terms of its demands for institutional reform and in terms of its conception of policy integration.

The second and third sections develop a more detailed account of the construction of a new transit-oriented reform agenda at the federal and Ontario provincial scales of government. Conceptions of transit-oriented reform emerged as part of the broader ‘new urban agenda’, bringing the ideas of a new localism to bear on the specificities of the Canadian case. In the transit arena, the problematic came to be construed first and foremost in relation to systemic

competitiveness. The problem of competitiveness was further articulated to other strands of the new localism, in particular to ideas about environmental sustainability and urban quality of life. In this way, strategic investment in transit-oriented reform became translated through a shallow vision of progressive-competitiveness that tied new modes of economic development to limited environmental and social objectives.

The final section considers the relationship between the progressive-competitive construction of the transit problematic and the conservative mode of institutional reform that was pursued. Though this relationship is clearly not one of cause and effect, there is a resonance that marks the nexus between the two. As the urban agenda evolved, social policy concerns were marginalized within a representational arena that prioritized the problems of economic growth and restructuring. This economic-led agenda resonated with an emphasis on reinvesting in hard capital assets to support new forms of development and growth, and this infrastructure programming was in turn readily accommodated within the existing architectures of Canadian intergovernmental relations.

The infrastructure-oriented approach to federal and provincial transit policy is indicative of government's failure to meaningfully engage with the social policy dimensions of transit-oriented urban reform. At the federal scale, this neglect followed from a more general failure to incorporate place-based social policy logics into its broader urban agenda. This is reflected in its modest engagement with the social housing sector, which has limited the ability of cities to incorporate affordable housing objectives in transit-oriented development projects. At the provincial scale, this neglect was more direct and explicit, as manifested in the government's decision to prioritize capital investments at the expense of operating subsidies, while leaving cities to manage the burden of equity-oriented planning.

## **The New Localism and Canadian Urban Governance**

In Canada, the rise to prominence of a 'new urban agenda' in the early 2000s was closely tied to the experience of neoliberal restructuring, which reached its apogee in the 1990s. This exposed the institutional weakness of cities, which as constitutional 'creatures of the province' had historically lacked a well-defined place within the intergovernmental machinery of Canadian federalism. Without an institutional base of authority, cities became vulnerable to decision-making at wider scales of governance and constrained in their ability to respond effectively to evolving conditions. This vulnerability was laid bare by the neoliberal state spatial project, which saw federal and provincial governments relegate institutional and political tensions to the local scale.

In Canada, the institutionalization of neoliberalism was implemented in important ways through the intergovernmental structures of federalism. Austerity and program retrenchment were realized through a cascading process of downloading, culminating with the imposition of poorly funded mandates at the municipal scale. Federal policymakers sought to alleviate budget deficits by downloading to provinces more responsibility for expensive health and social programs. Unilateral cuts to federal contribution programs in turn encouraged provincial governments to download a range of program responsibilities onto municipalities. This dynamic was particularly pernicious in Ontario, where municipalities were forced to absorb responsibility for social assistance, housing, and public transit (Kipfer and Keil 2002). In each case, the objective was to alleviate fiscal pressures by redrawing the scalar division of responsibility within the state (see Courchene 2005).

By downloading program responsibility to the local scale, the process of state spatial restructuring acted to transpose the tensions of neoliberal austerity to the site where taxation power was weakest and most conservatively governed. To an extent unlike virtually any other OECD country, municipalities in Canada depend on property taxation to generate own-source revenue. The limitations of the property tax placed very real constraints on the ability of local governments to fill the fiscal vacuum created by federal and provincial retrenchment. Not only is the property tax relatively inelastic, often failing to grow in proportion with the economy, it is mired in a political conservatism that makes contentious any attempt to raise rates and revenue. The visibility and volatility of the property tax, the fact that it is de-linked from income and consumption, and its relationship to homeownership, all contribute to its status as the ‘most hated tax’ (Slack 2011). Since the 1970s, opposition to the property tax has operated at the leading edge of populist demands for ‘small government’, infusing ratepayer politics with a deep ideological conservatism (Martin 2008).

The limitations of the property tax and the conservatism of ratepayer politics rendered local governments acutely dependent on funding agreements and intergovernmental transfers to finance both devolved responsibilities and existing local priorities. Over the course of the 1990s, however, contributions from senior governments to local program spending fell dramatically. For example, between 1988 and 2004, senior government grants as a proportion of local revenue fell by 30% (Kitchen and Slack 2006). The roll-back of intergovernmental transfers, combined with the localization of program responsibility, created a perfect storm for Canadian municipalities. Overburdened with governance responsibility, but unable to generate commensurate revenues, local governments became increasingly “squeezed between greater local service demands and

ratepayer backlash” (Bradford 2004). The result was a crisis of collective provision at the local scale (Slack and Bird 2007).

For urban policy advocates, this crisis of provision exposed a disjuncture between the institutional architecture of the state, which subordinated municipalities, and the growing importance of cities as sites of economic and social life. These concerns were informed by the ideas of a ‘new localism’ circulating through transnational policy circuits. The new localism represented a response to technological theorizations of a placeless global economy that anticipated a future in which the role of urbanization would diminish in the face of new information and communication technology. The new localism instead argued that cities were becoming the pre-eminent scale for organizing and managing the diverse economic, environmental, demographic, and cultural flows of 21<sup>st</sup> century society (Gertler 2001).

The new localism was itself less a coherent view of urban governance than a rhetorical catchall for a variety of distinct theorizations that shared an emphasis on the importance of cities and urban regions. From an economic perspective, it highlighted post-Fordist theories of agglomeration and sectoral clustering, as well as Florida’s insights into the place-based dimensions of labour market development. From a social perspective, it drew attention to the place-based dimensions of social disadvantage, the spatiality of labour market segmentation, and the relationship between urban development and quality of life. From an environmental perspective, it highlighted emerging thinking on the role of urban planning in mitigating local pollution and climate change (see Bradford 2002; 2004). Taken together, these theorizations helped to articulate a new understanding of the place of urban governance in an after-Fordist institutional context.

In Canada, the ideas of the new localism became inseparable from a conjoined critique of the institutional conditions of urban governance. Historically, Canadian cities had been distinguished by a high quality of life, supported by a more collectivist approach to planning and a greater degree of social integration. Yet, at a time when the institutional importance of cities was on the rise, the architecture of Canadian federalism was helping to erode these strengths. Researchers highlighted a range of problems, including deteriorating capital assets, suburban sprawl, rising congestion, and intensifying socio-spatial segregation (Bradford 2002; Courchene 2005; Andrew et al. 2002; Slack and Bird 2007). These problems spoke to the consequences of localized neoliberalism, where societal demands were exhausting government resources and capacities.

These failures helped to generate a consensus amongst urban policy advocates around the need for a 'new urban agenda'. Yet, this shared belief did not produce a common vision as to the how this agenda ought to be pursued. Instead, different priorities and assessments of the institutional environment yielded different understandings of the type of institutional reform required. Specifically, proponents of the new localism articulated three distinct visions of institutional reform, each aligned with a particular set of priorities and possibilities.

The first vision prioritized 'local autonomy' and in some ways it was this vision that entailed the most radical challenge to the existing architecture of the Canadian state. The problem, as diagnosed by proponents of greater local autonomy, was the misalignment between a state architecture borne of 19<sup>th</sup> century political-geographies and the 21<sup>st</sup> century realities of urbanization. If cities had become the pre-eminent site of social and economic life, it followed that the institutional organization of policy responsibility and revenue raising capacity should evolve to reflect these changes. For advocates of greater local autonomy, then, the new localism

demanded a redistribution of policy *authority* (as opposed to just responsibility), to municipal and city-regional scales of governance (Broadbent 2008).

This vision of local autonomy developed in close association with the experience of municipal amalgamation in Toronto. The provincial imposition of municipal amalgamation in 1998, through which the province forcibly joined the old city with the neighbouring municipalities of Metropolitan Toronto, gave rise to an oppositional citizen's movement (Horak 2008). The experience of amalgamation, combined with the downloading of unfunded program liabilities, spoke to the vulnerability of cities in the face of provincial hostility and neglect. Cities, and hence the lives of urban dwellers, were at the mercy of an institutional system that was as likely to exploit and antagonize as it was to support progressive reform. The answer was to empower local governments in ways that would allow them to more fully and responsibly manage for themselves the complexities of urban life.

Advocates of local autonomy were very much engaged in the progressive language of the new localism and visions of new urbanist reform. Yet policy reform was conceived as secondary to the more basic problem of institutional restructuring. That is, the rescaling of political authority was understood to be the most effective path towards realizing the various economic, social, and environmental policy objectives of the new localism. As such, the demands of local autonomists emphasized the importance of new local tax powers so that municipalities would be less constrained by the conservatism of ratepayer politics or the retrenchment of intergovernmental transfers. Similarly, they advocated for enhanced regulatory authority in areas such as economic development, land use and transport planning, environmental regulation, and even certain forms of social policy (Broadbent 2002; 2008).

In contrast to these demands for enhanced local autonomy, a second vision advocated for a more collaborative approach to institutionalizing the new localism based on new modes of multi-level governance. This institutional conception of the new localism posed a less direct challenge to the architectures of Canadian federalism than the local autonomy approach. Rather than demand a disentangling of intergovernmental relations and reorganization of institutional divisions of power, multi-level governance called for the development of new forms of intergovernmental partnership between local, provincial, and federal governments. Drawing on historical experiences of tri-level governance, in particular the short-lived federal Ministry of State for Urban Affairs (MSUA), advocates argued that effective urban policy demanded intergovernmental collaboration rather than simply localization (Bradford 2005).

Underlying the multi-level governance vision was the belief that the new localism would be realized most effectively by combining the unique resources and capacities of governments according to their 'comparative advantage'. Senior governments were in a fiscal position to channel new investment into urban areas, but advocates of multi-level governance argued that such investment should be combined with local place-based interventions, which would shape broader national or provincial objectives according to the specific needs, capacities, and opportunities present in particular localities. This was a vision in which senior governments retained a prominent role in the urban policy sphere, while interventions were given greater consistency through the development of new institutions of horizontal and vertical coordination (Bradford 2004; 2005).

The multi-level governance approach found particular resonance in the social policy and community development sectors because it incorporated ideas of place-based public policy. In the social policy arena, place-based policy had become associated with important insights into

the compound and spatialized nature of social disadvantage, drawing attention to the ways in which traditional forms of inequality were often augmented by local or neighbourhood scale factors. Concentrated poverty, for example, might be associated with public safety concerns, weak public transit connectivity, a lack of employment opportunities, and poor access to provisions and services. Place-based public policy sought to respond to this complexity by developing more integrated or ‘joined-up’ interventions that could address these compound disadvantages in a more holistic way (Bradford 2005).

There was a risk in the move towards place-based social policy, however, that had been identified by critics of neoliberal urbanism who saw in localization a post-Keynesian attempt to rationalize the retrenchment of traditional welfare state programming (see Brenner 2004; Bradford 2008). Narrow modes of localization, whether realized through neoliberal downloading or enhanced local autonomy, dis-embedded local interventions from social policies operating at wider scales of governance. In this act of dis-embedding, place-based social policies became vulnerable to co-optation into the service of neoliberal restructuring. In exchange for local autonomy and greater contextual sensitivity, policies would become less securely financed and more vulnerable to the exigencies of inter-local competition.

Scholars like Neil Bradford positioned multi-level governance as an antidote to this threat of ‘rolled-out’ forms of place-based social policy. Bradford argued that local place-based social policy was not an alternative to traditional social programming, but rather a means of augmenting and improving this programming. By integrating place-based approaches with broader networks of ‘aspatial’ policy, multi-level policy communities could adapt and coordinate macro-scale programs to create more holistic and spatially sensitive interventions (Bradford 2005). For example, neighbourhood redevelopment projects could be integrated with skills

training and community-led employment programs, affordable housing, or co-investment in public transit. This vision of multi-level governance was thus a more consciously progressive conception of a new urban agenda. It viewed the new localism as an opportunity to rejuvenate social policy in the context of a broader restructuring of urban governance.

A third new localist inspired vision of the urban agenda was based on a narrower form of intergovernmental collaboration. Unlike the previous visions, this approach did not entail any radical reworking of state architectures or modes of intergovernmental relation. Instead, it relied on more traditional program tools to organize reinvestment in urban-related areas. Oriented around a 'politics of need' (Hilton 2007) rather than a demand for institutional reform, the approach could best be understood as a pragmatic response to a localized crisis of collective provision.

Whereas the vision of multi-level governance referred back to the experience of the MSUA, the pragmatic needs-based approach drew on a more developed institutional history of federal-led urban reinvestment initiatives. At various times, perceptions of urban crisis had motivated the federal government to collaborate with provincial governments to develop programs to finance urban renewal and reform. These programs tended to focus on problems of the built environment, including networked infrastructure and housing. For example, in the immediate postwar period, the federal government established what is now the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to mitigate the pressures of rapid urban growth. Over time, CMHC became involved in infrastructure development, urban renewal initiatives, and public housing (Wolfe 2003). In the early 1990s, the federal government developed modest cost-shared infrastructure programs as a form of economic development and in response to mounting capital deficits (Andrew and Morrison 1995).

The needs-based approach was not sustained by any particular political programme or normative vision. It was theoretically open to interventions in a range of areas. In practice, however, the approach became associated with an infrastructure-led conception of the new localist problematic. This conception emphasized the barriers to urban reform created by the deterioration of capital assets and legacy infrastructure systems. It was a view that diagnosed many of the problems of Canadian cities in the built environment. As such, it sought solutions through built restructuring, that is, through land use and transportation planning reform, through urban redevelopment, and through reinvestment in infrastructure.

The emergence of a transit-oriented reform agenda in the early 2000s became closely associated with this infrastructure-led conception of the new localism and the problematization of an urban ‘infrastructure crisis’. The infrastructure crisis stemmed from long term patterns of retrenchment and institutional rescaling which resulted in municipalities absorbing the massive burden of capital depreciation, maintenance and renewal. This capital deficit came to be seen as a critical impediment to urban revitalization and reform. In this context, federal and provincial reinvestment in public transit became viewed as a progressive response to the crisis, a way to renew urban built environments in accordance with evolved understandings of the built demands of after-Fordist urbanism.

### **The Federal Agenda: Public Transit and a New Deal for Cities**

The urban agenda emerged in a somewhat unsettled political climate. The 1990s had been a period of profound neoliberal restructuring in Canada, with acute effects at the urban scale. This restructuring provided an essential context for debates about a new federal urban agenda in Canada. In putting cities ‘back on the agenda’, urban policy advocates were keen to emphasize

the manner in which neoliberal retrenchment and austerity had come to ground in Canadian cities. The urban agenda was, in this sense, an account of the contradictions of neoliberal urbanism, an attempt to re-establish conditions for effective collective provision and regulation at the local scale.

According to Bradford, in its diverse interpretations and emphases, the new localism was constituted as a response to the dilemmas of neoliberal governance. Of course, this response did not necessarily entail an attempt to escape the confines of neoliberalism. For example, strategies of ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism sought to preserve the broader neoliberal project through selective investments in infrastructure, neighbourhood renewal, and labour force development. Other instantiations went further, embedding neoliberal discourses within hybridized governance modalities that attempted to incorporate demands for community development and improved quality of life (Bradford 2008). What these various imaginaries had in common was an acknowledgement that neoliberal governance of the 1980s and 1990s had exposed the limits of market-led coordination at the urban scale.

In Canada, as in many countries, these debates drew attention to the problem of urban growth. According to the logic of neoliberal urbanism, urban growth should be regulated by the preferences of residents and the competitive behaviour of developers and rentiers. The role of the state was to limit planning controls and facilitate private coordination through markets. The new localism, however, offered a more nuanced account of the importance of planning and its relationship to economic development. Rather than simply act as a constraint on growth, coordinated planning and investments in collective consumption were seen to mitigate against the risk of market externalities and dysfunction, most clearly manifested in suburban sprawl. Though different strands of the new localism emphasized different forms of dysfunction

(economic, fiscal, social, or environmental), they shared a skepticism about the notion of ‘value-free’ growth. According to the new localism, what mattered was the *character* of growth.

Advocates of a new urban agenda emphasized the ways in which the historical success of Canadian urbanism was being undermined by the abandonment of its collectivist tradition. Canadian cities had historically been distinguished from their US counterparts by a greater commitment to coordinated planning and public investment. The benefits of this approach could be seen in the preservation of central cities, more rational forms of suburban growth, less acute socio-spatial segregation, and a generally higher quality of urban life (Goldberg and Mercer 1996). By the late 1990s, however, the deterioration of Canadian cities posed a challenge to this narrative of Canadian superiority. In response, urban policy experts and civic elites in large Canadian cities began to call attention to the problem of urban growth and the effects of declining state support (OECD 2002; Golden 1996; TD 2002).

Broadly speaking, there were two aspects to this growth problematic. The first concerned the collapse of a metropolitan planning tradition in Canada and the associated erosion of balanced development. In the 1950s and 1960s, many provinces created regional-scale institutions to govern urban development. The objective was to bring more effective coordination to increasingly complex patterns of metropolitan growth (see Sancton, 2005). Metropolitan planning succeeded in forging productive compromises between central and suburban municipalities, making it possible to share resources, coordinate transportation, and to mediate the spatial conflicts inherent to suburbanization. In the 1980s, however, provincial governments began to allow growth to escape beyond these metropolitan institutional boundaries.

As the authority of regional planning institutions diminished, suburban growth machines became more powerful and inter-municipal competition intensified (see Desfor et al. 2006;

Bradford 2005). As a result, managed suburbanization began to give way to a more intense form of suburban sprawl reminiscent of the US experience (Raad and Kenworthy 1998). Residential and employment growth increasingly took place in distant suburban and exurban areas, disconnected from integrated metropolitan planning. These development patterns generated a range of negative effects for both central and suburban municipalities: overtaxed infrastructure systems, the loss of environmental amenities and greenspace, devalorization of central areas, the concentration of poverty, metropolitan fiscal imbalances, and declining social service supports.

The decline of metropolitan planning was compounded by a second dynamic: neoliberal restructuring in the infrastructure policy sphere. This restructuring was associated with both program retrenchment and a rescaling of funding responsibility. In 1960, at the height of the Keynesian build-out of public works, public capital assets in Canada grew at an annual rate of approximately 4%. In the 1980s, however, at a time of accelerating suburban fragmentation, the capital growth rate had fallen to 1.2%. In the 1990s, net growth rates actually became negative, as asset depreciation began to outstrip new investment (Roy 2007; Mackenzie 2011). The federal government led declines in public capital spending, by reducing its share of public infrastructure from 33% in 1961 to only 12% in 2005. Municipalities, by contrast, saw their responsibilities double from 30% to 60% over the same period (Roy 2007).

The practice of retrenchment through rescaling had a profound effect on the ability of the state to supply core urban infrastructure assets. While accelerating suburban sprawl intensified demand for infrastructure, rates of public capital formation fell precipitously. The result was a widening gap between urban infrastructure needs and the actual stock of collective capital assets. Over the course of the 1990s, the rapidly deteriorating condition of urban infrastructure was

documented in surveys conducted by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. By 2003, these surveys pointed to an accumulated deficit of \$125 billion (Mirza and Haider 2003).

Canadian public transit systems were deeply affected by these dynamics. For many urbanists, the history of public transit was a defining characteristic of Canada's relatively successful approach to postwar suburban development. In the 1950s and 1960s, both Canada and the United States experienced a dramatic shift towards automobility and associated decline in transit ridership (Perl and Pucher 1995). Yet, Canadian and US governments reacted in different ways to this profound socio-technical change. Informed by a greater commitment to coordinated planning and collective public policy, Canadian governments invested far less in urban expressway infrastructure and were more proactive in attempting to stave off the collapse of mass transit (Raad and Kenworthy 1998). In the 1970s and early 1980s, a combination of growing transit subsidies and coordinated metropolitan planning made it possible to extend networks into new suburban developments. These extensions helped to stabilize public transit systems and better manage the process of suburbanization (Schimek 1996).

The suburbanization of transit, however, made systems in some ways more vulnerable. To attract 'choice' suburban passengers, planners were forced to develop less efficient network configurations that relied more heavily on large operating subsidies to sustain service (Canada Transportation Act Review Panel 2001). This strategy rendered systems much more dependent on generous public sector funding. With the rise of austerity in the 1990s, transit subsidies fell by nearly 25% (CUTA 2001). In response, local governments were forced to undertake a variety of restructuring initiatives, including service reductions, deferred capital maintenance, and fare increases (Cicuttin 1999).

While policymakers were able to successfully defend a fragile modal balance through much of the 1970s and 1980s, by the 1990s this success was quickly eroding. Unlike earlier generations of residential and commercial suburbs, newer developments were increasingly disconnected from existing networks and entirely dependent on the automobile for access. Ridership began to fall precipitously, declining by nearly 20% (Perl and Pucher 1995).

A number of political and policy shifts occurred in the early 2000s that helped place the problem of transit-oriented reform on the federal agenda. The first involved the scaling-up of neo-reformist movements in places like Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Toronto, where emerging civic coalitions were challenging a generation of suburban-oriented politics (Keil and Boudreau 2005). These coalitions shared with earlier reform movements a belief in neo-traditional planning, including an emphasis on coordinated metropolitan planning and central city preservation. Like earlier incarnations of urban reform, which mobilized in opposition to urban expressway construction, the problem of automobility figured as a central concern. What distinguished neo-reformism, however, were its broader civic roots and intellectual alliance with elite fractions urban capital. In Toronto, for example, these alliances developed through the formation of the Toronto City Summit Alliance (TCSA), which connected local capital to a broader civic movement that included prominent urbanists, social reform agencies, local planners, and segments of organized labour.

Through the TCSA, civic elites sought to articulate a progressive urban reform vision in which transit-oriented, neo-traditional planning anchored a collection of integrationist social policies, commitments to environmental sustainability, support for the arts, and a more encompassing and robust conception of systemic competitiveness (TCSA 2003). This connection between urban competitiveness and notions of ‘smart’ and coordinated planning was made

possible by the dissemination of new localist ideas amongst a contingent of civic-minded business leaders, who began to develop a more sophisticated, multi-dimensional conception of cities and their relationship to Canada's competitive position. Organizations like the Toronto Board of Trade and TD Bank, for example, became more attuned to the importance of urban place qualities in terms of attracting investment and improving productivity. In this context, dynamics of automobile-dependency and suburban sprawl came under fire for their contribution to congestion and fiscal inefficiency, as well as for their tendency to discourage youth-friendly urbanism and downtown revitalization (Toronto Board of Trade 2001; 2002; TD 2002).

Growing concern about urban place qualities gave rise to new anxieties about the state's ability to respond to deficits of collective provision. Whereas organizations like the Toronto Board of Trade had been supportive of austerity agendas in the 1990s, by the early 2000s there was a belief that federal and provincial downloading had placed too great a burden on municipalities, undermining their ability to support growth and renew the built environment (Keil and Young 2008). In response, corporate actors began to advocate for public investment in urban infrastructure, including public transit. Yet, in Toronto, the politics of austerity continued to pose a serious challenge for neo-reformers, who found themselves locked in a state of perpetual conflict with a provincial government actively hostile to its agenda. This hostility encouraged a turn towards the federal scale, where policymakers appeared to be increasingly receptive to the prospect of a new urban agenda (Horak 2008).

In 2001, Toronto reformers Jane Jacobs and Alan Broadbent convened a meeting of Canadian mayors with the goal of organizing municipal lobbying efforts at the federal scale (Broadbent et al. 2005; Broadbent 2008). The so-called 'C5' brought together mayors of large Canadian cities. In close alliance with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the group

developed a set of policy demands oriented around a new vision of federal-aided reform in which the problem of deteriorating public transit systems occupied a central place informed in part by the effects provincial austerity was having on Toronto's TTC system (Horak 2012). Thus, one of the FCM's central requests was an expansion of the federal government's modest Canada Infrastructure Works Programme, an allocation from the federal fuel excise tax, and a new annual investment of \$1 billion in capital funding for public transit (OECD 2002).

The success of local efforts depended crucially on finding a receptive environment at the federal scale. In the transit sphere, the federal government had no historic responsibility or experience. Thus, an agenda required the construction of an appropriate policy imaginary that could rationalize federal intervention in a non-traditional policy space. This imaginary emerged through two influential research and visioning exercises that took place in close proximity to local political movements. The first was conducted by the National Roundtable on the Environment and Economy (NRTEE), and the second by the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues.

The importance of these exercises was twofold. First, in developing their respective reports, each body consulted widely through conferences, stakeholder meetings, and working groups. These forums provided a venue through which to connect urban policy advocates and ideas to the federal policy machinery. Through a series of stakeholder and expert consultations, as well as through research commissions, the NRTEE was able to bring together dozens of leading academics, planners, municipal officials, and civic stakeholders to contribute to a vision of federal engagement (NRTEE 2003). Second, the reports played an essential role in crafting the parameters of a dominant ideological consensus based on the strategic integration of a number of core concepts and problematizations. The vision that emerged out these exercises quickly

solidified into a taken-for-granted imaginary that guided the development of federal transit policy.

This imaginary entailed a framing of the urban problematic in terms of the concepts of *sustainability* and *competitiveness*. At the federal scale, this conceptual linking resonated with ongoing experiments with ‘green’ economic development, which sought to tie environmental policy to an innovation-oriented science and technology agenda. The latter agenda had roots in the idea of sustainable development, which circulated through the federal bureaucracy in the wake of the UN Brundtland Report, but it gathered considerable momentum after the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. During this period, federal policymakers embraced the idea that ecological modernization constituted a new axis of international competition in which governments would race to secure the economic fruits of new environmental technologies. This inspired efforts to link environmental and climate mitigation policies to economic development initiatives, including subsidies for the development of ‘green technology’ (VanNijnatten 2004; Stoney and Hilton 2009). As early as 1999, the Transportation Climate Change Table, which was established to develop Kyoto implementation options, had begun to position public transit as part of this wider federal strategy (Transportation Change Climate Table 1999; Roschlau 2008). The NRTEE and Caucus Task Force stepped into this space and extended this line of argument.

The NRTEE was particularly well positioned to develop this argument. Founded in the late 1980s as a response to the Brundtland Report, the Roundtable was tasked with providing the government with arms-length advice on sustainable development policy. As its name suggested, the NRTEE’s role was to research and disseminate ideas about how environmental sustainability could be wedded to concerns about national competitiveness and growth. In 2001, it turned its attention to the urban scale by forming an urban sustainability task force. The goal of the task

force was to determine how the federal government should contribute to an alternative mode of sustainable urban development “aimed at improving the quality of life in and competitiveness of Canada’s cities or urban regions” (NRTEE 2003).

The basic insight underlying the NRTEE’s vision was the idea that “the links between urban environmental quality and a healthy knowledge-based economy are becoming more pronounced” (NRTEE 2003). The report operated along two lines of argument. First, it worked to document a range of negative urban environmental indicators and situate these in relation to Canada’s broader environmental performance. Not surprisingly, the report focused attention on the climate impact of urban automobility and the interrelated effects of land use and transportation in driving emissions. It documented patterns of accelerating decentralization and land consumption, increases in vehicle kilometers, and rising emissions from passenger travel. Ultimately, it argued that the environmental sustainability of Canadian urbanism was inextricably bound to the reform of suburban sprawl and excessive automobile dependency (NRTEE 2003).

The other, and more positive, aspect of the equation, according to the report, was that by counteracting sprawl and reducing automobile dependency, cities could become more competitive and livable. The NRTEE highlighted two key points of economic and environmental synergy. First, the report placed considerable emphasis on Richard Florida’s conception of amenity-oriented economic development. Competitiveness in a knowledge-based economy depended on the ability to attract valuable human capital assets, and increasingly these locational decisions appeared to be tied to urban environmental quality:

Skilled workers look for communities with a concerted approach to sustainable development that includes specific attributes such as user-friendly transit; commuter bike lanes, a clean, healthy environment; and a commitment to preserving natural resources for enjoyment and recreation.

Second, the NRTEE report argued that transit-oriented reform was a necessary response to the problem of worsening traffic congestion (NRTEE 2003). Here, the NRTEE echoed the anxieties of local business groups, who were beginning to voice concerns about urban mobility and circulation. The NRTEE made the case that problems urban circulation would not be resolved from within the paradigm of predictive planning, but rather required a new transit-oriented approach to land use and transportation policy.

The scale of investment needed to realize the project of transit-oriented reform, the NRTEE argued, would require new forms of intergovernmental partnership. Federal investments were essential to begin addressing the structural disinvestment in urban infrastructure. To this end, the report recommended as one of four priority measures that the federal government invest \$1 billion/year in public transit, with funding tied to requirements for integrated local planning and measured improvements in transit modal share. Federal engagement in this non-traditional area could be justified, according to the report, in terms of federal responsibility for climate mitigation policy, including commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, and the federal role in national economic development and innovation policy (NRTEE 2003). While public transit was clearly a municipal and provincial policy responsibility, it nevertheless impacted on areas of distinct federal jurisdiction.

Developed during the same period, the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues articulated ostensibly the same vision of urban competitiveness powered by environmentally sustainable transit-oriented reform. The Task Force was formed in 2001 as a response to criticisms, both external and internal, that the Liberal government was neglecting the urban policy file. The government of Jean Chretien had been reticent about re-entering an area of provincial jurisdiction, but under pressure it committed during the 2000 federal election

campaign to explore new opportunities for federal collaboration on urban-related policy issues. The Task Force was intended to give direction to this commitment.

The Task Force report, commonly referred to as the Sgro Report, was organized around a ‘vision of urban sustainability’. It argued that “Canada’s status as a world leader should be based on integrating and balancing economic competitiveness, social harmony, a stable environment, and high quality of life for all Canadians” (Sgro 2002). Like the NRTEE, the Task Force took as a starting point the need to adapt federal policy to the new realities of urban-based global competition. Like the NRTEE, it argued that the demands of urban sustainability followed naturally from this exigency; the dynamics of the knowledge-based economy were seen to align with the logics of sustainable urban reform and smart growth. Seeking to remain comfortably within the confines of federal jurisdiction, the report placed particular emphasis on the role of the federal government in facilitating the capital investments needed to support sustainable urban restructuring.

Comprising two of its three priority areas of action, the report recommended that the federal government create a national transit program and a national sustainable infrastructure program. Echoing the needs-based language of organizations like the FCM and Canadian Urban Transit Association, it noted the scale of the municipal transit infrastructure deficit and the urgency of reinvestment. It emphasized in particular the problem of congestion, which it took to be the principal rationale for the reform of urban transport systems:

Traffic congestion is increasingly becoming an economic burden and an environmental threat. The costs of driving continue to increase. It is estimated that gridlock costs the Greater Toronto Region alone, \$2 billion annually in lost productivity... To build world-class, competitive urban regions, all orders of government must invest in multi-modal transit systems (Sgro 2002).

This conception of a federal transit agenda as the centerpiece of a strategy of sustainable competitiveness solidified over a short period of time into an essentially taken-for-granted reading of the transit problematic. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Urban Transit Association, for example, embraced precisely this vision in their 2007 report on the need for a national transit strategy (FCM 2007). It was articulated as well in influential reports from the Conference Board of Canada which, in consultation with many of the leading voices in Canadian urban policy, produced *Sustainable Urban Transportation: A Winning Strategy for Canada* (Golden and Brender 2007). Both shared the same basic formulation as the NRTEE and Sgro Report. Beginning from an economic account of the new localism in which cities are depicted as ‘incubators of innovation’, ‘magnets for talent’, and the basic units of interspatial competition in a knowledge-based economy, these reports argue that urban competitiveness is closely aligned with environmental sustainability. That is, the very features which render cities environmentally unsustainable, such as sprawl and excessive automobile dependency, also render them less competitive.

Underlying this understanding of economic and environmental synergy was a reconceptualization of the dynamics of place competition. In the construction of the transit problematic, these texts insisted on a move beyond narrow, austerity-driven notions of neoliberal governance. Thus, in its call for a national transit strategy the FCM, argued that “While the key factor in the old economy was cost efficiency, in the new economy competitive advantage has shifted to those regions that can generate and retain the best talent and the most financial capital” (FCM 2007). As the qualities of the built environment and the character of urban growth were so integral to the pursuit of systemic competitiveness, the state could no longer afford to neglect

its responsibility for collective provision. Investment in public transit was necessary to create the (environmentally benign) place qualities on which cities now competed for mobile capital.

In response to lobbying from the FCM, the 2000 federal budget included a small endowment of \$125 million for a Green Municipal Fund to encourage experiments with ‘green’ infrastructure technologies. The budget also began to expand funding for omnibus infrastructure programs, which had operated on a smaller scale since the early 1990s, injecting an additional \$2 billion into the Infrastructure Canada Program. In 2001 and 2002, infrastructure spending was augmented again with \$2 billion for the new Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund, through which the government made its first substantial modern investments in urban public transit. In the Speech from the Throne that year, the government acknowledged that “Competitive cities and healthy communities are vital to our individual and national well-being, and to Canada’s ability to attract and retain talent and investment.” It promised to “put in place a ten-year program for infrastructure to accommodate long-term strategic initiatives essential to competitiveness and sustainable growth. Within this framework, it will introduce a new strategy for a safe, efficient and environmentally responsible transportation system that will help reduce congestion in our cities and bottlenecks in our trade corridors” (Government of Canada 2002).

In 2003, the agenda acquired significantly more momentum when Paul Martin became Prime Minister. Unlike Chretien, who had been averse in many ways to the notion of federal urban policy, Martin was an enthusiastic proponent of a new urban agenda. Martin had become well aligned with the urban policy community, adopting much of its visionary language, and had been signalling his desire to embrace a ‘new deal for cities’ as a signature issue for his government. As Finance Minister, Martin had been an architect of the federal austerity agenda of the 1990s. His embrace of a federal urban agenda was a self-conscious acknowledgement of the

need to rescue cities from the effects of retrenchment and downloading and reinvest in the process of urban reform (Martin 2002).

Martin's first budget made explicit the connection between urban competitiveness, sustainable development, and federal public transit spending: "Canada's cities have become the engine of the economy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the hubs where companies, highly skilled workers, universities and new ideas come together to generate investment and jobs. Dynamic cities are key to Canada's economic advantage." Furthermore, "Canada's communities hold an important key to sustainable development for future generations of Canadians, given communities' responsibilities in areas such as clean water, clean air, waste disposal and public transit." Citing in particular the connection between lagging investment and serious problems of urban congestion, the budget promised to prioritize transit projects within omnibus infrastructure programs (Department of Finance 2004).

A central pillar of Martin's new deal was a promise to transfer to municipalities a portion of the federal fuel excise tax. This promise was realized in the form of the Gas Tax Fund, which was established in the 2005 budget. The object of the Gas Tax Fund was to provide grants to municipalities dedicated specifically to sustainable infrastructure projects. For example, as a condition of receiving this funding, municipalities were required to complete Integrated Community Sustainability Plans that would help to embed federal investments in integrated local planning frameworks. The Gas Tax Fund was technically available for a range of sustainable infrastructure projects, including water and wastewater infrastructure, green energy, and solid waste management. In practice, however, the Fund became another mechanism for flowing federal funding to public transit, with all large Canadian cities committing their allocations to transit capital projects (Steinberg 2014).

This brief period, between 2002 and 2005, was pivotal in the formation of the federal transit agenda. Before 2002, the federal government contributed no funding whatsoever to urban transit systems, but by 2005 federal spending had grown to over \$220 million, or nearly 14% of all transit capital spending (CUTA 2010). More than this, it was a period when the basic ideational architecture of federal transit policy took shape and acquired a level of security. Though there had been significant reticence about entering a policy domain traditionally dominated by local and provincial governments, the Liberals came to accept that there was a legitimate role for federal engagement through infrastructure programming. This engagement was governed by an imaginary that understood transit-oriented reform in terms of its contribution to a state strategy of sustainable-competitive urbanism.

The degree to which public transit had become entrenched on the federal agenda became clear after 2006, when the Liberals were replaced by a new Conservative government. The Conservatives drew from a predominantly suburban and rural constituency and in contrast to the Martin Liberals were skeptical of the notion of federal urban policy. Yet, despite a very different electoral and ideological base, the Conservative government retained a strong commitment to the nascent federal transit agenda. In fact, between 2005 and 2010, annual federal investment rose nearly three-fold to over \$730 million, contributing to a transit renaissance across the country in cities like Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Ottawa, and Kitchener-Waterloo (Steinberg 2014).

The strong sense of policy continuity was evidenced in the Conservative's 2007 Building Canada Plan, a 7 year and \$30 billion infrastructure spending plan that expanded federal investment in public transit infrastructure. Building Canada not only retained the basic architecture of Liberal infrastructure policy, flowing money through shared-cost omnibus

programs and the federal Gas Tax Fund, it also retained the established language of sustainable competitiveness, with its holistic framing and emphasis on the relationship between sustainable urbanism and national competitiveness. It stressed, for example, the connection between transit infrastructure development and the problem of talent attraction:

In an integrated global economy, Canada's large cities must compete with other cities for private-sector capital investment and a skilled workforce. Today's skilled knowledge workers have high job mobility, picking and choosing the community where they will apply their skills. Cities and communities that provide a high quality of life are therefore able to attract, retain and create the required human capital to remain economically competitive. Talented professionals and investors are attracted to healthy, prosperous, vibrant and safe communities supported by public infrastructure such as public transit, sports facilities, green spaces, and arts and cultural institutions.

Furthermore, it worked to place this amenity-oriented conception of economic development within a post-political vision of sustainability that depicted public transit investments as a form of 'three-pillar' policymaking:

Sound investments in public transit can improve mobility and help get people out of their cars, which reduces traffic congestion, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and air pollution. In addition to the environmental value, these investments benefit the economy and quality of life in cities. Well-planned public transit systems that are integrated into the urban form can provide a fast, effective and economical transportation option for city residents as well as broader access to jobs, education, health care facilities and recreational facilities. And for many users, public transit is often the only affordable option (Government of Canada 2007).

Though the Conservatives were much less committed to the underlying notion of federal urban policy, and in particular to more involved conceptions of multi-level governance, their continued support for federal transit spending was made easier by a strengthening intergovernmental consensus around the logic and scope of federal participation. This consensus became articulated most clearly in the work of the Urban Transportation Task Force (UTTF) of the Council of Deputy Ministers Responsible for Transport. The function of the Council was to provide a forum where federal and provincial governments could interact on a recurrent basis to

develop shared policy agendas in the transportation sphere. From 2003 to 2012, the Council operated a task force to develop policy recommendations related to urban transport. Formed originally as a way to negotiate priorities and policy approaches related to the federal 'New Deal', the Task Force helped to articulate a shared understanding of transit policy and the federal government's role.

This understanding was organized around three distinct but complementary pillars. First, the Task Force placed a particular emphasis on the problem of congestion. In this, it was echoing the growing chorus of voices expressing anxiety about the economic costs of deteriorating urban connectivity and circulation. Second, the Task Force concluded that the problem congestion would not be solved from within the paradigm of automobile-centric planning. Instead, it drew on the language of the new realism to argue that problems of urban circulation required a more efficient, transit-oriented planning alternative. Finally, the Task Force suggested that the role of federal policy should primarily be to support transit infrastructure development. Rather than any kind of joined-up or integrated approach to transit-oriented reform, the Task Force argued that the federal government could support capital reinvestment while at the same time avoiding jurisdictional entanglement (UTTF 2005; 2009; 2012).

The period from 2006 was notable for an intensification of debate about the economic costs of congestion. In 2006, Transport Canada released an influential study that provided a conservative accounting of these costs, which it estimated to be between \$2.3 and \$3.7 billion per year (Transport Canada 2006). This study set the stage for a proliferation of subsequent studies from public bodies, business groups, and policy research organizations. These studies sought to quantify and draw attention to the economic effects of rising road congestion on trade, labour market functioning, productivity, competitiveness, wage costs, and commute times

(Mekky 2007; HDR 2008; TBOT 2010; Gill et al. 2011; Dachis 2013). The effect of these studies was to amplify the demands of business groups, who were becoming more vocal in their calls for an infrastructure-led fix to problems congestion and urban circulation (TBOT 2010; 2011; Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal 2010; Canadian Chamber of Commerce 2009).

The work of the Task Force was clearly influenced by these reports and reflected the growing importance of urban congestion on the intergovernmental agenda. The problem of congestion figured prominently in both the 2005 and 2009 reports, situated alongside other related problems, such as climate change and aging capital stock. By 2012, however, the problem of congestion had become not only the pre-eminent area of concern, but also the organizing frame that connected the other aspects of sustainable urbanism. In the introduction to the report, *The High Cost of Congestion in Canadian Cities*, the Task Force explained that:

Traffic congestion is a growing problem in Canada. It is becoming acute in our large cities, which are seeing record commute times that compare poorly with equivalent-sized cities in other countries. It is a growing problem in medium-sized cities. Congestion reduces Canadians quality of life and also has environmental costs. The waste of energy in gridlocked traffic and the production of greenhouse gases and other pollutants are harmful to the Canadian environment. Perhaps most importantly, congestion has substantial economic costs. Decisions on investments and jobs hinge on the quality of transportation infrastructure and the free flow of goods and people in and through our cities. Congestion increases current costs and discourages future investments (UTTF 2012).

Having made the case for congestion as the pre-eminent problem of urban transport, the Task Force went on to position public transit as the only viable technological ‘fix’ for the intensifying crisis of mobility. In this, the Task Force was reflecting an emerging consensus amongst policy actors that automobile-centric planning was itself the source of mobility problems, not the solution. Solutions would entail adopting new forms of sustainable transport planning:

Congestion is already impacting competitiveness and quality of life in our major cities, and it is clear that a more sustainable future will not allow for the same patterns of transport use that are in evidence today, particularly with regard to automobile use (UTTF 2009).

In language that appeared to be drawn directly from the ‘new realism’, the Task Force explained that:

Evidence shows that building more roads to address congestion in Canada’s largest cities is not only impractical from a cost perspective, but also ineffective: the new road space is used up as fast as it is built and congestion remains unaffected. Addressing congestion effectively will require innovative solutions that challenge the status quo. In large urban regions where the bulk of congestion exists, new transit that provides fast, reliable options for moving people around is a major part of the solution (UTTF 2012).

The final dimension of the intergovernmental consensus concerned the role the federal government would play in this complex jurisdictional space. As a number of observers noted at the time, the Conservative government that took power in 2006 had articulated a conception of federalism that appeared to sit uncomfortably with the notion of federal urban policy. The government’s conception of ‘open federalism’ was resolutely opposed, for example, to any notion of multi-level governance. Not only was the government ideologically opposed to more expansive conceptions of place-based social policy, it was committed to a disentangling of intergovernmental relations based on a more precise delineation of jurisdictional responsibilities (Bradford 2007). Despite this, however, the Conservative government showed a willingness to continue and even extend federal support for urban transit. An important reason for this appeared to be that unlike more interventionist forms of urban policy, the infrastructure-led transit agenda allowed the government to engage problems of urban systemic competitiveness in a ‘quieter’ way (Berdahl 2006). It allowed it to acknowledge the saliency of the new localism and sustainable urbanism, while at the same time limiting its institutional reach.

The Conservatives were encouraged in this by a provincial consensus around the value of federal infrastructure spending. Earlier iterations of federal urban policy, most notably the experimental Ministry of State for Urban Affairs (MSUA), had failed in large part because of provincial resistance to federal jurisdictional incursion. In the case of the transit infrastructure agenda, however, provincial governments were quite supportive of the idea of bringing federal spending power to bear on the problem of urban capital deficits. In its initial report, the Task Force was particularly concerned, for example, to document the scale of need in the transport sector and widening ‘infrastructure gap’. It concluded that there was a need to mobilize new sources of capital beyond what had traditionally been provided by users, municipalities, and provinces (UTTF 2005).

This did not imply that the federal government should embark on a new interventionist campaign of place-based urban policy. The Task Force instead embraced the language of need, arguing that the federal role should remain limited to capital funding. The objective of policy should be to support provincial and municipal investment in new public transit infrastructure, while being cautious not to overreach beyond conventional institutional boundaries:

The provincial members of the Task Force strongly support greater federal investment in transit...For its part, the federal government is currently providing more funding for transit than ever before, having increased funding from zero at the beginning of the decade to approximately \$1 billion in fiscal year 2008/2009; at the same time federal funding is based on strict respect for jurisdiction (UTTF 2009).

## **Ontario**

The federal transit strategy was operationalized through a suite of infrastructure programs that included the Gas Tax Fund, tri-level partnership funds, as well as a number of short-term funding pools (the Public Transit Fund and the Public Transit Capital Trust, which operated

between 2006 and 2008). While the Gas Tax fund provided municipalities with important funding (even helping to finance municipal contributions to shared projects), it was the tri-level infrastructure programs that were most responsible for flowing federal funding to large transit capital projects. These programs were initiated in the 1990s and renewed under various names - the Canada Infrastructure Works Program was followed by the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund and then by the Building Canada Fund. Despite the name changes, these programs operated according to a common set of parameters. Federal funds were committed on the condition that they be matched by equivalent provincial and municipal contributions. Partnerships were enshrined in federal-provincial agreements, which set terms for contributions and shared project selection.

The tri-level partnership model was based on a shared or collaborative approach to project development. This approach resonated with institutional path-dependencies that encouraged federal policymakers to pursue urban policy in conjunction with the provinces, who retained control over the municipal sphere. Yet, the tri-level approach also introduced barriers to federal policymaking. It required the articulation of a multi-scalar consensus around the value of transit capital projects – projects could only be developed once governments at municipal, provincial, and federal scales agreed that they were a priority for funding. In Ontario, the embrace of smart growth and transit-oriented reform was informed by many of the same discourses that were shaping federal policy, but with a particular emphasis on the dynamics of urban growth. Jurisdiction over municipal planning positioned provincial policy in more intimate relation to the neoliberal growth problematic and raised more explicit questions about the coordination of land use and transportation planning policy.

In Ontario, the early 2000s was a period of significant political flux and contestation, when a particularly virulent form of neoliberal restructuring was being challenged by societal interests, including from urban neo-reform movements that had become locked in a state of perpetual conflict with the Conservative government of Mike Harris. This movement gave rise to a broader alignment of political forces around a shared concern with the effects of suburban sprawl, a disenchantment with a suburban politics dominated by ascendant growth machines, and the socio-economic implications of disinvestment in collective urban infrastructures. Notions of transit-oriented reform emerged as part of an alternative vision for sustainable urban growth, which was actively embraced by a new Liberal government after 2003. This vision closely mirrored the progressive-competitive imaginary that solidified at the federal scale and helped to articulate a shared understanding of the transit problematic. It was rooted first and foremost in a conception of urban systemic competitiveness that challenged the Conservative government's narrow commitment to austerity and deregulated planning. In place of this deregulated growth strategy, the provincial Liberals embraced ideas of coordinated planning and infrastructure renewal as necessary features of a more rational and effective approach to economic development and growth.

As municipalities are constitutional 'creatures of the province', provincial governments are responsible for creating the institutional milieu in which local planning and policymaking take place. Not only have provincial governments played an active historical role in organizing, regulating, and financing urban infrastructure networks, they define municipal planning authority through the Municipal Act, set out overarching planning rules through the Planning Act, and determine the scale of urban coordination through the regulation of municipal boundaries and special purpose bodies. The deep penetration of provincial policy in the machinery of urban

governance ensures that the ebb and flow of provincial engagement has a profound effect on the dynamics urban development and local planning. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in relation to urban public transit.

The postwar history of Ontario provincial planning policy can be divided into three relatively distinct periods. The first period spanned much of the 1950s and 1960s and was characterized by a commitment to balanced growth. In this early postwar period, Ontario emerged as a North American leader in metropolitan planning, using regional institutions to manage the process of suburbanization. For Filion, this strategy was consistent with a Fordist regulatory logic that prioritized state-led coordination and investments in collective consumption (Filion 2001). In the transport sphere, this period was defined by a concern with the preservation of modal balance in a context of rapid automobile growth. Though automobile use and ownership expanded rapidly in these years, metropolitan planners nevertheless worked to preserve a viable role for mass transit (Friskin 2007). This entailed, in particular, investments in suburban transit extensions and efforts to foster supportive land use patterns in new developments.

By the end of the 1960s, however, the zeal for urban renewal and expressway construction was being imported from the United States, threatening the political compromise that had been fostered between urban and suburban constituencies. This resulted in the famous conflict over the Spadina Expressway in Toronto, which saw a Jane Jacobs led reform movement mobilize in opposition to rampant automobility and anti-urbanity (Robinson 2011). In a testament to the continued commitment to managed growth, the Conservative premier William Davis intervened in the conflict, overruling the Ontario Municipal Board and cancelling funding for the expressway. Davis accepted the reform movement's demand for a more environmentally

sensitive and people-centered transport regime, explaining his decision thus: “If we are building a transportation system to serve the automobile, the Spadina Expressway would be a good place to start. But if we are building a transportation system to serve people, the Spadina Expressway is a good place to stop” (quoted in Frisken 2007). As an alternative to expressway construction, Davis expanded subsidies for public transit, encouraging the extension of more suburban service, including via the provincially operated GO Transit commuter service.

The early 1970s marked the end of a postwar era in which planning policy had sought to embed suburbanization and automobility within a coordinated and multi-modal approach to development. By the end of the decade, a combination of forces were conspiring to undermine this growth model. In a context of slowing economic growth and rising budgetary pressures, the ideological tenor of provincial planning policy shifted, as a collectivist and interventionist disposition gave way to a more passive approach to regulation. As planning controls were relaxed, the power of metropolitan institutions eroded. Growth began to accelerate outside of metropolitan boundaries in suburban municipalities that catered to preferences for lower density, socially homogenous, and automobile-centric environments. In the transport sphere, the effects of decentralizing growth were compounded by the retrenchment of provincial public transit programs. The reduction of local capital and operating subsidies made it much more difficult to induce transit-supportive development in new generation suburbs (Frisken 2007). As a result, transport systems in these later developing suburbs became far more ‘splintered’ and commuting patterns more auto-centric (Perl and Pucher 1995).

The decline of coordinated, multi-modal metropolitan-scale planning reached its apogee with the 1995 election of the Mike Harris Conservative government. The Harris government came to power in the wake of an NDP government that had struggled to manage the acute effects

of recession. The Harris government's agenda was oriented around its notion of a 'Common-sense Revolution' predicated on a suite of neoliberal interventions, including aggressive reductions in public sector spending, privatization of public assets such as infrastructure, and regulatory reforms designed to lower business costs and extend market freedoms (Kipfer and Keil 2002). Importantly, the neoliberalism of the Common-sense Revolution was one inflected with a particular hostility to notions of traditional urbanism. The government's electoral constituency drew primarily from rural Ontario and newer generation suburban and exurban areas and its agenda devoted particular attention to suburban-oriented growth concerns.

This agenda was manifested in a number of interrelated ways. First, the Conservatives sought to create more favourable conditions for suburban development by rolling-back changes to the Planning Act implemented by the previous NDP government, which had been designed to re-establish conditions for transit-supportive development by placing restrictions on sprawl. Second, in addition to eliminating these tentative growth management efforts, the Conservatives mobilized infrastructure policy to actively reinforce the modal privilege of the automobile. Though the government invested relatively modestly in infrastructure overall, it used limited spending to pursue an outsized expansion of the provincial highway system, the largest in over three decades (Winfield 2003; 2005). Transit policy, by contrast, quickly became caught-up in the government's anti-urban austerity agenda, which sought to rein in the provincial state through municipal restructuring and downloading. As part of a suite of radical reforms in 1997, which included the municipalisation of responsibility for social assistance and housing, the government unilaterally cut all subsidies for public transit. This move cemented the shift away from the multi-modal transportation policies of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. In the 1970s, the

province provided subsidies to municipalities for 50% of net operating expenditures and up to 75% of capital spending. By 1997, subsidies had been reduced to zero.

This strategy proved relatively short-lived, however. In writing about the Conservatives' approach to economic development, Bradford describes a strategy designed to 'unleash the growth machine' (Bradford 2003). By the early 2000s, shortly into the Conservatives' second term, political cracks began to form in the government's planning agenda that challenged the logic of unrestrained growth. It was notable that these political pressures emerged not just from downtown-oriented urban reformers, but from the Conservatives' suburban and exurban constituency, as well. As Eidelman explains, these years marked a pivotal point in public attitudes towards suburban planning in Ontario. Traditional suburban politics had focused narrowly on issues of municipal autonomy, land servicing, and property tax rates, a politics which the Conservative government had embraced. At the turn of the century, however, there emerged a new awareness about the *externalities* of uncoordinated growth. This awareness, which brought increased attention to concerns about commute-times and congestion and the pressures of development on ecologically sensitive lands, led to new suburban demands for growth management initiatives (Eidelman 2010).

One expression of this shifting ideational landscape was the rapid and forceful emergence of the 'smart growth' concept in Ontario political discourse. Eidelman documents an explosion of media discussion of the concept between 2000 and 2003, suggesting that smart growth had become a politically salient response to the demands for a more rational and environmentally conscious mode of suburban development (Eidelman 2010). In response to this ideational shift, the Conservative government sought to alter course. In 1999, for example, under strong pressure from their exurban base, it agreed to halt subdivision development on the Oak Ridges Moraine

(Macdonald and Keil 2011). Then, in 2001, the government agreed to establish a series of ‘smart growth panels’ to conduct planning reviews and make recommendations on growth management. Though these panels ultimately yielded little in terms of concrete policy, they had important symbolic value. They signalled the emergence of a nascent consensus around the failure of laissez-faire metropolitan development and an end to the era of non-planning, which had prevailed since the latter part of the 1970s (White 2007).

The issue of growth management figured prominently in the 2003 election as parties competed to attract coveted suburban voters, particularly in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region where growth pressures were most acute. The Conservatives’ smart growth discourse tried to strike a balance between the perceived need to respond to growth problems and an ideological preference for non-interventionist planning. The Liberals struck out a much more aggressive position, promising to introduce a new growth management regime in response to concerns about congestion and the state of provincial infrastructure (Eidelman 2010). In addition to commitments to end subsidies for sprawl and to re-regulate ecologically sensitive development, the Liberals promised to re-invest in public transit and prioritize a more balanced multi-modal transportation system (Liberal Party 2002).

Upon assuming government, the Liberal’s planning agenda quickly came to constitute part of a broader political project attempting to chart a ‘third way’ between the Conservatives’ trenchant neoliberalism and a social democracy that was insufficiently attuned to the demands of competitiveness in an after-Keynesian economic context (Coulter 2009). Where the Conservatives had sought to foster competitiveness through a combination of austerity, deregulation, and various forms of public-private partnership, the Liberals made the case for a strategy that envisioned a more robust role for the state. This vision entailed both a broader

conception of systemic competitiveness that sought to incorporate a role for place qualities and the notion that the demands of economic development could be reconciled to objectives of environmental protection and quality-of-life. The urban reform agenda taking shape at local and federal scales during this period resonated strongly with this project and the Liberal government worked quickly to fill the institutional gap at the provincial scale and establish itself as a partner in a new multi-scalar policy ensemble.

The provincial agenda was founded on two interrelated pillars: the roll-out of ambitious growth management regulations and the expansion of infrastructure investments needed to underwrite a new regional growth model. Following the election, the Liberal government moved quickly to fulfill its commitment to regulate exurban sprawl through a series of changes to the provincial planning regime. The first piece of legislation was the 2005 Greenbelt Act, which extended protections for 1.8 million acres of ecologically sensitive and agricultural lands in Southern Ontario. The Greenbelt Plan formed the cornerstone for future growth planning by defining areas which were formally off-limits to development, preserved for other ecological, recreational, and agricultural functions (Government of Ontario 2005). These restrictions were then complemented by amendments to the Provincial Policy Statement, which guided land use and transportation policies, and by the development of a comprehensive Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe within the new Places to Grow Act. These legislative changes set out a framework for an alternative ‘smart’ growth management regime across the province.

At the heart of this regime was a strategy to re-integrate land use and transportation planning, with the objective of increasing the efficiency of urban and regional growth. The new planning legislation curtailed municipalities’ ability to pursue greenfield development, requiring instead a greater concentration of development within designated growth centers. Within these

growth centers, planning legislation further emphasized the importance of mixed-use development, land-use intensification, and brownfield remediation. Multi-modal transportation reform was integral to these land use requirements. A key objective was to mitigate automobile dependency by ensuring that development was ‘transit-supportive’, meaning both functionally integrated and sufficiently dense (Government of Ontario 2005; 2006; White 2007).

These planning reforms were a keen expression of the Liberal government’s third-way agenda. On the one hand, there was clearly a sense in which growth management legislation entailed a reassertion of residential use values in opposition to the Conservative government’s attempt to ‘unleash the growth machine’. The agenda reflected real voter anxieties about quality of life, traffic congestion, and the environmental effects of development. It sought to respond to these anxieties with growth reforms that were strongly opposed by many developers and traditional allies of the suburban growth machine (Macdonald and Keil 2011).

On the other hand, while it is true that new planning rules had political implications for development, it would be a mistake to treat Liberal reforms as somehow ‘anti-growth’ – they were not. Rather, they emerged from an understanding of systemic competitiveness that placed much greater emphasis on the threat of development externalities. As with policymakers at the federal scale, provincial actors were strongly influenced by those new localist discourses that stressed the relationship between place qualities, economic revitalization, and the attraction of investment and human capital. They diverged from their Conservative predecessors not in their relative prioritization of growth, but in how they understood the conditions of successful economic development, as well as in their conception of the state’s role in facilitating these conditions.

This orientation can be seen, for example, in how the government described the rationale underlying its southern Ontario growth plan. The problem to which the government saw itself responding was not how to curtail growth, but rather how to ensure that rapid growth in the present did not have the counterproductive effect of limiting growth in the future:

The *Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH)* is one of the fastest growing regions in North America. It is also the destination of choice for many people and businesses relocating from other parts of Canada and around the world. They settle here because of the high quality of life and the economic opportunities...However, without properly managing growth, communities will continue to experience the negative aspects associated with rapid growth...

In order to ensure that people and businesses continue to locate in the region, government needs to play an active role in encouraging more rational, transit-supportive development:

The *GGH* must remain competitive with other city-regions. However, urban sprawl can affect its competitiveness. Despite its many assets, Ontario and the *GGH* face a number of challenges in sustaining and growing its economy:

- Increasing numbers of automobiles are travelling over longer distances resulting in clogged transportation corridors...Traffic congestion and the delay in movement of goods costs Ontario upwards of \$5billion in lost GDP each year;
- Attractive and efficient public transit is difficult to introduce into sprawling communities, and this limits our ability to respond effectively to growing traffic congestion issues... (Government of Ontario 2006).

With its planning agenda, the Liberal government sought to manage growth in ways that were more sensitive to concerns about environmental sustainability and quality-of-life, but these objectives were inextricably bound to a more holistic understanding of the dynamics of urban economic development. Though the agenda was met with consternation by many traditional growth interests, it was very much inspired by a perceived need to impose order onto a mode of competitive suburban development that had itself become a barrier to long term growth and sectoral restructuring. For this reason, Macdonald and Keil argue that provincial planning reforms should be read as an attempt to establish a new 'sustainability fix'. The objectives of this

fix were to both mitigate the counterproductive excesses of auto-centric sprawl and to secure a more robust political consensus around growth (Macdonald and Keil 2011).

This third-way disposition was equally evident in the second pillar of the provincial reform agenda: a complementary ‘infrastructure fix’ (Saunders 2014). Just as the re-regulation of provincial growth was seen as a necessary antidote to the failures of laissez-faire planning, the Liberals insisted on a more statist conception of government’s role in the infrastructure sphere. In this, the Liberals argued that they were re-establishing a core responsibility of the state that had been neglected under conditions of neoliberal austerity. In the postwar period, the ‘era of visionary investment’, the state had accepted a foundational role in providing basic collective assets, which in turn secured the conditions for economic expansion and improved quality of life. Beginning in the 1970s, the province had entered an ‘era of neglect’, during which the politics of austerity had undermined this essential collective architecture. The Liberals described their infrastructure strategy as constituting an ‘era of renewal’. After years of “deep cuts and neglect”, the government promised to “reverse the massive infrastructure deficit – estimated at tens of billions of dollars – that accumulated over the last several decades and was threatening our long-term prosperity” (Government of Ontario 2011).

In response to this threat, the government ushered in an ‘infrastructure boom’ in the province (Nugent 2015). Beginning in 2005, the Liberals created a series of omnibus infrastructure programs. The first operated under the banner of ReNew Ontario and provided funding through 2009. This was followed by the Building Together Plan, which operated through 2014. These omnibus programs complemented infrastructure initiatives in the federal space, which required provinces to negotiate intergovernmental cost sharing agreements for large scale projects. With these funding initiatives, the government transformed the infrastructure policy

landscape in the province, infusing large amounts of new capital and collaborating with federal partners to finance a wide array of projects. When the Liberals assumed government in 2003, infrastructure spending amounted to \$2.6 billion. By 2011, provincial spending had reached a high of \$14 billion (unadjusted dollars, Government of Ontario 2011).

This infrastructure renewal strategy was understood as part of an integrated reform package that together with new planning regulations would create conditions for a new growth trajectory in the province (see Metrolinx 2008). The renewal of provincial infrastructure was thus conceived both as a response to deficits generated during an era of neoliberal neglect and as an opportunity to create new infrastructure systems that were better aligned with the government's progressive-competitive vision of sustainable growth. As in the planning sphere, then, Liberal infrastructure policy was meant to respond to capital's anxieties about a loss of systemic competitiveness, but also to respond to a crisis of political legitimation related to daily quality of life and concerns about the environmental effects of growth.

In his analysis of Liberal infrastructure policy, Nugent argues that a key to this legitimation strategy was an emphasis on so-called environmental infrastructures. This emphasis was seen to be central to the government's desire to create a new political consensus around growth. The objective was to connect infrastructure renewal to a broadly progressive agenda that included government climate change policies, job creation programs, and quality of life discourses. This strategy was exemplified, for example, in the 2009 Green Energy and Economy Act, which sought to combine restructuring in the electricity sector with climate mitigation policies and support for innovation in related green technology industries. For Nugent, the renewal of environmental infrastructures was constitutive of a 'socio-ecological fix': programs were rolled-out in response to capital's demand for productivity-enhancing public investment,

but were also mediated by political concerns around job growth, air pollution, climate change, and congestion (Nugent 2015).

Nugent positions provincial public transit policy in relation to and as part of this broader societal project. Like the other investments in environmental infrastructure, the renewal of public transit functioned to reconfigure traditional axes of political coalition and conflict, renewing collective conditions for growth, but in a way that was responsive to certain non-economic concerns. In the transit sphere, this political process was oriented primarily around the problem of congestion, and in particular the problem of congestion in the GTHA, where the challenges of automobile-centric development were seen to be most acute. The problem of congestion was politically productive in this regard because it resonated with and connected to a number of distinct economic, environmental, and social concerns. In Saunders' words, the problem of congestion created a consensus-building moment, an opportunity to align interests around a shared problem in an overlapping policy space (Saunders 2014).

The problem of congestion, and its relation to transit-oriented reform, was brought to prominence both provincially and nationally by organizations like the Toronto City Summit Alliance (later renamed CivicAction), and the Toronto Board of Trade. As previously noted, this was a period when civic elites in the Toronto region were becoming increasingly anxious about the state of congestion and its economic costs. The Board of Trade, for example, identified congestion as the most pressing concern of its membership, arguing that the state of the regional transport system was becoming a pre-eminent barrier to local competitiveness (TBOT 2002). The Toronto City Summit Alliance, which brought prominent urbanists, social service organizations, and labour groups together with leading corporate executives and business representatives, played an important role in integrating these economic anxieties into a cohesive

transit-oriented reform agenda. In its influential 2003 report *Enough Talk*, the TCSA explained that:

The problems facing our transportation system have escalated to the point where they threaten our economic efficiency and ability to compete with other urban regions. Our freeway network is 70% congested at peak periods. Gridlock alone costs the GTA \$2 billion annually in lost productivity. Indeed, local businesses cited congestion as their number one worry in a recent Board of Trade survey. And it is the number one or two issue for residents of the regions making up the GTA, according to a recent Environics poll. The Central Ontario Smart Growth Panel's recent discussion paper recommended an approach to unlocking gridlock that involves investment in transit, as well as transportation demand management, transit-supportive land use planning, and an integrated transportation network to move people and goods (TCSA 2003).

The anxiety of civic elites around congestion, sprawl, and the failure of the auto-centric transport system led to increasingly urgent demands for new transit capital spending, which had been neglected through the 1980s and 90s (TCSA 2003; TBOT 2001; Metrolinx 2008). The province responded with a series of network development plans that set the stage for an ambitious renewal of provincial transit infrastructure. Consistent with the Toronto-centric nature of the provincial growth debate, these plans were oriented around the needs of the GTHA, but their corresponding funding regime also supported projects elsewhere, notably in Ottawa and Kitchener-Waterloo. The first incarnation of the plan was introduced in the summer of 2007 as MoveOntario 2020, which consolidated a collection of 52 rapid transit projects in various states of planning preparation into a single strategy for Southern Ontario. This included extensions and refurbishments to the GO commuter system, subway and light rail projects operated by the Toronto Transit Commission, and bus rapid transit projects in York Region and Mississauga. Altogether, MoveOntario committed over \$11 billion of provincial money to develop more than 900 kilometers of transit infrastructure. The following year, the strategy was incorporated into a longer term plan branded the Big Move, housed within the newly formed regional transportation

authority, Metrolinx. The Big Move extended the scope and time horizon of the MoveOntario vision, laying out a 25 year development strategy at a projected cost of \$50 billion (Metrolinx 2008).

For provincial policymakers, transit-oriented reform, conceived as a fix for problems of auto-centric congestion, was emblematic of the progressive-competitive imaginary it was working to cultivate. The problem of congestion was presented as a common denominator concern, a node around which distinct economic, social, and environmental problematics could be brought into alignment. When the Premier introduced the MoveOntario 2020 plan, for example, he explained its value thus:

As businesses increase their speed and efficiency and develop faster production cycles, delivering goods "just in time" has become more critical than ever -- but battling traffic results in lost time and productivity. Congestion costs the GTA \$2.2 billion each year.

The personal cost is rising. Ontarians have been patient, but gridlock and packed transit vehicles can put a real stress on commuters. Commuting in the GTA currently takes 32 per cent longer than it would in free-flowing conditions. By 2031, that will rise to 40 per cent.

The environmental cost of congestion is also unsustainable. GTA residents made approximately 10 million car trips per day in 2004 and were responsible for approximately 14 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

If we continue growing the same way, making the same transportation choices, and not doing anything to relieve gridlock, congestion will get much worse. (Office of the Premier 2007).

The broad-based civic consensus that emerged around the MoveOntario and Big Move strategies was underwritten by a number of core ideas. In the economic sphere, support for transit-oriented reform was tied to evolving ideas about the sectoral dynamics of regional economies, their geographies, and the relationship to transport technology. As early as 2001, the Toronto Board of Trade had begun to advocate for investment in rail-based commuter transit as a

fix for the growth dilemmas of auto-centric sprawl. While the Board had been an advocate of austerity budgets in the 1990s, its position became more nuanced as it began to develop a more sophisticated understanding of place-based dynamics. In addition to a generic concern with the productivity losses associated with congestion, the Board argued that transit-oriented reform would help to resolve local budget pressures by counteracting the inefficiencies of sprawl (TBOT 2002).

As the political window of opportunity widened later in the decade, the Board became an even stronger advocate for investment in commuter rail. Through its annual ‘scorecards on prosperity’, it identified congestion as the single greatest threat to the region’s competitive position and insisted that accelerated development of the Big Move was the principal solution (TBOT 2009; 2010). For the Board, the prioritization of commuter transit was shaped by its understanding of the bifurcating regional economy and the twin problems that this created for the transport system. On the one hand, suburban areas were expected to remain oriented around manufacturing, light industry, and low density subdivision development. In these spaces, there was a need for freer movement on highway networks, particularly to facilitate freight, and thus a need to encourage a reduction in unnecessary auto traffic. On the other hand, the urban core was becoming increasingly tied to the dynamics of the cognitive-cultural economy and its spatial logics of functional integration and residential intensification. In the core, the growth of high-value knowledge sectors depended on the ability to accommodate greater density and to sustain an adequate supply of skilled labour. The expansion of commuter transit networks came to be seen as a solution to these parallel problems (Keil and Young 2008).

This vision and attendant concerns about congestion were also closely connected to the popularization of amenity-oriented conceptions of economic development. In its annual

scorecards, the Board advanced its argument beyond a concern about the direct economic costs of congestion (related to wages, turnover time, and skill matching), to include concerns about the region's desirability as a place to live. In its benchmarking reports, Toronto was seen to derive a competitive advantage from the local quality of life, which tended to attract educated and mobile workers. Its single greatest weakness in this regard, however, was the state of the transport system and the experience of daily commuting:

With a suite of such solid, and often enviable, results Toronto could aim to be the number one metro on Labour Attractiveness – except that poor results on transportation persist. Eighty-minute round-trip commute times mean Torontonians spend the most time getting to and from work (TBOT 2011).

Toronto's reputation as an attractive place to live, argued the Board, was being 'tarnished' by the relative burden of commuting in the region.

For organizations like the Board of Trade and the Civic Action Alliance, the problem of congestion provided a fertile site to connect economic anxieties to popular concerns related to social reproduction. The problem of 'labour attractiveness' was in effect an expression of the frustrations experienced by commuters in the coordination of daily life. In 2012, for example, the Civic Action Alliance organized the 'your32' campaign in an effort to accelerate investment in the Big Move. The objective of the campaign was to generate popular political support for new revenue and investment tools to fund public transit infrastructure. To do this, it sought to orient debate around lengthening commute times and to position the Big Move as a solution to quality of life concerns. The campaign sought pledges from residents and politicians by asking: 'what would you do with 32?' (Civic Action 2013). The number 32 referred to the projected time savings that an average commuter would enjoy once the Big Move network had been developed in full.

Finally, the transit-oriented approach to congestion reduction also helped to secure the consent of leading environmental organizations in the province, who were eager to support an alternative to the auto-centric development patterns that predominated through the 1980s and 1990s. From its inception, the province's renewal strategy had been presented as part of its broader green economy agenda to articulate economic development initiatives to the government's climate change policies:

We don't have to choose between a strong economy and a healthy environment. Faced with the challenge of climate change, the only way to have a strong economy is to go green. And the only way to go green is to have a strong economy (Government of Ontario 2007).

Transit-oriented reform was considered an exemplar of this strategy. Here, the connection between congestion and the environment entailed an equation of traffic and emissions reduction. The Growth Plan, for example, was expected to reduce carbon emissions from automobiles by 45% over the lifetime of the plan. Most of this reduction would be achieved by diverting travel demand to an extended rapid transit network:

The Ontario government is launching a multi-year \$17.5 billion rapid transit action plan for the GTA that will deliver jobs, increase transit ridership and reduce congestion. MoveOntario 2020 will build 902 kilometres of new or improved rapid transit, starting in 2008. This project will remove 300 million car trips off our roads – that's good news for the air we breathe – and the fight against climate change we're waging (Government of Ontario 2007).

The success of this modal shift, according to the plan, would result in emissions reductions of 10 megatonnes, almost 15% of the province's climate change target (ibid).

As noted, environmental groups were strong supporters of the government's growth management regime, which set controls on sprawl and encouraged more intense, transit-supportive development patterns. They were equally supportive of the government's transit renewal plans. This support was perhaps best expressed through the Move the GTHA coalition.

Move the GTHA began operating in 2011 with the mission of advancing the pace of development for Big Move projects. The coalition included membership from leading corporate and civic organizations, including the Toronto Board of Trade, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and Civic Action Alliance. Its campaign work thus cross-fertilized with the efforts of these organizations and projected a common message centered on the urgency of large-scale capital investment in public transit. It was distinguished, however, both in its exclusive focus on transportation and in its membership, which drew much more heavily from the environmental advocacy and policy sector.

Move the GTHA was founded with funding from the Toronto Atmospheric Fund, a publicly endowed organization focused on developing urban solutions to climate change. Members included the Pembina Institute, a leading environmental policy research organization in the province, the David Suzuki Foundation, Environmental Defense, the World Wildlife Fund, the Toronto Environmental Alliance, and the Canadian Environmental Law Association, among others (Kishchuk 2015). Move the GTHA's campaign operated alongside and in conjunction with the broader mobilization of elite civic advocacy around the need to generate new sources of dedicated public revenue to accelerate the development of Big Move projects. In this sense, the function of the coalition was not to articulate an independent environmental rationale for the government's transit agenda, but rather to project the kind of multi-sectoral consensus that was needed to overcome resistance to new taxation tools.

With the coalescence of elite civic opinion through organizations like the Board of Trade, Civic Action, and Move the GTHA, the contours of the provincial agenda became increasingly taken-for-granted. The notion that policymakers should pursue transit-oriented reform as a response to the economic, social, and environmental problems of congestion was broadly

accepted. The only question that remained was how quickly and aggressively government would expand investments in public transit infrastructure. In the final section of the chapter, I want to consider the implications of this infrastructure-led strategy in more detail.

### **The Politics of Infrastructure-led Transit Policy**

At the beginning of the chapter, I described three visions of new localist reform, arguing that each addressed itself to the problem municipal weakness in particular ways. The decision to pursue transit-oriented reform through collaborative tri-level infrastructure programs entailed the most conservative pathway, one which addressed problems of Canadian cities in quite narrow terms. In this concluding section, I want to probe the consequences of this approach and its implications for local policymakers. By channelling new funding into urban transit infrastructure, the infrastructure-led approach pursued by federal and provincial governments has helped to resolve transit capital deficits that evolved over the course of the 1980s and 90s. Yet, by focusing exclusively on this problem of capital deficits, federal and provincial policymakers have neglected other aspects of policy that are related, both directly and indirectly, to the problem of transit equity.

There are certainly political and institutional reasons for pursuing this pathway. As noted, federal infrastructure programs developed in the early 1990s continued a tradition of federal urban policy that was careful to avoid entanglements with provincial jurisdiction. Shared infrastructure programs represented a ‘quiet’ approach to urban policy. They allowed for an enhanced federal presence in Canadian cities and for the alleviation of certain aspects of the ‘vertical fiscal imbalance’, yet also retained a healthy respect for historical divisions of institutional jurisdiction (Berdahl 2006). Viewed from this perspective, it is possible to see an

infrastructure-led approach to public transit policy as following a path of institutional least-resistance that fit most easily with the existing intergovernmental architectures of the Canadian state.

It would be a mistake, however, to reduce the infrastructure-led approach to the forces of institutional path dependency. Rather, the approach reflected a broader form of coherence between existing institutional architectures and the ideas and objectives that policymakers brought to bear in the transit arena. These ideas played an essential role in mediating the nature of the new localism as it manifested through transit-oriented reform. Above, I showed that at both federal and provincial scales, the problem of public transit became rooted in a critique of automobile-centric sprawl that linked economic problems of congestion, talent attraction, and urban revitalization to notions of environmental sustainability and quality-of-life. This progressive-competitive imaginary placed problems of competitiveness and growth at the forefront, articulating them in turn to other complementary social and environmental logics. An infrastructure-led approach to transit policy was a natural corollary to this vision – it focused attention on dynamics of circulation and the imperative to invest in the development of new built environments.

At the federal scale, this relationship between policy objectives, institutional modalities, and spending priorities was made visible in the negotiation of the new cities agenda. At the beginning of this process, when momentum was first beginning to build, there was a sense of openness and possibility that encouraged policy actors in a variety of diverse issue areas. The language of sustainability, with its post-political promise of holistic reform, reinforced this sense of optimism. As the agenda evolved into a more concrete collection of initiatives and funding commitments, however, the sense openness naturally closed around a more restricted set of

priorities. This closure was felt in particular by social policy advocates, who saw in the urban agenda the potential for a change in federal course away from the trenchant neoliberalism of the 1990s. This potential appeared to diminish over time as it became clear that federal policy was being guided by an economy-led conception of the new localism. While steeped in the language of sustainability, this conception retained little space for the complexities of place-based social policy and its concern for aligning the project of built reform with spatially sensitive programs for social development. This became visible in a narrow emphasis on ‘hard’ infrastructures and a neglect of complementary ‘soft’ infrastructures.

The uneven nature of the federal agenda is captured by Bradford’s analyses of the Martin Liberals’ ‘new deal’ for cities. For Bradford, the unfulfilled promise of the agenda can be traced to a failure to take-up the institutional practice of ‘urban development agreements’ (UDAs). UDAs represented a latent Canadian tradition in collaborative place-based policy, one which advocates hoped could serve as a model for multi-level social policy engagement. Experiments with urban development agreements evolved directly out of the short lived Ministry of State for Urban Affairs of the 1970s. Implemented through the regional development agency, Western Economic Diversification Canada, these UDAs had been used to coordinate regeneration activities with targeted social policy and community development initiatives in a number of western Canadian cities (Bradford 2008b). In Vancouver, for example, an urban development agreement had been used to coordinate federal, provincial, and municipal resources around public health initiatives in the Downtown East Side neighbourhood. In Winnipeg, the approach attempted to integrate economic revitalization programs in the downtown with employment and housing policies aimed at supporting urban aboriginal communities.

The experience of UDAs in the 1980s and 90s pointed both to the policy promise of integrated social policy and the institutional potential for tri-level multi-level governance. For many, this suggested the urban development agreement as an attractive model for the social pillar of a new urban agenda, a way to align overarching federal and provincial social policies with locally informed planning and community development initiatives. In places like Toronto, for example, there were ambitious proposals to align social housing, redevelopment, and community support programs to target priority neighbourhoods (Bradford 2007). The hope was that the new federal urban agenda might serve as an impetus towards renewed social spending, mobilized through collaborative and place-based institutional frameworks.

This vision, however, ultimately went unrealized. Though the Liberals did make some tentative social investments in cities, these were of a much smaller scale than reformers had hoped. The reason appeared to stem from the government's weighted interpretation of the notion of urban sustainability, which excluded any real concern for its equity dimension. Instead, the government conceptualized holistic policy primarily in terms of the wedding of environmental and economic rationalities into a vision of green growth. As Bradford observed,

Fundamentally, the government's approach lacked a robust urban social vision... While frequently reciting the four pillars of urban sustainability, it was not clear that the government had thought through implementation of anything beyond the economic and environmental dimensions (Bradford 2007).

This equation of sustainability with a kind of green growth encouraged a narrow preoccupation with the problem of 'hard' infrastructure, with the type of investment that could help to induce more efficient development dynamics. Social policy concerns went largely neglected because they operated outside of this dominant imaginary.

Stoney makes a similar observation in his account of the federal urban agenda, which he depicts as state strategy guided by a business-led reading of the new localism. Yet whereas

Bradford describes the failure of multi-level governance, Stoney emphasises the government's decision not to devolve real institutional authority to local governments. For Stoney, the institutional conservatism of federal policymakers was a reflection of their desire to maintain control over the direction of the urban agenda, which meant limiting the scope of local policy discretion. The urban agenda, Stoney argues, represented an opportunity not only for the federal government to adapt to the exigencies of an urban-oriented political-economy, but to enhance the legitimacy and efficacy of urban policy by empowering the local state. Federal policymakers were resistant to this type of devolution, however, precisely because it threatened to undermine the corporate agenda that underpinned their urban policy vision. Devolution would open up political space at the local scale for a broader array of interests and priorities, including social policy priorities that might pose a direct challenge to the growth-first logic of progressive-competitive urbanism (Stoney 2006).

What both Stoney and Bradford draw attention to, then, is the close relationship between the institutional modalities of federal urban governance and the government's conception of the urban problematic. The infrastructure-led approach to urban policy in general and transit policy in particular was informed by a strategy of selective engagement. Policymakers made strategic decisions about which problems *in* Canadian cities were the most urgent or appropriate objects for federal intervention. More than this, they engaged with the problem *of* Canadian cities only in the narrowest of terms, directing federal spending to targeted areas while neglecting the broader problem of institutional weakness, and thereby constraining the space for local politics.

For the project of transit-oriented reform, the equity implications of federal policy became most visible in the development of affordable housing policy. Historically, federal housing policy played an important role in shaping the character of local development, providing

resources that allowed planners and policymakers to pursue more balanced forms of suburbanism. When it returned to the urban policy arena, however, federal engagement with housing was much more modest, reflecting its prioritization of hard infrastructure and general ambivalence towards the logic of social sustainability (Evans 2007). By drawing this linkage, the intent is not suggest that housing and transport policy were seen by federal policymakers to be properly intertwined – they were not. Rather, the intent is highlight the effect of selective federal engagement on policy at the *local* scale, where the relationship between these issues tended to be more fully appreciated.

In his history of Canadian social housing policy, Suttor refers to the three-decade period from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1990s as the ‘prime’ period when robust investment helped to provide deeply subsidized housing for a significant portion of low income renters. At the local scale, one of the important effects of this investment was to allow planners to incorporate affordable housing into mixed income suburban developments, a feature which became a hallmark of Canada’s more balanced model of early postwar suburbanization (Suttor 2016). Though federal housing policy was not conceived within the context of metropolitan planning objectives, this collectivist policy orientation nevertheless resonated with local projects. Deep investments in social housing empowered local planners and policymakers to develop relatively integrated neighbourhoods based on a mix of tenures and multi-modal transport policy.

In the early 1990s, the ‘prime’ period of social housing development gave way to a new period of devolution and retrenchment. During a brief period between 1993 and 1996, the federal government extricated itself from the business of social housing, first by unilaterally ending its funding of new housing production and then by devolving program management. Federal retrenchment had a profound effect on the sector. Between 1970 and 1990, Canada produced an

average of 20 000 new social housing units every year. In 1992, over 22 000 new units were developed nationwide. Between 1994 and 2001, however, production collapsed to just over 3000 units per year (data from Suttor 2016).

The emergence of the new urban agenda at the turn of the century was thus encouraging for the social housing sector. It suggested that the federal government might be ready to re-engage and there was hope that investments in affordable housing might be used to anchor the social pillar of a holistic urban reform strategy. As Suttor explains, however, the housing lobby confronted a government that while enthusiastic about investing in infrastructure, was much less committed to the idea of investing in social housing, much less at a scale required to replicate ‘prime’ era development (Suttor 2016). Through sustained lobbying, the sector convinced the federal government to make a number of limited commitments to housing and homelessness, including the National Homelessness Initiative and Affordable Housing Initiative. Valuable as these contributions were, they constituted only a modest form of re-engagement, one driven by pragmatic political concerns rather than any coherent vision of social housing renewal or inclusive urbanism (Pomeroy and Falvo 2014). Not surprisingly, then, what housing development did take place was modest, producing relatively few units at low subsidy levels (Suttor 2016).

As we shall see in the case of Waterloo Region, this modest form of federal engagement in social and affordable housing has acted as a constraint on local efforts to re-establish conditions for socially integrated multi-modal urban development. Whereas earlier generations of federal housing policy empowered local policymakers to pursue a more equitable form of multi-modal planning, in the current conjuncture, selective patterns of urban engagement are producing a different landscape of political opportunity at the local scale. While transit capital

expenditures are encouraging local governments to extend and intensify infrastructure networks, their capacity to integrate these investments with affordable housing development is limited. This dynamic, I show, is particularly apparent in the region of Kitchener-Waterloo, where a demand for integrated transit-oriented reform has been undermined by a dearth of resources.

The challenge of equitable transit-oriented reform has been compounded further by policy decisions at the provincial scale, where a similar mode of selective engagement has resulted in an overwhelming emphasis on the problem of transit capital development. Like the federal government, the Ontario provincial government has made significant investments in public transit. Yet here too, the strategic emphasis on built restructuring and problems of modal shift have produced a narrow, infrastructure-oriented approach that marginalizes concerns related to equity and inclusion. This dynamic has been particularly apparent in the government's differential response to the problems of capital and operational funding. While the support for capital investment has increased dramatically since the early 2000s, spending on transit operations has remained modest, particularly when compared to provincial contribution levels of the 1970s and 80s.

In the previous chapter, I outlined the importance of operational subsidies to equity-oriented transit policies. Whereas capital spending is used to finance one-time purchases of large infrastructure assets, operational funds contribute to the costs that are incurred by using these assets on a day-to-day basis. This includes, for example, costs related to labour and fuel. In North America, all transit systems operate on a cost-loss basis, which means that some portion of every trip is subsidized by public contributions. From an equity perspective, the importance of these public subsidies is that they allow planners to make decisions related to route design, network intensity, operational hours, service standards, and user fees that are not fully determined by the

dictates of market demand. Subsidies, for example, allow planners to deliver service at times and places that might not be justified strictly on the basis of ridership demand. Furthermore, because operational subsidies are inversely related to user fees, they determine the overall level of (de)commodification in the system. The incorporation of affordability objectives into fare policy thus depends in significant part on rates of public subsidy.

In Ontario, the postwar pattern of provincial funding for local transit operations has been characterized by a series of shifts. State re-engagement has been both uneven and selective. Commitments to operational subsidy have not been renewed to nearly the same extent as commitments to capital investment. This pattern of selective engagement reflects the more generalized dynamics highlighted in the previous chapter that have contributed to an operational budget crisis across North American public transit systems. While the renewal of public transit has empowered cities to invest in large-scale infrastructure projects, governments have simultaneously been forced to contend with a chronic underfunding of transit operations. In the next chapter, I explore this type of contradictory dynamic in Ottawa, where the development of a multi-billion dollar light rail mega-project has been pursued alongside years of tense negotiations over the scale of the city's operational subsidy.

The growth of provincial funding for transit operations coincided with the suburbanization of public transit nationwide in the 1970s. As new forms of commuter service were considerably less efficient than traditional local services, they required a radical increase in operational subsidy to sustain. Network extensions in the 1970s and 1980s were successful in growing ridership, inducing a 25% increase in per capita travel, but these gains were the result of a nearly 250% increase in service kilometers. To fund these extended suburban services, operating subsidies nationally rose from less than \$100 million in the early 1970s to over \$1.5

billion by the end of the 1980s (constant 1998 dollars, Canada Transportation Act Review Panel 2001). In Ontario, this trend was expressed in the Davis government's decision to subsidize 50% of municipal operating costs alongside its subsidies for capital investment.

The Conservatives' Common Sense Revolution marked the end of this era of provincial support. The dismantling of the operation subsidy program began almost immediately, with a 10% reduction in 1996 followed by a further 10% reduction in 1997. In 1998, the program was disbanded entirely as part the broader restructuring of provincial and municipal responsibility. According to the 'Who Does What' panel, appointed as part of the program review exercise, provincial retrenchment was necessary in order to recalibrate subsidy levels in the urban transit sector. According to the panel, provincial operating subsidies had encouraged the overextension of local networks and allowed municipalities to avoid making difficult planning and operational decisions. As it explained: "The dominant role played by provincial subsidies in municipal transit across most of the province has resulted in systems that are financially unsustainable" (quoted in Cicuttin 1999).

The elimination of the provincial operating subsidy program exacerbated an already difficult operating situation for local transit providers, a result of ridership losses and the recession of the early 1990s. In response to cost pressures, municipal governments began to adapt service and fare levels in an attempt to balance budgets. The loss of provincial subsidies made conditions much worse. In 1995, combined operating subsidies for Ontario transit systems totalled \$438 million, but by 1997, subsidy levels had fallen to only \$331 million (unadjusted dollars, Cicuttin 1999). Subsidy reductions were accompanied by a combination of both service contraction and fare increases. The City of Ottawa, for example, reduced service by 18% during the 1990s, in large part in response to provincial cuts. In Toronto, the average fare increased by

over 25% in the two years after 1995. The combination of subsidy reductions and fare increases became reflected in a dramatic shift in the province-wide cost-recovery ratio; that is, in the proportion of operating costs funded through user fees. Whereas in 1990 system revenue accounted for approximately 60% of operating costs, by 1997 this ratio had increased to over 70% (ibid).

The most recent shift in the provincial operating funding regime occurred in the mid-2000s as part of the Ontario Liberals' broader urban reform and growth management agenda. In 2005, the Liberals followed their federal counterparts in distributing a portion of the provincial fuel excise tax to municipalities as a new source stable funding for public transit. Unlike the Federal gas tax program, the provincial program allowed municipal discretion over the allocation funding across operating and capital budgets. Thus, with the Ontario Gas Tax Program, provincial funding began flowing to municipal transit operations for the first time since 1998.

This investment was of course valuable, providing a stable stream of funding after a long period of provincial neglect. Yet, when compared to subsidy ratios of the 1970s and 1980s, and particularly when considered within the context of the government's wider engagement with transit-oriented reform, the Gas Tax Program was a fairly modest initiative. For example, between 2004 and 2014, the provincial government invested approximately \$21.8 billion in public transit across the province. Of this total, the Gas Tax Program constituted only \$3.4 billion (Ministry of Transportation 2015), of which only a portion has been used to fund local operations. The impact of the gas tax program for municipal systems is well illustrated in the case of Ottawa. In 1980, the provincial government contributed approximately 45% of the annual operation subsidy for Ottawa's transit system. By 2000, this contribution had fallen to zero. While the subsidy level began to rise again in 2006 with the introduction of gas tax funding, in

2010 provincial funding still contributed only 16% of the city's operational subsidy (Data drawn from CUTA 1980-2010).

The embrace of transit-oriented reform by the Ontario Liberals, I have argued, was constitutive of its turn away from the 'roll-back' neoliberalism that characterized Conservative governance in the 1990s. Yet, when the divergent trajectories of capital and operating spending are taken into account, what becomes clear is that this turn has constituted only a *partial* reversal of neoliberal retrenchment. On the one hand, the Ontario government's self-described 'era of renewal' has since 2004 introduced dramatic growth in transit capital spending, supporting significant expansions in transit infrastructure across the province. On the other hand, however, provincial spending on transit operations has recovered only to a much more limited degree

In Ontario, it is perhaps surprising that the equity implications of this selective engagement has received relatively little attention from directly within the transit policy space. Instead, the dynamic has been discussed most expressly within the context of the province's engagement on poverty reduction. In 2008, the Liberal government launched a series of consultations to support the development of a new provincial poverty reduction strategy, a coordinated set of initiatives designed to address the complex and layered disadvantages experienced by low income Ontarians. It was in the context of this engagement that concerns about the equity-oriented transit policy were raised, including attention to equity-oriented network planning and affordable fare policies, and the constraints imposed by inadequate provincial operating subsidies.

The Liberal government's engagement with the poverty reduction agenda was attributable in significant part to persistent advocacy on the part of community service and poverty advocacy groups. The government's first term had been characterized by a 'Third Way'

orientation in which policymakers sought to align economic development objectives with new progressive imaginaries that included space for environmental and quality-of-life concerns (see Coulter 2009). While the government had success in crafting an elite consensus around issues like smart growth reform, it had generally failed to engage subordinate concerns around poverty and income security. Beginning in 2007, the coordinated mobilization of a broad base of advocacy groups helped to push the government towards the development of a poverty reduction strategy, which was seen as a requisite to preserve the government's progressive credentials.

This mobilization centered on a Toronto-based alliance that became known as the 25-in-5 Network, which referred to the goal of reducing poverty by 25% in 5 years. The Network developed a comprehensive platform of poverty reduction measures centered on three core policy areas: employment and wage protections, income support, and investments in affordable communities. The problem of accessible and affordable public transit featured as part of this third pillar. At the heart of this problematization was an effort to distinguish between, on the one hand, the government's significant investments in transit infrastructure and, on the other hand, its failure to support operational subsidy levels needed to improve accessibility for dependent and disadvantaged transit users (25-in-5 2009).

The application of a poverty reduction lens to public transit shifted the discussion away from issues of congestion, growth, and environmental sustainability, towards a more explicit consideration of the role transit plays in fostering connectivity and opportunity. This dimension of transit policy was well illustrated, for example, in the City of Toronto's poverty reduction strategy, which developed in the wake of the broader provincial engagement process. In its analysis of transit equity in the city, the report highlights the burden that large fare increases and service cuts have had on low income households. As modest income residents have been pushed

out of the downtown core, it notes, they have been forced to rely on increasingly expensive and substandard service, with deleterious consequences:

Low-income people in [the inner suburbs] depend on transit to get to work. Jobs are often low-paying shift work with irregular schedules that don't always match transit availability. High fares require people to spend a significant portion of their earnings on getting to and from work. Unreliable bus services require them to spend even more time commuting, or risk losing their jobs.

Low-income parents rely on transit to provide for their children. If they can't afford monthly passes on the first day of the month, they use tokens for necessary errands such as picking up a child from daycare, visiting the doctor, and going to the store that sells fresh food. Fare costs add up quickly. Too soon in the month parents start making choices that they should not have to make (City of Toronto 2015).

A cornerstone of the province's poverty reduction engagement strategy was a comprehensive consultation process. This process involved 14 government-led consultations, as well as more than 50 community-led meetings that included government representation (Maxwell 2009). These consultations generated a series of policy recommendations organized around ten core issue areas, including transportation. What was consistently highlighted in the consultation process was the importance of public transit for low income households and the barriers that inadequate and unaffordable service posed in carrying out the basic activities of daily reproduction and coordination (Clutterbuck 2008). The problem, as advocates pointed out, was that despite large investments in transit capital renewal, the government had failed to make comparable investments in transit operations:

While more capital money flows to the infrastructure of transit systems across Ontario, dedicated operating funding has not kept pace to make transit accessible and affordable. The rising cost of transit fares remains a serious barrier for people with low incomes. Increased provincial operating subsidies and a long-term plan to fund transit across the province are needed to help ensure public and community transit is accessible and affordable (25-in-5 2009).

In the wake of these consultations, the province released its poverty reduction strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*. With a special emphasis on child poverty, the strategy was described as both a moral imperative and a means to make “Ontario a place where every person has the opportunity to reach their full potential” (Government of Ontario 2008). The place of transit in the context of the strategy was notable for two reasons. First, the strategy acknowledged the key role that public transit plays in people’s lives and the barriers that many face in using and accessing the service:

In community after community, lack of access to public transportation was a significant issue we heard about from people living in poverty; people simply could not afford to take the bus. That means that they are unable to apply for jobs or access resources that are there for them and their children.

Second, the strategy insisted that the mobilization of public transit policy as a poverty reduction tool was essentially a municipal responsibility. The report positioned public transit policy as outside of the province’s own poverty reduction objectives and indicator system. Instead, it argued that the problem of transit equity, while important, should be addressed primarily through municipal leadership (Government of Ontario 2008).

My objective here is not so much to criticize the strategy’s priorities, which focused on more traditional poverty reduction concerns like early learning and child care, income support, and employment. Rather it is to suggest that this way of thinking was emblematic of the government’s pattern of selective engagement in the transit policy arena. As was explored above, provincial policymakers accepted that there was a necessary role for government capital investments to expand rapid transit networks, improve modal share, and combat congestion. At the same time, they opted not to make complementary investments needed to enhance public transit’s social policy function. Instead, they relegated this responsibility to municipalities, where

fiscal capacity was much more circumscribed. As I show in the next chapter, this pattern of selective engagement had important implications for political and policy dynamics at the local scale.

## Chapter 6

### The Political Economy of Public Transit in Ottawa, Ontario

#### Introduction

In Chapter 4, I argued that the (re)engagement of federal and Ontario provincial policymakers with the public transit file was informed by a network of ideas that linked norms of urban sustainability to problems of growth and systemic competitiveness. Underwritten by popular conceptions of the new localism, policymakers came to view transit-oriented reform as an opportunity to remake urban landscapes in ways that were not only more attuned to the institutional demands of after-Fordism, but in ways that might also contribute to a new post-political consensus around urban growth and development. At the heart of this progressive-competitive agenda was a strategy to address the urban ‘infrastructure gap’ with investments in sustainable infrastructure, including significant investments in public transit. Transit-oriented reform was seen to respond in an integrated way to a crisis of urban congestion and mobility, helping to solve at once problems related to economic circulation, investment attraction, environmental emissions, and household quality of life.

In this chapter, I shift scales to consider how this strategy has interacted with the practice of public transit policy in the City of Ottawa. I trace the policy process, beginning from regional amalgamation in 2001. In short, what I want to highlight is a seeming contradiction. Since amalgamation, the City has pursued an aggressive, albeit sometimes clumsy, strategy of rapid transit development that seeks to extend its light rail transit network into each of the City’s largest suburbs. This network development strategy is at the heart of the City’s effort to implement a new ‘smart growth’ regime designed to reduce future demand for the automobile.

At the same time that policymakers have been engaged in this capital development strategy, however, they have also been engaged in an ongoing effort to reduce system operating expenses to alleviate pressure on the local property tax base. The pursuit of these parallel objectives has given rise to an inconsonant dynamic: the largest transit capital expansion in the City's history is taking place alongside a strategy of operational retrenchment.

This dynamic is clearly related to patterns of federal and provincial policy engagement. At the time of amalgamation, policymakers, inspired by the ideas of the new localism, set out to implement a more balanced and efficient growth model for the new City. They argued, however, that their ability to do so was constrained by the City's fiscal position and the failure of senior governments to respond to local infrastructure needs. In time, federal and provincial governments responded to municipal demands with infrastructure programs that subsidized the development of new rapid transit networks. These programs, however, did not resolve the broader fiscal challenges faced by the City, which continued to depend on a limited property tax base to finance services. As a result, while federal and provincial grants encouraged the City to invest in its expanding light rail transit network, the funding of system operations remained governed by the same set of fiscal constraints.

It would nevertheless be a mistake to reduce local decisions to the institutional context supplied by federal and provincial policymakers. In Ottawa, decisions about network development and operational austerity have been informed by local determinations about the relative importance of certain types of transit service. It is the politics involved in arriving at these determinations that will occupy much of this chapter. In particular, the notion that the public transit system should not place too great an onus on the local property tax base remained a persistent theme, functioning as a measuring stick against which various proposals are evaluated.

Viewed in this light, some policies and services have been presented as necessary expenditures, while others have been depicted as fiscally ‘unsustainable’. It is in relation to this normative calculus that local visions of transit-oriented reform have been articulated. Some of these visions reinforce the dominant imaginary operating at wider scales of state governance, but others present a challenge by seeking to direct local policy in more equitable directions.

The chapter proceeds in four parts. I begin by introducing Ottawa’s transit policy history, setting out the context in which post-amalgamation debates have taken place. Ottawa has been held-up by international experts as a successful example of transit-oriented planning. By the latter half of the 1980s, however, the success it achieved in the 1970s was beginning to unravel in the face of accelerating sprawl and declining support for public transit. In 2001, the newly amalgamated City of Ottawa set out to resurrect its practice of transit-first development, but this time organized around ascendant principles of smart growth and transit-oriented development.

The embrace of sustainable planning in the City’s new official plan and its re-prioritization of public transit led policymakers to explore directions for future rapid transit network development. In the second section, I explore the contentious politics that surrounded the planning of the City’s new LRT network. Following the failed development of a ‘north-south’ line, policymakers embraced a new ‘east-west’ project featuring a downtown transit tunnel. This \$2.1 billion mega-project introduced a more consensual transit vision that better reflected existing commuting patterns and supported the revitalization of the downtown.

In the third section, I contrast the consensual politics of transit infrastructure development with ongoing attempts to make daily transit operations fiscally ‘sustainable’. As consensus solidified over the role of public transit in supporting the City’s future growth, new concerns emerged over the public expense required to provide service across an expanding system. Since

the early 2000s, the City has responded to these concerns with a series of measures designed to improve the system's cost-recovery ratio. These regressive measures included a two month labour stoppage, a succession of dramatic fare increases, and a historic package of service cuts euphemistically branded as 'network optimization'.

In the final section, I examine the response of social policy actors to this politically imposed constraint on operational spending. This response has taken two principal forms. The first has involved efforts to incorporate principles of equity and inclusion into the transit planning process. The second has involved demands for more equitable fare policies. In both cases, the objective has been to broaden the ideational terrain by challenging the logic of austerity. In the face of concerns about 'unsustainable' cost escalation, social policy actors have drawn attention to the consequences of operational austerity for low and moderate income households and have attempted to reorient the debate to include concerns about transit equity.

### **Ottawa's Public Transit History**

In Ottawa, the modern era of city planning began in 1950 with the development of the *Plan for the National Capital*. The Plan was developed by Jacques Greber, a prominent French planner who had been invited to the capital by William Lyon Mackenzie King. Greber's work marked the first real attempt to map a comprehensive plan for the national capital region onto what had become, particularly in the interwar period, an increasingly chaotic and dysfunctional urban process. The Greber Plan would provide the overriding vision for the region's growth over its two formative postwar decades.

Jacques Greber occupied a somewhat ambivalent position in relation to emerging postwar planning norms. On the one hand, Greber was influenced by Ebenezer Howard's garden city

concept, which was opposed to fragmented and disorderly forms of suburbanization. Instead, Howard advocated the use of greenbelts to contain sprawl and the development of functionally integrated satellite suburbs. On the other hand, Greber was also strongly influenced by the emerging modernist transport paradigm, which celebrated the automobile and sought to replace streetcar systems with expansive new road networks. Greber's *Plan for the National Capital* thus sought to combine elements of Howard's garden city vision with a modern, auto-centric transport system.

In Ottawa, Greber's plan was oriented around two perceived problems. The first was a process of disorderly suburbanization that had taken root during the interwar period. Between 1920 and 1940, the city experienced its first wave of automobile-led suburbanization in areas that were not connected to the electric streetcar network. In 1912, there were only 400 cars registered in region, but by 1931, registrations had jumped to 23,000. This auto-centric growth was taking place primarily in Nepean and Gloucester townships, where municipalities were eager to permit development, despite lacking the fiscal resources to properly service new lands. The result was a process of disorderly growth marked by persistent conflicts between Ottawa and its surrounding municipalities. Greber proposed the creation of a greenbelt in an effort to contain sprawl and ensure the rational development of core infrastructure networks. In time, growth would be permitted to expand into satellite suburbs, which would contain their own mix of employment and amenities (Fullerton 2004).

The second problem that Greber sought to address was related to traffic congestion. On Greber's view, the rapid growth of automobile demand was a natural development that should be supported by public policy. In particular, it suggested the need for a shift in infrastructure priorities. For example, Greber argued that local streetcars were impeding the flow of auto traffic

and thus advocated for the removal of all railway and streetcar tracks from city streets. In the place of these rail networks, the *Plan for the National Capital* called for the construction of an extensive road and parkway network along the rights-of-way formerly reserved for rail lines (Fullerton 2004). Taken together, the objective of Greber's plan was to give coherent form to a postwar auto-city, while at the same time seeking to mitigate the risks associated with fragmented and unplanned decentralization.

Ultimately, the *Plan* was unable to achieve this delicate balance. While the greenbelt was intended to limit the spread of development, by the 1960s, growth had already jumped across the boundary. This was particularly problematic because suburban municipalities continued to reject appeals for managed development. Rather than channel growth into integrated satellite cities, municipalities allowed development to spread haphazardly in areas immediately beyond the greenbelt (Fullerton 2004). Despite this pattern of residential decentralization, however, a majority of regional employment remained concentrated in the central area. Though the federal government had taken some steps to decentralize office space in accord with Greber's plan, this process never took hold to the extent envisioned and the downtown continued to act as the region's commercial centre (Al-Dubikhi and Mees 2010). This combination created a significant amount of transportation pressure in the central city, as more vehicles struggled for space on increasingly congested road networks.

It became clear that a lack of inter-municipal cooperation was compounding challenges of functional and geographic coordination, particularly with respect to systems of land use and transport planning. In response to this institutional deficit, in 1969 the province decided to impose a new administrative structure on the national capital region. Modelled on the structure of Metropolitan Toronto, the province created an upper tier regional government, the Regional

Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton (RMOC), charged with providing a comprehensive planning function. While lower-tier municipalities would retain authority over zoning and local services, RMOC would be responsible for developing integrated regional plans, investing in large regional infrastructure, and delivering shared regional services (Cervero 1998).

Public transit was not originally included as a regional responsibility but was added in 1972 at the request of regional planners, who had identified a lack of coordinated public transit as one of the chief impediments to the rational integration of suburban development. While the City of Ottawa operated a traditional inner city bus service, the absence of regional governance had prevented the extension of service into suburban municipalities. In the suburbs, residents had only limited access to private transit service. As a result, by the 1960s suburban commuting had become an almost exclusively auto-centric phenomenon. One of RMOC's first major initiatives was thus to create a new regional transit service, OC Transpo, and begin the process of building-out a more extensive and integrated network (Al-Dubikhi and Mees 2010; Fullerton 2004).

Politically, the demand for an enhanced regional transit service emanated from both inner city and suburban constituencies. In the central city, neighbourhood groups and a burgeoning urban reform movement were deeply concerned about the effects of automobile traffic on quality of life and neighbourhood integration. During consultations for the Region's inaugural Official Plan, one of the movement's primary concerns was to avoid the expansion of expressway infrastructure through the core and Centretown. This concern to mitigate traffic in the central area resonated with growing frustrations amongst suburban commuters with the rise of traffic congestion, particularly in and around the downtown. With increasing pressure on the road system, suburban residents expressed a growing appetite for the extension of urban transit connections beyond the greenbelt. These concerns, combined with a growing environmental

consciousness and problems of energy scarcity, created a context that was particularly amenable to reform (Fullerton 2005).

The Region's inaugural Official Plan of 1974 marked a decisive shift away from Greber's vision of rational automobility, implementing instead a philosophy of 'transit-first' planning. While the Plan accepted a significant degree of decentralized development, it encouraged growth to locate along radial corridors, which could be efficiently serviced by a new system of rapid transit (Fullerton 2004; Al-Dubikhi and Mees 2010). The intent was to invert Greber's prioritization of the automobile. The Plan dictated that public transit should be given full priority in responding to any new travel demand. Road infrastructure, by contrast, would only be developed as a last resort in instances where public transit was not considered viable (Al-Dubikhi and Mees 2010)

Beginning in 1972 with the creation of OC Transpo, the Region implemented an aggressive series of route extensions into suburban municipalities. These extensions served as a prelude to a more ambitious network strategy oriented around the development of a new rapid transit commuter system. Through a series of studies in the mid-1970s, the Region considered a number of different technologies and network configurations, eventually settling on a concept that would become known as the 'Transitway'. The Transitway system consisted of a bus-rapid-transit (BRT) network configured along a series of radial corridors surrounding the city's central business district. Construction of the 31 kilometer network (including 26 kilometers of grade-separated infrastructure), began in 1981 and was completed at an eventual cost of nearly \$400 million (Gow 1998).

The Transitway system was carefully conceived to provide an attractive commuting option for suburban riders who were employed in the downtown. Planners made two key

decisions in this regard. First, the Region opted to develop a bus-based network, rather than using more popular light rail technology. Planners believed that BRT would be a more appropriate fit for the large and fragmented geography of suburban Ottawa-Carleton, a decision that transit scholar Robert Cervero describes as “an adoption of transit to settlement patterns par excellence” (Cervero 1998). The objective was to offer commuters an express, transfer-free service that could effectively compete with the automobile. A BRT system made this possible by creating a ‘trunk and branches’ style of network – buses could flexibly travel into suburban neighbourhoods and then enter a grade-separated trunk line into the downtown. The second important decision that planners made was to pursue an ‘outside-in’ approach to network development. Rather than begin with expensive infrastructure in the downtown core, planners sought to build political capital by investing as quickly as possible in suburban line extensions. In the downtown, the network relied on priority lanes at street level, which it was hoped would obviate the need to construct an expensive transit tunnel (Rathwell and Schijns 2002).

RMOC’s transit-first commuter strategy proved enormously successful. In the year before the founding of OC Transpo, transit ridership in the region stood at only 40 rides per capita. With the rapid expansion of suburban service in the 1970s, however, ridership rose dramatically. By 1985, OC Transpo ridership reached a peak of 160 trips per capita, more than any other North American service of comparable size (Al-Dubikhi and Mees 2010). Modal shift was particularly pronounced for commuting trips into the downtown. Between 1975 and 1986, one-third of the growth in total travel was taken-up by the transit system. In the downtown, transit accounted for virtually all new trips generated during this period (Cervero 1998).

This success, however, proved fleeting. After reaching a peak in the middle of the 1980s, OC Transpo ridership began to fall precipitously in the latter part of the decade. Losses

accumulated year after year reaching a low in 1997 of only 100 trips per capita, a decline of nearly 40%. The collapse of OC Transpo ridership was attributable to two key factors. The first related to retrenchment at the provincial scale. Service expansions in the 1970s and early 80s had been made possible by generous provincial subsidies that contributed 50% of municipal operating expenses and 75% of capital spending. The early success of OC Transpo was attributable in particular to the extension of new suburban routes and express commuter services that were much less productive than traditional local bus service, and hence much more expensive to operate. These services depended on provincial grants to defray costs. In the latter part of the 1980s, however, the subsidy program was scaled back before being eliminated entirely in the mid-1990s (Ciccutin 1997). This produced a policy environment much more hostile to public transit than that which prevailed in the 1970s. While growth continued to accelerate in suburban municipalities, OC Transpo, rather than expand service to meet growing demand, was forced to raise fares and cut service.

The other important factor concerned the scalar distribution of land use and transportation planning authority between RMOC and its constituent municipalities. The creation of RMOC was founded on a delicate compromise between the need for regional-scale planning coordination and local desires to retain control over land use and zoning policies. While RMOC was technically able to veto local land use plans, in practice, these decisions were largely left to local municipalities (Cervero 1998). Regional planners instead sought to use transit policy to encourage the concentration of development, and in particular employment uses, at strategic transit nodes. Over time, however, it became clear that local planners were paying little heed to regional land use preferences and instead were encouraging an accelerated process of residential and commercial sprawl. By the 1990s, areas like Kanata were experiencing dramatic economic

development and population growth. And rather than plan these areas in accordance with Regional transit-oriented norms, local planners encouraged the creation of transit-inaccessible sub-developments and auto-oriented commercial parks (Fullerton 2004).

The opportunity to address problems of planning coordination again came about as a result of municipal restructuring, but this time through the process of municipal amalgamation. In January 2001, the provincial government imposed an amalgamated administrative structure, dissolving the Regional Municipality of Ottawa Carleton and its constituent municipalities to create the new single tier City of Ottawa. Unlike the reforms of 1969, this process was driven not by planning concerns, but rather by a desire for administrative efficiency. Nevertheless, there was something fortuitous in the change – by amalgamating the 11 constituent municipalities, the province created a much more powerful planning entity. For the first time, a single institutional body was empowered to conduct both land use and transportation planning across the entirety of the urban area.

Municipal amalgamation occurred at a moment in which policymakers were being forced to once again reckon with the pressures of urban growth. On the one hand, by uniting the old city and its suburbs under a single planning authority, amalgamation required that policymakers come to terms the dilemmas of laissez-faire planning that had taken root in the 1980s and 90s. At the same time, the new City was being asked to confront the complexities of regional development under conditions of rapid growth. According to planning projections, the City's population was expected to grow by as much as 50% over the subsequent two decades. The vast majority of this growth, furthermore, was set to locate outside of the City's greenbelt, in the suburban areas of Kanata, Orleans, and Barrhaven (City of Ottawa 2003a). This rapid rate of suburban expansion, coupled with the demographic trend towards smaller household sizes,

appeared poised to place large demands on the City's transport system. By one measure, person trips across the City were expected to rise by as much as 81% over this twenty year period (Abouhenidy et al 2004). The essential question facing planners concerned how to manage these growth pressures under new institutional conditions of amalgamated governance.

To answer this question, policymakers undertook an ambitious planning and visioning exercise, *Ottawa 20/20*. The objective was to lead a public discussion about the City's inaugural Official Plan and in the process to generate a consensual vision of growth that could unite the interests of a large and geographically diverse city. In light of the wider intellectual milieu, it is perhaps not surprising that policymakers drew heavily from notions of sustainable urbanism and smart growth in formulating this vision. To launch the *20/20* process, the City convened a 'smart growth summit', a kind of ideas conference that brought to Ottawa a collection of many of the world's most influential planning voices, including Peter Hall, Richard Florida, and Andres Duany, a founder of the new urbanism movement. At the summit, these and other influential policy voices were invited to share their insights into the value of smart growth planning principles. What emerged was a strong public statement on the urban qualities and planning norms that contribute to 'good' growth: intensification and mixed use development, vital streetscapes, an active pedestrian-friendly public realm, and an emphasis on transit-oriented development (Paquet 2001; Adamo 2012).

The summit played an important role in shaping the City's planning vision by connecting local debates to a series of influential planning norms. It helped to moderate between competing approaches to Ottawa's growth challenge. In the months preceding the summit, the Conservative provincial government had asked the City to participate in a joint study to evaluate the viability of a new suburban ring-road, part of its broader effort to expand suburban highway infrastructure

across the province. The concept of a suburban ring-road, in conjunction with a widening of the existing Queensway, was favoured as a transport solution not just by the provincial government but also by a number of greenfield land developers and business representatives in the western suburb of Kanata (Weller 2001; Adam 2001). After some debate, the new City Council decided to postpone a decision until it had had an opportunity to digest the ideas presented at the planned summit (City of Ottawa 2002). Not surprisingly, a number of presenters at the summit were expressly opposed to the idea of a new suburban bypass, advocating instead for investment in the City's rapid transit system (Wheeler 2001). Councillors ultimately decided not to participate in the joint study.

Instead, the 2003 Official Plan and supporting master plans set out a transit-oriented alternative to the City's growth challenge. The embrace of smart growth planning norms was presented not as a choice, but rather as the only viable response to the growth pressures facing the City. In the face of these pressures, the only way to preserve the City's desirable place qualities was to mitigate the relentless rise of fragmented sprawl:

Ottawa will meet the challenge of this growth by managing it in ways that support liveable communities and healthy environments. This means that growth will be directed towards key locations with a mix of housing, shopping, recreation and employment – locations that are easily accessible by transit and that encourage walking because destinations are conveniently grouped together (City of Ottawa 2003a).

Central to this managed growth strategy was an ambitious commitment to grow transit ridership and restructure the modal configuration of the City's transport system:

In order to maintain Ottawa's attractiveness as an innovative and competitive city with an exceptional quality of life, while managing this tremendous level of growth, the City of Ottawa's new Official Plan describes a transportation system that emphasizes transit, walking and cycling in a compact city. The plan assumes that the proportion of peak hour travel on transit will increase from 17% to 30%. Given the forecast increase in population, this means that transit usage would grow from 87 million to almost 260 million trips annually over the next 20 years (City of Ottawa 2003c).

The City's transit-led growth strategy was founded upon three interrelated components. The first involved a philosophical shift in the conceptualization of transport planning, which resonated strongly with the logic of the new realism. Transportation planning in Ottawa had historically been oriented around the problem of mobility – that is, of how to plan infrastructure in accord with expected travel demand, and hence to ensure that people could move where and when they desired. Even under conditions of transit-first regional planning, the goal of network development was primarily to support mobility. The new Official Plan, by contrast, sought to reorient transport planning around the problem of accessibility. Rather than seek to maximize mobility, planning would now focus on connecting people with places to maintain a high degree of connectivity whilst managing demand for travel, particularly by private automobile (Abouhenidy et al. 2004).

As the experience of regional planners had shown, one of the primary barriers to rational transport planning lay in the coordination of land use policies. Without the ability to regulate transit-supportive land use, planners struggled to maintain an effective network. Thus, the second component of the City's strategy entailed an emphasis on the integration of transit policy with land use planning. The 2003 Official Plan began the process of aligning development rules with the interests of the transit system. The Plan included, for example, policies to direct growth and intensification to mixed-use centres located in proximity to the City's rapid transit network. In addition, the Plan sought to prioritize the introduction of rapid transit early in the community development process as a way to encourage more transit-oriented lifestyles (City of Ottawa 2003a). These efforts would be strengthened in subsequent years as the City moved to develop aggressive and detailed policies for transit-oriented development.

Third, and most significantly, the Official Plan identified the expansion of the City's rapid transit system as the cornerstone of its transportation strategy. To support the dramatic increase in transit ridership envisioned in the Plan, policymakers understood that the capacity and the reach of the rapid transit system would need to be enhanced. Thus, alongside the Official Plan, the City commissioned a *Rapid Transit Expansion Study*, which formed the foundation for the Ottawa Rapid Transit Expansion Plan (ORTEP). This network development strategy then became enshrined in the Transportation Master Plan as the infrastructural basis of the City's transit-oriented growth regime (City of Ottawa 2003b and d).

It is this network development strategy that I now want to turn my attention to. The planning reforms of the early 2000s introduced a new era of sustainable city-building to the national capital. The Official Plan laid out a coherent vision of transit-led growth, supported by a new Rapid Transit Expansion Plan that would extend new light rail and bus rapid transit lines to the south, east, and west of the downtown core. After a period of significant decline, the city's sustainability turn appeared to mark an emerging consensus around the need to reinvest in the public transit system. Yet, when the City turned its efforts towards the concrete process of project selection and development, the arena became considerably more contentious as various interests struggled to influence the network planning process. It is this process of political contest and negotiation that I turn to in the next section.

### **The Consensual Politics of LRT**

The Ottawa Rapid Transit Expansion Plan was ambitious. Based on the *Rapid Transit Expansion Study*, the Plan identified three light rail and six bus rapid transit corridors to be

developed over a twenty year planning period. The proposed expansion entailed 163 kilometers of new rapid transit service, including over 100 kilometers of new light rail, to be delivered at an estimated cost of \$3.4 billion. The Plan included lines radiating out from the downtown to the east, west, and south ends of the City and were designed to integrate a much wider territory into the existing network. Taken together, the ORTEP envisioned a three-fold increase of the City's rapid transit system (City of Ottawa 2003d).

The ORTEP process took place directly in the midst of Canada's roiling debate over the governance of urban infrastructure and the role of municipalities in the context of the new localism. Very much conscious of this debate, local actors used the Plan as an opportunity to engage federal and provincial policymakers. The Expansion Plan was conceived as a generational renewal of the transit network, one that would update the successful work done in the 1970s and 80s to develop the Transitway. This success, the Plan noted, had been made possible by generous provincial subsidies, which provided 75% of the City's capital development costs. These subsidies, unfortunately, no longer existed:

The politics of the 1990s saw the provincial government abandoning its traditional role in investing in public transportation in order to meet some shorter-term political goals. What was once sustained, strategic funding has dwindled to ad-hoc, project-based grant programs at considerably lower costs. This change began to occur at the same time as cities were taking on greater importance in the global economy, and as national governments in Europe and the United States were reinvesting heavily in transportation infrastructure in order to make their cities more competitive... (City of Ottawa 2003d).

At a cost of \$3.4 billion, policymakers understood that their ability to fund the ORTEP was almost entirely contingent on support from federal and provincial scales. Fortunately, the political landscape appeared to be shifting:

[a]s the City of Ottawa moves forward to implement the vision articulated in the *Rapid Transit Expansion Study* to support our continued economic growth while maintaining our quality of life, there is evidence that the political priorities of federal and provincial

governments are beginning to change, and the importance of renewed investments in municipal infrastructure recommended by economists, international experts and the international business community are receiving more consideration (City of Ottawa 2003 d).

The first priority project for which the City sought funding was an extension of the O-Train, a five stop diesel light rail line that had been operating on a pilot basis since 2001. This line became known as the 'north-south project'. It was designed as a 29 kilometre extension that would connect the downtown core to the southern suburbs of Riverside-South and Barrhaven. The prioritization of a north-south link was meant to address a growing imbalance in the City's transport network, which had been historically oriented along an east-west axis. With the acceleration of growth in southern suburbs, the lack of effective transport connections to the downtown emerged as an area of concern. The north-south LRT was conceived as 'smart' solution to this problem. By supplying a rapid transit connection to the south in advance of growth and by planning the Riverside South community according to transit-oriented design standards, policymakers wanted to avoid the need for a 'north-south Queensway' (Chiarelli 2006; City of Ottawa 2006).

The North-South project was strongly favoured by the mayor and a large majority of council. In May 2004, the City secured a \$400 million funding commitment from the federal and provincial governments, an amount equal to two-thirds of the project's original \$600 million cost estimate. With funding in place, the project advanced quickly through the planning process and a final procurement contract was approved by City Council in July 2006. Nevertheless the project continued to face a significant amount of political opposition. In the summer of 2006, this opposition coalesced into a coalition calling itself 'Get it Right', which mobilized to stall the project. The coalition was comprised of a number of downtown business improvement

associations, a group of prominent downtown commercial land owners, representatives of the Ottawa Chamber of Commerce, and Transport 2000, an influential transit advocacy organization. While broadly supportive of the City's rapid transit ambitions, the coalition argued that the North-South project was poorly conceived. In particular, it argued that the project failed to address the City's most pressing transit challenge – bus congestion in the downtown core (Ottawa Citizen 2006).

Though Council proceeded with the procurement, opposition to the project continued, becoming the focus of a contentious municipal campaign in November 2006. The eventual winner of the mayoralty, local businessman Larry O'Brien, campaigned on a promise to cancel the North-South project. As an alternative, he promised to develop a new plan under the guidance of a special task force. In the first weeks of his administration, O'Brien moved to fulfill this pledge, leading a narrow council vote to end the project. Citing the project's shortcomings, O'Brien argued that the City had no choice but to 'hit the reset button' (Rupert 2006).

The collapse of the north-south project gave rise to real anxiety about the state of sustainable city-building in Ottawa for good reason. The extension had served as the first piece of an ambitious network plan that constituted the infrastructural centrepiece of the City's smart growth planning agenda. The failure of the project called into question the City's commitment to this agenda and the ability of political leaders to manage the tensions and complexities inherent in the reform of large infrastructure systems (Hilton and Stoney 2007).

Yet, as appropriate as these criticisms and concerns were, with the benefit of hindsight it is possible to read this event in a different way. While the cancellation of the project delayed the City's transit expansion plans and forfeited significant financial and planning resources, it also created the space for a debate about network priorities and for the eventual development of an

alternative ‘east-west’ project, which would prove to be considerably more consensual. As a result, the failure of the north-south line opened the way to the solidification of a political consensus around the City’s transit-oriented growth strategy.

As promised, O’Brien commissioned a mayoral task force in January 2007 to examine the City’s transit system and make recommendations for a more effective network development strategy. The task force was chaired by former federal cabinet Minister, David Collenette, and included representatives from key groups opposed to the north-south project, including the lead representative of a group of downtown commercial landowners. Following its review, the task force argued that rather than extend the network to the south, the City’s first priority should be to address transit conditions in and through the downtown core (Mayor’s Task Force on Transportation 2007).

As I discussed above, the development of the Transitway in the 1980s followed an ‘outside-in’ approach. At the time, it was understood that the convergence of rapid transit on the downtown might eventually necessitate the construction of a bypass or tunnel to accommodate transit traffic, which planners hoped to forestall by creating priority bus lanes at street level (Metropolitan Knowledge International 2010; Rathwell 2002). The task force argued, however, that the principal problem now facing the City’s rapid transit system was a bottleneck of peak hour buses along these priority lanes through the central business district, which created a host of challenges. It placed an immediate capacity constraint on the system because the downtown was no longer able to accommodate growing demand; it undermined the reliability of the wider network by creating a critical point of congestion and delay and it threatened the quality of downtown space by creating an inhospitable environment for people and activity. To resolve

these problems, the task force recommended that the City begin by constructing a light rail tunnel beneath the downtown core (Mayor's Task Force on Transportation 2007).

Historically, the barrier to constructing a downtown tunnel had been its enormous projected cost. With the release of the task force report, however, the idea acquired renewed momentum. With expanding federal and provincial funding opportunities, the mayor and council calculated that the time was ripe to develop the project. Accepting the recommendation to prioritize transit in the core, the City revised its Transportation Master Plan in 2007 and 2008. The updated Master Plan identified a new priority LRT project featuring a downtown tunnel. Rather than extend the O-Train south, this alternative line would convert a 12.5 kilometer segment of the east-west Transitway, from Tunney's Pasture to Blair Station, to light rail. In the downtown, the line would proceed through a 3.2 kilometer tunnel bored beneath the central business district (City of Ottawa 2008).

The North-South project, originally estimated to cost \$600 million, had increased at the time of procurement to nearly \$800 million. The new Downtown Ottawa Tunnel project (DOTT) was considerably more expensive. The complexities of tunnelling beneath commercial office towers in the core meant that the relatively short line would require \$2.1 billion in public funding. This left a yawning funding gap. Fortunately, infrastructure programs at both federal and provincial scales continued to grow during this period. In December 2009 and June 2010 respectively, federal and provincial governments each agreed to triple their earlier contributions from \$200 to \$600 million, providing a shared commitment of \$1.2 billion.

The DOTT project quickly acquired a degree of political consensus that had eluded the north-south initiative. As in 2006, light rail emerged as a prominent concern during the municipal election of 2010. But in contrast, this time both the incumbent mayor and the principal

challenger, former mayor and provincial cabinet member Jim Watson, expressed their support for the project. Though Watson, the eventual winner, had been skeptical of the project and its high cost in the run-up to the campaign, he ultimately chose to embrace the City's vision for rapid transit, criticizing O'Brien not for the project but rather for his failure to demonstrate the leadership necessary to shepherd the City's largest ever infrastructure investment. Watson won the mayoralty on the promise to deliver the project 'on time and on budget'.

The 2010 election marked the beginning of a new more consensual phase of transit infrastructure politics in Ottawa. This shift could be traced to a number of intersecting factors. First, there appeared to be a palpable urge to move past the failure of the north-south project and re-establish a sense of forward momentum. As Watson explained in his 2011 Address on Transit: "The public sent a very clear message to me and Council last October. Cancelling the last light rail project was a costly error. Get your act together and move forward with a realistic and affordable plan. Get a shovel in the ground – sooner rather than later" (Watson 2011). This need to move past was rooted in a desire to reclaim the progressive and visionary narrative around smart growth that local policymakers had been cultivating since amalgamation. In their account of the 'dreams and delusions' that characterized the debates surrounding the north-south project, for example, Hilton and Stoney (2007) describe the ways in which policymakers used the project to brand the city as modern, innovative, and 'world class'. Beginning with the *Ottawa 20/20* exercise, policymakers had embraced the notion that smart growth represented the only progressive response to the development dilemmas faced by a city that was becoming larger, more complex, and more modern. The north-south LRT had been the most visible and public expression of this self-conscious embrace of sustainable urbanism as a feature of the City's "transition from a big little city to a little big city" (Chiarelli 2006). The Downtown Ottawa

Tunnel project helped to resurrect this sense of civic purpose, allowing policymakers to once again herald the city's planning progress.

As Hilton and Stoney explain, the 'dream' of the north-south LRT was expressed through a narrative that emphasized the diverse economic, environmental, and quality of life benefits to be realized through the project (Hilton and Stoney 2007). The project business case, for example, presented a detailed list of benefits: it would reduce the costs of congestion, ensuring that the City remain attractive and competitive; it would increase mobility for residents and help to reduce household spending; and it would help the City meet Kyoto obligations by eliminating over 17,000 tons of GHG emissions (City of Ottawa 2006). Though the project was cancelled, this broader narrative linking transit-oriented reform to local competitiveness, livability, and environmental sustainability did not lose its force, nor did it become less central to the City's growth discourse. While opponents of the project challenged the particularities of the business case, they did not contest the underlying dream of smart, transit-oriented growth. As such, this narrative remained poised to migrate into the subsequent Downtown Tunnel project.

The Downtown Ottawa Tunnel project was presented to the public as integral to the City's progressive transformation into a large, modern city:

From its humble origins as a logging town, the City of Ottawa has grown into the fourth largest city in Canada. As our nation's capital continues to grow, we need to ensure that its growth is both economically sustainable and environmentally responsible. For Ottawa, like any large city, long-term economic and environmental well-being will depend to a large degree on its transportation system. To be competitive economically and to reduce harmful emissions cities must ensure that people, goods and services can move freely and efficiently and that cleaner transportation options are both available and attractive to users (City of Ottawa 2010).

And like the earlier project, the DOTT project was powered by the post-political logic of urban sustainability, promising a range of benefits. According to the business case, the project would

enhance connectivity, reduce commute times, eliminate 38 000 annual tonnes of greenhouse gas, increase residential and commercial property values, spur economic development, create thousands of jobs, and save households money (ibid). At the core of this public narrative was the notion that investment in LRT was a smart and progressive response to contemporary growth pressures that would integrate the economic benefits of growth with other social, environmental, and civic values:

The benefits Ottawa's Light Rail Transit project will bring to the City and the people who live here today and in the future are clear.

LRT will save time, money and increase investment. It will reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and air pollutants. It will mean fewer buses and other vehicles crowding and congesting our downtown streets. It will clear the way for new bikeways and walkways, promoting healthier lifestyles. It will create jobs and encourage economic growth.

There is no question that LRT is the best solution to the serious, long-term transportation challenges the City is facing. LRT and the downtown tunnel will give Ottawa a clean, modern, efficient, expandable transit system that will meet the City's needs for decades to come.

In short, LRT is about much more than a way to get from point A to point B. It is about good and prudent management. It is about smart investment and smart growth.

LRT is about making a great City even greater. It's about achieving our shared vision for a city that's cleaner, more efficient, more prosperous, and more attractive. It will improve our communities and our quality of life; making Ottawa an even better place to live, work and play. It will truly be a world-class system for a world-class City (City of Ottawa 2010).

In addition to this desire to recapture a sense of visionary civic purpose, the consensual nature of the Downtown Tunnel project reflected its appeal to key political constituencies. Foremost amongst these were large downtown commercial landowners, a number of whom had played a pivotal role in organizing opposition to the north-south project. In the lead-up to the 2006 municipal election, these landowners came together as the Albert-Slater Coalition (later expanded and rebranded as the Downtown Coalition). The Downtown Coalition was made up of 33 property owners whose assets included 65 office buildings and 10 hotels, which they claimed

contributed 10% of the City's property tax base (Ottawa Citizen 2008). The objective of the coalition had always been to challenge 'outside-in' transit planning, which had historically neglected the infrastructural needs of the downtown. The tunnel project was seen not only as an effective response to this challenge, but also as a belated acknowledgement of the downtown's preeminent role as the economic heart of the City (see Mayor's Task Force on Transportation 2007).

The DOTT project addressed the economic concerns of downtown landowners and commercial interests in two essential ways. First, it resolved a critical capacity constraint that had threatened to undermine the long term economic health of the downtown. The roots of this concerns trace back to the inaugural Regional Official Plan of 1974. One of the key objectives of that Plan had been to limit the growth of automobility in the core by extending rapid transit facilities into the suburbs. While this strategy was successful in increasing transit patronage, it effectively tied the fate of the downtown to the rapid transit network. From the 1980s onwards, the economic growth of the downtown became singularly tied to increases in peak hour transit travel (Cervero 1998). As a result, the eventual exhaustion of street level transit capacity posed a profound risk to downtown landowners and the wider economy in the core. As OC Transpo's Assistant General Manager, Pat Scrimgeour, explained, the DOTT project was thus key to 'unlocking economic growth' in the downtown:

There hasn't been any new road capacity built into downtown since the Portage Bridge opened in the 1970s. We can't get past 13 or 14,000 people an hour running buses at street level. If the road system can't get more people in, and the bus system can't get more people in, then how can more people take jobs in downtown Ottawa (quoted in Chianello 2014)?

This concern with growth capacity in the downtown was keenly felt in particular because since the 1990s commercial interests had been exploring strategies for revitalizing the central

area and diversifying its economy. In the early 1990s, fears of depopulation and decline had led to policymakers to incentivize residential and retail development in the downtown. These efforts only intensified after amalgamation. The City's new smart growth regime placed an even greater emphasis on the importance of intensification and the cultivation of live-work-play urbanism in the core. Downtown, these ambitions were expressed through the Downtown Ottawa Urban Design Strategy (DOUDS), which the City commissioned as part of the 20/20 and Official Plan process. The DOUDS, which was developed through extensive consultation, was meant to guide the City's ongoing revitalization initiatives by creating an up-to-date vision of smart urbanism for the downtown. The essence of this vision turned on a strategy of place-making – the objective was to cultivate more vibrant and livable place qualities and through this to attract new residential development and expand opportunities for mixed-use and main street retailing (Adamo 2012; City of Ottawa 2004).

A number of the key initiatives identified within this downtown place-making strategy related to transportation reform, including leveraging the redesign of road space to create more pedestrian-friendly environments. For the Downtown Coalition, the value of the transit tunnel was understood very much in these terms. In addition to constraining network capacity, the coalition argued that the surface Transitway contributed to an environment that was entirely antithetical to the kinds of vibrant and inviting streetscapes envisioned in the DOUDS. By removing the majority of transit vehicles, surface streets would be free to be redeveloped and repurposed. This idea was captured by Hume Rogers, the Coalition's chief spokesperson:

My own little dream (is) having only local buses on the streets... You'd have bicycle lanes, you can widen the sidewalks, reduce the streets by one lane and still have all that stuff. I'm willing to bet it won't be long before you have another Byward Market. Some of us can remember when on Albert Street, as an example, there were restaurants and a lot of street-level business. But there's not a lot now, because it's a very inhospitable area (quoted in Zakaluzny 2008).

This vision eventually became formalized in the City's Downtown Moves strategy. Developed in 2012 and 13, Downtown Moves was meant to extend the work of the earlier DOUDS by creating a redevelopment vision in conjunction with the DOTT rapid transit project (now rebranded as the Confederation Line). Like the DOUDS, the strategy sought to articulate a connection between the health of the downtown and the economic success of the city as a whole: "As with any city, the social, cultural and economic success of Ottawa's downtown will always be a barometer of the success of the entire city" (City of Ottawa 2013). One of the principal objectives of the strategy was to identify capital projects that could be undertaken to redesign public and street space around the LRT. These investments, it argued, were justified because of the downtown's outsized economic significance. Not only did it function as the city's social and cultural heart, but it played a disproportionate role in driving growth and redevelopment:

Ottawa's downtown area properties contribute approximately 18% of the municipality's approximately \$1.37 B property tax revenue... This supports a very strong case for long term investment in Ottawa's downtown streets" (ibid).

The continued economic success of the downtown, according to the strategy, would be tied to a series of demographic and lifestyle changes that were transforming the socio-economy of the downtown: increasing residential development, the attraction of younger professional cohorts, and growing demand for mobility alternatives. As in other cities, Ottawa's downtown was evolving in relation to changing cultural preferences and demand for more vibrant urban public space. More than just improving transit capacity, the LRT project provided a unique opportunity to invest in a transformation of downtown space that would embrace and capitalize on these changes:

Our downtown is about to undergo a transformation that will define a new identity and be the foundation for its prosperity for coming generations. The investment in the Confederation Line will commence and sustain a new pursuit of civic and national pride in the urban quality of our capital city. Our downtown streets will be re-oriented to favour and comfort pedestrians, cyclists and transit customers, recognizing all travellers, of all ages and abilities. With this safe, healthy and active orientation, our streets themselves will be praised as among our city's most coveted public spaces that in turn spark investment and that are befitting of the highest quality of buildings and open spaces along them (City of Ottawa 2013).

In addition to placating downtown landowners, the Confederation Line also marked the beginning of a more geographically inclusive approach to LRT development. This shift helped to address one of the most contentious aspects of the original North-South project – its failure to speak to the interests of a broad constituency of suburban commuters. While the North-South project addressed the problem of rapid growth in the southern suburban communities of Barrhaven and Riverside South, it neglected the vast majority of suburban commuters residing in the traditional growth areas of Kanata and Orleans. This neglect contributed to the overwhelming rejection by suburban voters of the incumbent transit vision in the 2006 municipal election. The Downtown Tunnel project was in part a response to this dissatisfaction.

The root of this political dissatisfaction lay in the strategic decision, articulated in the 2003 Rapid Transit Expansion Strategy. In the RTES, City staff had argued that investments in LRT should be directed to underserved areas where growth potential was greatest (City of Ottawa 2003). This thinking was guided by a desire to be more proactive in the integration of land use and transport planning. It was much more difficult, planners understood, to encourage transit-oriented lifestyles in communities designed around the automobile. The goal should thus be to create transit-supportive suburban environments at the development stage. Accordingly, the

network strategy proposed that new lines be developed using light rail technology, while service extensions along the Transitway would continue to be supported by bus-rapid transit.

This was certainly a defensible strategy. Nevertheless, it left existing transit riders little reason to support City's expansion plan. The Mayor's Task Force on Transportation, convened after the 2006 election, put significant emphasis on this oversight. While acknowledging the importance of new transit corridors, the Task Force challenged the idea that such development should come at the expense of upgrading existing infrastructure. The objective of rapid transit policy, the Task Force argued, should not only be to improve the reach of the network, but to use new infrastructure to improve the experience of existing commuters (Mayor's Task Force on Transportation 2007).

The DOTT project served the interests of existing east-west transit commuters in two ways. First, by converting the downtown portion of the Transitway to light rail, and by constructing a tunnel through the central business district, the project promised many riders a faster and more convenient experience. For example, policymakers argued that a typical rider could save up to fifteen minutes as a result of the tunnel project:

Right now, it's supposed to take 17 minutes to cross downtown by bus but because of congestion, it often takes five and even ten minutes longer. Delays are too common and many people are already in the habit of allowing extra time for their trip, just in case. By avoiding the majority of the conditions that cause delays and congestion, running LRT under downtown will save approximately 10-15 minutes from a typical rider's daily commute (City of Ottawa 2010).

While the 12.5km line converted only a small portion of the Transitway to LRT, it nevertheless promised a meaningful improvement in commute experience for many of the nearly two-thirds of riders who were expected to use some portion of the Confederation Line.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the tunnel served as the core of an updated network vision. Like the 2003 Plan, the 2008 TMP preserved a southern LRT extension to

Riverside South and a plan for a transit-oriented southern suburb. Along the east-west axis, however, the network vision shifted north with a plan for a staged conversion of the Transitway to light rail (City of Ottawa 2008). By incorporating the Transitway into the City's LRT strategy, planners helped to create a much stronger political constituency by promising existing users eventual access to the network.

This updated network strategy set the stage for the far more consensual political period during Watson's first term. Despite being an early skeptic of the City's light rail ambitions, in office, Watson evolved to become an ardent booster for the acceleration of the City's strategy. In part, this shift reflected the swell of civic enthusiasm that increasingly defined the politics of LRT. As Watson observed, the public mindset around LRT had shifted dramatically during the course of his term, and this was attributable in no small part to the fact that communities across the City increasingly felt invested in the progress of the expansion program: "It's no longer will we have. Now, everyone wants it" (Watson, quoted in Sherring 2013).

The other dynamic that clearly informed the consensual turn in Ottawa's LRT politics was the profound change in the City's fiscal circumstances. When the Rapid Transit Expansion Plan was first developed in 2003, policymakers could not foresee the extent to which federal and provincial capital programs were to expand. Historically, the downtown tunnel had been viewed as prohibitively expensive, but this evaluation changed with the progressive growth of federal and provincial funding pools. A \$400 million funding agreement was replaced by an agreement for \$1.2 billion in senior government grants. What is more, the growth of federal and provincial gas tax dispersals made it easier for the City to fund the municipal share of the project. Together, these funding streams made it possible for the City to transcend the kinds of political conflict that had undermined the original North-South project in 2006.

This dynamic only became clearer as the City moved on to the development of its ‘Stage 2’ project, which sought to leverage the downtown tunnel as an anchor for a coordinated series of extensions to the east, west, and south of the downtown. The hallmark of the Stage 2 project was its ambition and scope – a plan to develop an additional 44 kilometers of commuter-oriented light rail and 24 new stations. The 2008 TMP had envisioned a multiple phased approach to building-out the City’s LRT network. The Stage 2 concept sought to accelerate this timeline, combining projects into a single massive procurement process.

For suburban commuters, the Stage 2 project provided something for everyone. It incorporated a southern extension of the O-Train to Riverside South, as well as a westerly extension to the edge of the greenbelt, setting the stage for a subsequent extension to Kanata. Perhaps most notably, the plan included an LRT extension beyond the greenbelt to Orleans in the east. This extension was incorporated after a request from the local councillor and brought LRT to the suburb ten years earlier than had been anticipated in the previous TMP. The plan even included a dedicated spur to the City’s international airport, developed in response to lobbying efforts by the local business community and Chamber of Commerce.

What is clear, then, is that in the capital arena, senior government funding supported local policymakers in their pursuit of a more consensual approach to LRT development, one that was more ambitious and geographically inclusive. By the time the Stage 2 procurement was finalized in 2019, the cost of the project had grown to over \$4.6 billion, a figure more than twice as large as the Confederation Line, which had itself stood as the City’s largest ever capital work. This enormous undertaking was made possible by over \$2.3 billion in senior government grants, as well as by nearly \$1 billion in federal and provincial gas tax allocations (City of Ottawa 2019).

In the following section, I want to contrast this politics of plenty with the far more conflictual politics of austerity that have defined the governance of transit operations.

### **Transit Operations and the Politics of Austerity**

A City of Ottawa document extolling the virtues of the 2008 Transportation Master Plan explained in reference to the Downtown Ottawa Tunnel Project that: “This is a necessity, not a choice. A do-nothing scenario will put at risk the economic prosperity, environmental integrity and quality of life of Canada’s national capital” (City of Ottawa 2009). The success of the City’s rapid transit expansion strategy was sustained by the representation of large capital investments as *necessary* – in the absence of such investment, the relentless pace of growth would overwhelm and lead to congestion, economic stagnation, environmental degradation, and a declining quality of life. In this section, I want to set this understanding of necessary expenditure against a parallel argument that has continually insisted on the necessity of *reducing* expenditure on transit operations.

In fact, an important rationale for investing in the City’s light rail network has been, somewhat paradoxically, to help manage cost inflation on the operational side of the budget ledger. With the update to the Transportation Master Plan in 2008, OC Transpo began the process of reconfiguring the rapid transit system from a ‘trunk-and-branches’ network to a ‘trunk-and-feeder’ style of network. Historically, the ‘trunk-and-branches’ network had been integral to OC Transpo’s express commuter strategy, premised on transfer-free bus routes (branches), which converged on the Transitway to enter the core (trunk). The DOTT project was embraced as an opportunity to convert the system to a more efficient and cost-effective ‘trunk-and-feeder’ network, in which riders on feeder bus routes would transfer to a higher capacity

trunk line (OC Transpo 2009). By facilitating this shift, the Confederation Line came to be viewed as a solution to the trend of “unsustainable cost escalations” on the operational side of the budget:

...the redesigned transit system will save the City up to \$100 million in annual operating costs. Operating costs for Light Rail are much lower than buses, so those savings will grow as the rail system is expanded in the future...These savings will create new opportunities for the City of Ottawa to manage property tax rates or invest in improved services (City of Ottawa 2010).

In her account of Ottawa’s sustainability turn of the early 2000s, Abra Adamo explains that for local policymakers smart growth reform was from the outset conceived as a strategy for managing fiscal pressures in a context of state austerity (Adamo 2012). In response to the withdrawal of federal and provincial governments from the urban sphere, and in an effort to limit politically fraught increases to the property tax, the City looked to smart growth as a way to lower municipal spending obligations. In the transit sphere, this logic of sustainable austerity has created a complex and seemingly contradictory dynamic. On the one hand, large infrastructure investments have been justified in terms of their ability to drive network efficiencies, grow ridership, and encourage intensified development – that is, in terms of their ability to support more cost-effective growth modalities. On the other hand, however, the cost to operate this expanding network has emerged as a chronic source of financial anxiety and a target for spending reform.

This contradictory logic was made visible in the early days of the post-amalgamation reform period, a moment when policymakers were just beginning to come to terms with the particular dilemmas of urban growth in an age of austerity. In 2002, the City initiated a long-range financial planning process that was designed to identify and resolve the key drivers of municipal program spending, as well as the structural causes of a growing ‘infrastructure gap’. It

was here that the internal tension within the City's emerging transit-oriented growth agenda first became clear. Through the financial planning exercise, policymakers identified public transit as both a threat and a solution to the problem of fiscally unsustainable growth.

In their review of City spending, staff highlighted two intersecting dynamics that were combining to undermine the City's ability to sustainably finance growth. The first concerned land use and transportation planning practices. Suburban development in the 1980s and 90s, the staff report argued, had contributed to a growing infrastructure gap by fuelling demand for low density housing and auto-centric transport:

In the past, growth had led to traditional suburban development that was matched by increasing demand for lower density, largely car-based infrastructure. Indeed, this type of infrastructure demand has been responsible for a significant portion of the present capital infrastructure gap... As a result the City must recognize that it cannot afford to continue to subsidize development and growth as it has done in the past. The City must reconsider where development takes place, as well as its true cost (City of Ottawa 2002).

The fiscal consequences of cost-intensive growth were exacerbated by a second dynamic related to state restructuring. With retrenchment at federal and provincial scales, responsibility for infrastructure and other growth related costs had been effectively downloaded onto municipalities. Retrenchment in the infrastructure sphere, the effects of the province's 'local services realignment' exercise, and strict institutional limits on municipal revenue generation, had come together to create a crisis of collective provision at the local scale (City of Ottawa 2002).

Crucially, however, the city's fiscal challenges were not solely attributable to external institutional constraints imposed by senior governments. They also stemmed from the political perception of ratepayer fatigue; that is, the notion that rates of property taxation were becoming too burdensome. As senior governments retrenched, pressure on the local property tax base intensified. This contributed to a hardening of ratepayer conservatism and a deepening of

political opposition to local tax increases. In the years leading up to amalgamation, policymakers reacted to this mounting pressure by slashing property tax rates, and this practice continued into the administration of the new city. In 2001, for example, the property tax rate in Ottawa was reduced by 10% in an attempt to forge political compromise at the new City Hall. When combined with pre-amalgamation cuts, the average resident's inflation-adjusted property tax obligation in 2002 was over 20% less than it was in 1993 (City of Ottawa 2002).

In the transit sphere, these pressures came together with schizophrenic results. On the one hand, in assessing the structural roots of its fiscal dilemma the City argued that expanded public transit was integral to the reform of unsustainable growth patterns:

The City's capital infrastructure deficit can be reduced by changing the way the City develops. One alternative is investing in high quality transit, which in turn reduces the need to build more arterial roads and expressways. This alternative provides significant side benefits, such as less air and water pollution, and the creation of high quality community living. Any increase in the share of trips taken by transit reduces infrastructure costs (City of Ottawa 2002).

This rationale helped to underwrite the smart growth agenda elaborated in the inaugural Official Plan, as well as the City's Rapid Transit Expansion Program, which was unveiled the following year. On the other hand, however, this push for expanded capital works was expected to operate alongside a simultaneous demand to manage short term program costs. Immediately following the release of the OP, and as part of the same long-range financial planning exercise, the City launched a Universal Program Review to examine municipal spending, recommend administrative efficiencies, and identify opportunities to rationalize program spending (Adamo 2012). In response to this review, and at a time when the City was preparing to launch the first phase of rapid transit expansion, Council approved \$8 million in cuts to the 2004 transit budget (Brunt and Winfield 2005).

This contradictory push and pull became a hallmark of post-amalgamation transit policy in Ottawa. Motivated by the perceived urgency of smart growth reform, consensus solidified around notions of rapid transit expansion and suburban ridership growth. The City expanded its designated Urban Transit Area and continued to develop ambitious plans for LRT. At the same time, the question of how to reconcile the operating costs of an expanding system with the expectations of conservative ratepayers became an increasingly vexing one. As the cost to operate the system increased, policymakers became increasingly concerned with ensuring that the growth of the system was financially ‘sustainable’ and premised on an appropriate balance between user fees and public subsidy.

O’Brien’s election in 2006 marked an important inflection point in this process. O’Brien’s term of Council, from 2006 to 2010, was marked not only by the beginnings of a more robust consensus around LRT, but also by a more nakedly regressive approach to planning and program spending, that appeared to give little consideration to the equity dimensions of municipal governance. Instead, O’Brien helped to entrench a ratepayer ideology at the political heart of the new City of Ottawa. Winning all but one suburban pole, O’Brien was brought to power by a wave of suburban disaffection with the administration of the new city. Campaigning on the slogan ‘zero means zero’, O’Brien promised to freeze local taxes for the duration of his four year term. At the root of his appeal, then, was a commitment to insulate suburban ratepayers against, in particular, the costs of service demands emanating from the inner wards (Andrew and Doloreux 2011).

In the new City of Ottawa, this ratepayer agenda was forced to confront the contradictions of the city’s rising transit budget. On the one hand, public transit represented the City’s largest council-controlled expenditure and spending trends showed that that the program

was moving progressively away from its council-directed recovery ratio (City of Ottawa 2006). Between 1997, the year when provincial operating subsidies were eliminated, and 2007, the system's recovery ratio had fallen from 55% to 48%, and was projected to fall further in subsequent years (City of Ottawa 2007a). At the same time, an important cause of this rising rate of public subsidy was the improvement of suburban commuter service. From 2000 to 2006, the City's designated Urban Transit Area expanded rapidly in response to amalgamation and the City's evolving transit-oriented growth objectives. The addition of high mileage commuter service to Kanata, Orleans, Barrhaven, and Riverside South had the desired effect of growing ridership, but it also contributed to decreasing productivity rates across the network. This gave rise to a dilemma: suburban ridership growth was achieved, but only at the expense of a rising operational subsidy. Between 2003 and 2007, the system's average hourly service cost increased in real term by 18% (City of Ottawa 2007; OC Transpo 2011). This was a problem that OC Transpo's Manager of Transit Service Design described as one of 'unsustainable success' (Scrimgeour 2011).

In an effort to come to terms with this problem of 'unsustainable success', O'Brien and Council directed staff to develop a strategy that would help to stabilize OC Transpo's recovery ratio at 50%. As staff explained, this was a tall order, particularly in light of the City's ridership objectives. In addition to cost drivers like fuel and labour, which tended to rise at a rate above inflation, the City's growth strategy was predicated on the extension of unproductive commuter service. To reconcile these conflicting objectives, policymakers would need to make difficult decisions in three principal areas: labour costs, fare policy, and service design (City of Ottawa 2007a).

The O'Brien administration focused most of its attention on labour costs and fare policy. In the winter of 2008, the City entered negotiations with the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) representing OC Transpo workers. As part of its effort to transform the service's cost structure, the City sought to alter rules that allowed drivers control over the composition of daily schedules. This control was identified as a key source of operational inefficiency. By empowering management to determine scheduling, the City expected to save between \$3 and \$4.5 million in annual wage costs by improving the productivity of drivers (City of Ottawa 2011). The ATU resisted these demands and when negotiations came to an impasse, the union elected to strike. Over the course of the 53 day strike, which extended through the winter months of December and January, the City remained steadfast in its demand for scheduling control and operational cost savings.

The transit strike exposed a stark social divide in the city, highlighting in often dramatic terms the degree to which many residents depended on public transit. The media supplied an almost daily account of the hardships experienced by dependent transit riders: stranded seniors unable to attend emergency medical appointments, social workers ferrying clients to treatment and court appointments, people forced to walk hours to and from work through the cold and snow (Cole 2008; Daubs 2008; Ward 2009). Not surprisingly, the strike also laid bare the role of public transit in maintaining health and well-being. In the second month of the strike, the City's public health agency conducted a survey to assess its impact on residents, uncovering a whole array of negative indicators for low income individuals in particular. For example, over 30% of low income residents reported that their health had worsened as a result of the strike. The survey also found a dramatic increase in perceived stress, negative impacts on employment, declining

social engagement, and challenges accessing medical care and food (Community Foundation of Ottawa 2009).

The transit strike also exposed the manner in which different transit constituencies were represented at City Hall and the competing interests at stake in the City's drive to reign in labour costs. O'Brien had been carried to office by an overwhelmingly suburban electorate. Most of these voters did not rely on the transit system in any direct way, but those that did tended to relate to it as 'choice riders'. Thus, while the strike created serious challenges, particularly around the daily commute, residents were generally in position to manage and adapt. Dependent riders, by contrast, were disproportionately concentrated in central and inner suburban areas of the city, electoral wards that had favoured the centre-left candidate, Alex Munter. The interests of this constituency of riders were thus not nearly as well represented in the City's evaluation of the effects of a labour disruption. Reflecting on this divide in political representation, one journalist was led to observe that: "Many of the people who can't manage well without buses are the people who never count for much in politics: the poor, the students, recently arrived refugees, seniors" (Heartfield 2008).

The second avenue by which the O'Brien administration sought to reduce subsidy rates was fare policy. In the post-amalgamation period, the challenge of fare policy had been to determine how best to align user fees with the decline in network productivity. In the preceding term of council, policymakers had been reticent about increasing fares too quickly due both to concerns about discouraging ridership, but also to normative considerations and a concern for transit equity. For example, a proposal in 2003 to raise cash fares by 10% was defeated by a coalition of progressive councillors concerned about the measure's effect on low income riders.

By targeting cash fares, councillors argued that the measure would place too great a burden on “those who can least afford it (Munter, quoted in Gray 2002).

After 2006, however, these equity concerns were displaced by an overwhelming emphasis on reducing the rate of property tax subsidy. This shift was in accord with the City’s new ‘fiscal framework’, which was meant to impose discipline on the budget process. Through the framework, policymakers sought to reaffirm the principle of ‘user pay’ as a way to reduce the relative contribution of taxation to City services. Transit fares received particular attention in this regard. According to the framework, transit fares were expected to rise in an effort to restructure the balance between user fees and public subsidy (City of Ottawa 2007b). To this end, Council directed staff to review OC Transpo’s fare table. The resulting plan called for unprecedented successive increases of 7.5% in 2008, 2009, and 2010. Altogether, fares rose by nearly 24% over this three year period (OC Transpo 2011).

After 2010, fare increases became an annual occurrence, albeit at more moderate levels. By 2018, most fare categories had increased by approximately 45%, or three times the rate of inflation. What was most troubling about this, however, was the manner in which increases were distributed across the fare table. While a principal cause of the declining cost-recovery rate was the growth of long-distance commuter service, policymakers were careful not to raise the premium charged for express fares too dramatically for fear of suppressing ridership (OC Transpo 2007a; and see Jeanes 2011). By contrast, the fare class that saw the greatest increase in cost over this period was the single-use ticket – the fare type most relied upon by dependent riders. While most fare classes rose between 40 and 45%, data assembled by one councillor showed that the price of a ticket or its digital equivalent increased by over 72% (Menard in Pritchard 2019).

Whereas O'Brien and his Council focused on labour and fare costs, Watson, focused on a third area of concern: service levels and network design. One of the criticisms that O'Brien faced was that his management approach tended to be disorderly, even chaotic. Because the administration failed to address the root causes of the City's governance challenges, it was able neither to maintain fiscal discipline nor to effectively manage policy outcomes. For example, despite a promise to freeze property tax rates, rates in fact rose by 14% over the course of O'Brien's four year term. Watson was elected in 2010 not on a commitment to oppose O'Brien's fiscal agenda, but rather to pursue it in a more rational and intelligent way. Annual budget increases, he promised, would be limited to 2.5%, but combined with a more deliberate approach to program management (Cockburn 2010). Transit reform would be central to this agenda.

One of Watson's first initiatives upon taking office was to initiate a review of transit operating and capital budgets. As part of the 2011 budget process, Watson asked staff to assess the long term funding projections for public transit. The objective was to determine if these projections were affordable in the context of his commitment to moderate, inflation-adjusted increases to the property tax. Watson had initially been skeptical of the costs associated with the LRT strategy, but over the course of the campaign had committed to delivering the Downtown Tunnel project as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. The review was meant to provide a long-term, system-wide view of public transit and determine whether existing capital and operating assumptions were fiscally sustainable.

Reviewing the capital and operating projections yielded two different conclusions. On the one hand, the City's capital plans, based on the network vision outlined in the 2008 TMP, were deemed affordable. Through a combination of transit taxes, development charges, and federal and provincial gas tax funding, the City concluded that it would be able to finance the municipal

share of its LRT strategy while remaining within the mayor's prescribed borrowing and revenue constraints (City of Ottawa 2011b). The operating budget, by contrast, was seen to be more problematic. Despite the labour efficiencies won through collective bargaining and the revenue derived from large fare increases between 2008 and 2010, the public transit system was seen to suffer from a kind of structural bloat that would need to be brought under control if the system was to be aligned with the mayor's fiscal parameters.

The logic underlying the distinction between capital and operating was of course not without its own political determinations. For example, with respect to provincial gas tax revenues, the City determined that the majority of the \$36 million receipt would be used to fund capital-related expenses. Only \$16 million would be directed to the operations budget (City of Ottawa 2011b). Nevertheless, policymakers argued that there was a structural gap in the budget of approximately \$20 million. In response, OC Transpo was instructed to develop a service plan to right-size the service in accord with this perceived gap.

This restructuring strategy became euphemistically branded as a process of 'network optimization' designed to realign the service with council-directed standards for network coverage. In reality, it entailed the most extensive series of route changes and service cuts in the history of OC Transpo. To reach its budgetary target, planners implemented a variety of measures, including: the consolidation of routes, reduced hours of service for off-peak routes, the cancellation of routes with insufficient ridership, and the elimination of so-called 'milk runs' that entered and exited residential neighbourhoods (OC Transpo 2011). Altogether, the network optimization process involved changes to nearly 100 bus routes affecting over 10 000 daily riders.

OC Transpo's 2011 Business Plan, which gave direction to the network optimization strategy, was given the title: *Toward a Sustainable Transit System for Ottawa*. By 'sustainable', of course, the title was referring not to any notion of 'sustainable development', but rather to the notion of *fiscal* sustainability was defined according to perceived burden borne by ratepayers:

...the growth in demand for property tax support of the transit system will rise dramatically if the changes set out in this Business Plan are not implemented. By 2016, if this change does not occur, over \$50 million in additional tax support would be required. Put another way, this would see our public transit system demand a property tax increase of at least 5 per cent all on its own. Budget 2011 sets clear direction to redress this situation and place the transit system on solid and sustainable financial foundation for years to come. If these changes are made, the transit system will be able to properly fund capital and operating within its share of a 2.5 per cent tax increase. If these changes are not made, this will not be possible and the transit service will require a dramatic increase in property tax support (OC Transpo 2011).

As the mayor explained in a speech the following year, there was no reasonable alternative to service cuts:

Last year, Council stepped up to fix the fundamentally unsustainable public transit system that we inherited. The financial demands of the transit system were far outpacing the available funding. The growing cost of providing public transit threatened our ability to fund other vital services that we must provide. Action was needed to set public transit on a sustainable financial footing. This Council met the challenge (Watson 2012).

In the following section, I explore the political response of transit equity advocates to this narrative of fiscal necessity. As a number of commentators at the time noted, there was something deeply disingenuous about this narrative, which sought to naturalize what was quite plainly a question of political priorities and values. For example, in an editorial, the Editorial Board of the Ottawa Citizen challenged the notion that the network optimization strategy was anything other than an attempt to match spending to a pre-defined budgetary commitment:

Ottawans have learned much from OC Transpo's route-cutting exercise. It's too bad that information had to come from reducing rather than improving the system. The latter should be the goal of Ottawa city council and OC Transpo – to undertake a system-wide optimization plan. Not "optimization" mandated by Mayor Jim Watson's need to reach a

2.5 per-cent tax increase on this year's rushed budget so \$22 million in bus route cuts had to be put in place, whether they were the right changes for the system or not (Ottawa Citizen Editorial Board 2011).

Perhaps more pointedly, Citizen columnist David Reevely challenged the very idea that there could be some objective measure of the transit system's fiscal sustainability. Rather, the political framing of service cuts in terms of 'sustainability' obscured what was essentially a political determination:

I'm not sure what this means. The transit system as a whole lost \$212 million in 2010. It's losing \$217 million this year. In 2012, it's slated to lose \$227 million. In no way is this "sustainable", whether you cut \$20 million a year from it or not. The transit system isn't supposed to be sustainable in the usual sense. It's partly a social service and partly a planning device, whereby you weigh the costs of transit against the costs of (broadly understood) of building and maintaining even more roads...But in any event, as a business venture by itself, it makes no sense. What happened was the mayor decided, and city council agreed, that Ottawa should spend less on its transit services, and could do so without hurting riders badly enough for there to be serious political consequences, or ridership badly enough for there to be serious urban planning consequences... (Reevely 2011).

### **The Politics of Transit Equity**

In 2013, in a speech to a local business audience, Watson insisted that the function of urban public transit was essentially economic – its role was to maximize the efficient circulation of capital. In his view, public subsidies for transit were justified because they helped to improve productivity. To advocate for public subsidy on the basis of social policy was misguided, as this was not the function that the public transit system was intended to fulfill: “Congestion strangles productivity...Transit isn't a toy or a social program...it's a cheap way to move a lot of people” (Watson, quoted in Reevely 2013). In this section, I want to consider how progressive social forces have sought to respond to this dominant conception of public transit and the regressive policies to which it has given rise.

The politics of operational austerity emphasize the burden that is placed on ratepayers by an expanding public transit system. Here, the societal benefits of transit ridership are placed in tension with the demands of a conservative fiscal politics. Progressive social forces have tried to challenge this political dynamic by introducing a new logic: transit equity. The objective has been to broaden the terrain of ideational competition by drawing attention not only to the distinct role of public transit in the lives of dependent riders, but also to the ways in which the interests of these residents are affected by an overriding concern with ridership and subsidy rates.

The mobilization of anti-poverty and social service advocates in recent years has been oriented around two particular transit policy concerns. The first is related to network planning and the inequalities surrounding service cuts. Here, the challenge has been to confront the apolitical approach to network planning that sees policymakers treat riders as a homogenous group and focus decision-making on seemingly objective criteria like ridership, area coverage, and service demand. The problem with this approach is that while it appears to rest on objective and apolitical calculations, in practice it leads to an overwhelming concern with the needs of suburban commuters, who drive the system's ridership growth. Overlooked are the very different concerns of dependent riders, who are not only more attached to the service, but who also are much more likely to rely on local services at off-peak times.

In 2004, for example, the City implemented its first set of post-amalgamation service cuts as part of its Universal Program Review exercise. As observers at the time noted, these route cuts were determined entirely according to ridership criteria – the goal was to reduce expenditure by \$8 million, while preserving ridership to the greatest extent possible. For transit planners, the reason for prioritizing ridership was two-fold. First, and most obviously, City planning policies placed a priority on reducing automobile dependency and expanding the transit modal share.

Second, and likely just as important, preserving ridership was itself an important dimension of the cost-cutting exercise. Were service cuts to drive away too many riders, revenue losses would offset much of the financial benefit. While this prioritization of ridership did not seem to target any particular area or group, the result was nevertheless expected to be a significant reduction in accessibility (Brunt and Winfield 2005).

The reason for this loss of accessibility, and the challenge of balancing ridership and equity concerns, was spelled-out by staff in their 2007 financial review of the City's transit operations. If the objective is to reduce expenditure and minimize ridership loss, it is necessary to distinguish between dependent riders, who by definition cannot opt out of using the service, and choice riders, who will only use the service if it is sufficiently convenient. Service cuts, the report argued, need to be "oriented towards reducing service levels for those persons that generally have no access to a car (demand is inelastic) to favour those that are attempting to make a modal shift away from the car (commuters with choices over transit)" (City of Ottawa 2007). In short, the staff report acknowledged that, under conservative fiscal conditions, the goal of promoting ridership necessarily entails prioritizing the needs of choice commuters at the expense of dependent transit riders.

This logic continued to guide decision-making when the City undertook the network optimization process a few years later. As in 2004, planners evaluated route cuts using metrics such as ridership, area coverage, and walking distance. The result of this evaluation procedure was an 'optimization' strategy that concentrated cutbacks on local and off-peak services, which were variously reduced, combined, or outright eliminated in an effort to realize prescribed budget savings. As one influential transit observer noted, the consequence of this decision-

making was to entrench even further the bias towards peak-hour suburban commuting (Jeanes 2011).

For many at City Hall, this bias was viewed not as a problem but as an appropriate reflection of planning priorities. For example, in his budget speech announcing the service cuts, Jim Watson defended the optimization initiative by framing it as a decision to reduce waste while preserving what was essential about the service:

This Budget is about more express service and smarter routing. A better service does not mean more milk runs through neighbourhoods stopping every 200 meters and crowding through the downtown bottleneck. It means express service that runs reliably even when there is a storm or a traffic snarl (Watson 2011).

The removal of \$22 million from the transit budget was, on this view, of little concern because the proposal promised to preserve the system's ability to provide reliable suburban commuting service.

Not surprisingly, this view was not shared by equity-seeking community organizations, who mounted a vigorous opposition to the historic cutbacks. As one anti-poverty activist explained, the network optimization initiative, by targeting such an essential and widely used service, created natural conditions for broad-based civic action (personal interview). In the weeks following the announcement, City Council faced sustained pressure from anti-poverty activists, seniors' representatives, disability advocates, community associations, and student groups. These diverse interests became united around a shared critique of the City's transit planning priorities, and in particular the failure to give meaningful consideration to how service cuts would affect vulnerable transit constituencies.

The mayor wanted to depict cuts as apolitical and technocratic. What opponents pointed out however, was that this representation was only possible because policymakers *acted as though* service changes were a purely technocratic matter. The idea that service cuts could be

oriented in a neutral and rational way was premised on the notion of a universal transit user, a notion that abstracted away from the real-world needs of different transit constituencies. This idea was well-captured in a presentation to Council by a representative of the City's Poverty Issues Advisory Committee, who argued that the optimization process systematically neglected the ways in which the needs of dependent constituencies diverged from those of choice commuters:

We have a number of concerns which we feel it important to raise before the City proceeds (some might say rushes) to implement revised services to meet administrative deadlines. These arise from the needs of Ottawans living in poverty and supporting their families on low-incomes. For this group you will appreciate that appropriate access to reasonably-priced public transit is not a preference but a necessity of life. Accessing employment, food and other services are not luxuries and, for many, public transit is the only way to meet basic needs.

Our first point is that the process has considered where users live, how often they use services but not who they are. We are not convinced that the optimization process has considered the needs of disadvantaged groups from the outset. Our understanding is that the principal criteria for deciding how routes will be enhanced or reduced relate to proximity to transit routes, transfers and wait times...It does not appear that significant consideration was given to areas or to groups for whom availability of transit, even during off-hours, is a necessity – for example, low income working people who travel to or from jobs at very late hours, vulnerable people who need to minimize the time it takes them to travel through high-risk areas and of course, persons with mobility issues for whom “five minutes walk” can have distinctly different connotations than for the rest of us (Sloan 2011).

The goal for equity-seeking groups was to expand the sphere of normative concern. The network optimization process reflected, quite plainly, a dominant preoccupation with the relationship between operational spending and local tax rates. For community opponents, the objective was to draw attention to the consequences of this preoccupation for vulnerable and dependent public transit users. This challenge was posed with particular effect by the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), a local civic organization that had an established history working with City officials to advance equity and inclusion concerns. In response to the concern that

service cuts were being planned without accounting for their disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups, CAWI asked officials to assess the plan using the City's Equity and Inclusion Lens, a tool recently developed in collaboration with the City to improve the sensitivity and responsiveness of municipal policy and governance practice.

CAWI's organizational roots trace to the creation in 1999 of an RMOC Working Group on Women's Access to Municipal Services. In response to the findings of the Working Group, CAWI entered into a formal partnership with the City of Ottawa to enhance its institutional responsiveness to gender and equity concerns. With funding from the federal Status of Women Canada, CAWI and the City began work in 2005 on a Gender Equality Lens, a tool that would help policymakers to understand and account for barriers to service access (Klodawsky et al. 2014). Beginning in 2008, work on the Gender Equality Lens evolved into a new initiative to develop a multi-focal Equity and Inclusion Lens. This shift aligned with a parallel move by activists and City staff to explore the notion of an Equality Framework, which was first developed in London, England (Kotani 2014). With the shift to a multi-focal perspective, CAWI, the City, and a collection of collaborative civil society organizations, began to imagine a mechanism within the municipal administration that would institutionalize thinking about the needs of marginalized communities.

The result of this multi-sectoral collaboration was a new Equity and Inclusion Lens for the City of Ottawa, which was officially launched in the summer of 2010. The Lens included 11 'diversity snapshots', which provided profiles of particular communities at risk of exclusion, as well as details about the specific types of barriers they might face with respect to employment, education, housing, transportation, and service access. In addition, the Lens was rolled-out with a handbook for City staff and councillors that provided information on how to apply principles and

learn more about the incorporation of equity considerations in the policy process (Klodawsky et al. 2014). The objective was to support and encourage policymakers to take on these new understandings and norms as part of their daily practice.

While the Lens was not applied during the optimization planning process itself, the Transit Commission did cede to community groups by asking City staff to conduct a post-hoc analysis of service cuts. In the following year, staff conducted consultations with affected groups in an effort to gain a more fulsome understanding of their experience with the transit system and the consequences of service cuts in their daily lives. This consultation exercise aimed in many ways at precisely the kinds of understanding that activists suggested were missing from the optimization planning process – it sought to disassemble the notion of a universal transit user in order to uncover the specific needs of vulnerable and dependent transit constituencies.

Through these consultations, staff developed a variety of critical insights concerning the impact of network optimization on seniors, persons with disabilities, people living in poverty, women, new Canadians, visible minorities, and young people. For example, the consultations highlighted the burden experienced by seniors, who were disproportionately dependent on off-peak services and particularly sensitive to increases in walking distance. With reduced access to service, seniors reported a greater sense of social isolation and exclusion. The loss of mobility interacted with other forms of systemic exclusion to create a compound form of disadvantage. In a similar way, the consultations yielded insight into the experiences of people living in poverty. It found that service cuts not only create new burdens for vulnerable individuals and families, but exacerbate the material and emotional stress of lived poverty:

For example, a single mother of three living in poverty having to get groceries or take children to a medical appointment, feels a greater impact if the bus stop is farther away, frequency is reduced, if the route was combined with another route, or is more crowded.

The impact severity is said to be exacerbated by feelings of desperation when a person living in poverty has no other transportation choice (City of Ottawa 2013).

The application of the City's Equity and Inclusion lens to the optimization plan brought into sharper focus the impact of service cuts on marginalized communities. The obvious question then became how to use this understanding to address service deficiencies. OC Transpo responded in two ways. First, with funding assigned from the City's social service budget, it reinvested a modest \$500,000 in service enhancements, applying the Lens to determine high priority routes. Second, and perhaps more significantly, OC Transpo also committed to use the lens in the planning of future network changes. This would entail, for example, determining whether and how changes would affect identified groups and engaging in remedial consultations (City of Ottawa 2013).

These changes pointed to both the power of the Equity and Inclusion Lens to expand policymakers' sphere of normative concern, as well as to its institutional limits. As some participants in the development of the Lens have observed, its creation came about at a moment when policymakers were struggling to negotiate the evolving landscape of neoliberal urbanism. This period saw a definite turn towards local austerity and tax control, yet there also remained reserves of social democratic concern amongst councillors and within the local bureaucracy (Klodawsky et al. 2013). CAWI sought to navigate this terrain by embracing an inside/outside engagement strategy. CAWI remained a policy outsider, using its position to build community networks and advocate for equity-oriented policy initiatives at the City. At the same time, however, it also worked directly with the City to develop the Lens, seeing an opportunity to support positive organizational change and extend the reach of equity norms (Siltanen et al. 2015).

The relationship between dominant neoliberal norms and subordinate social democratic reserves plays out, in part, through the allocation of resources. In the creation and application of the Lens, senior management was viewed as supportive, contributing to its development and encouraging its roll-out amongst staff. Nevertheless, there was a presumption that the use of the Lens would not entail significant amounts of direct spending. In her review of the Lens and its history, Kotani explains that budgetary constraints served as a generally accepted limit on the how the Lens might be developed and employed (Kotani 2014). There was receptiveness to the use of the Lens as an aid to more progressive planning and decision-making, but it was not conceived as direct challenge to the prevailing austerity regime.

This dynamic certainly seemed to be reflected in the City's approach to addressing the exclusionary effects of network optimization. On the one hand, OC Transpo was able to use the Lens to improve its understanding of the relationship between network planning, service levels, and social equity. It committed to the Lens as a permanent feature of its future planning practice, ensuring that equity concerns occupy a more prominent place within the architecture of transit planning. On the other hand, however, the use of the Lens did not alter the fundamental commitment to fiscal realignment in the transit sector. The underlying need to extract \$20 million from the transit operating budget – the precipitating cause of 'optimization' – remained essentially unchallenged. Planners were asked to pay greater attention to the equity dimensions of network development, but remained constrained by the more fundamental demand for austerity or 'fiscal sustainability'.

Alongside this push for more equitable network planning, local activists have also mobilized around the problem of equitable fare policy. Where equitable network planning concerns the organization of routes, frequency of service, and the prioritization of particular

types of mobility, equitable fare policy concerns the ability of low income residents to affordably access this network. Here, the problem is not simply the quality or efficacy of the service, but the ability of people to use this service. As explained, for example, in the equity and inclusion snapshot of people living in poverty, a key barrier to inclusion is the rising cost to access the public transit system: “While there is public transit available in Ottawa, many people living in poverty often cannot afford to use it” (CAWI and City of Ottawa 2017).

In the post-amalgamation era, the problem of affordable fare policy can be traced to the mobilization of disability advocates, who first began to organize around the question of affordable access. This mobilization initially developed in response to the 2001 ParaTranspo strike, which encouraged advocates to organize for improvements to accessible transit. One of the principal sites for this organizing became the Persons with DisAbilities Community Coalition, which led efforts to elevate accessibility issues in the transportation planning process. The coalition advocated around a number of issues, but placed particular emphasis on the problem of transit affordability, forming a working group to explore the possibility of a reduced fare transit pass for persons with disabilities (see City of Ottawa 2005).

The linking of disability and affordability was rooted in the argument that people living with disabilities faced a compound risk of exclusion. First, residents living with disabilities were particularly dependent on public transit for their personal mobility. As the working group explained:

The need for *accessible* public transportation is well understood by people living with disabilities and the people and organizations that support them. Accessible public transit provides the critical link between employment and employment-related activities, education, health care, recreation, community supports and family and friends. For people with disabilities, accessible public transit is fundamental for ensuring inclusion in the community. Public transportation is the key to countering isolation and enabling independence (Accessible Transit Pass Work Group 2004).

Accessibility was made more challenging, however, by disproportionate rates of poverty in the community. People living with disabilities, advocates noted, were twice as likely to live in poverty and were often dependent on provincial income support (City of Ottawa 2005). The compound problem of dependency and poverty put households in the impossible position of having to make choices about essential budgetary items. As the Work Group explained, because the cost of a transit pass consumed the majority of the personal needs allowance for recipients of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), people were often forced to harvest money from things like food budgets (Accessible Transit Pass Work Group 2004).

In response to the report developed by the Accessible Transit Pass Working Group, the City agreed to develop a pilot program that would offer a discounted express monthly transit pass to recipients of ODSP. Whereas a regulation adult express pass in 2006 cost \$87 per month, the discounted Community Pass would be available for only \$28.25, at an estimated cost to the City of approximately \$1.1 million (City of Ottawa 2006). In developing the pilot, City staff conducted a survey to gauge the impact of a discounted transit pass. Its findings echoed many of the arguments presented by the working group, showing that access to affordable transit would provide significant benefits in term of health and well-being, including better access to healthy food, better access to healthcare, improved employment opportunities, and reductions in social isolation and financial anxiety (City of Ottawa 2006; Accessible Transit Pass Work Group 2004).

When the Community Pass was introduced, poverty reduction advocates hoped that the pilot might eventually translate into an expanded program for all low income households. The timing, however, proved inauspicious. As the City transitioned towards a more openly austere operating environment, there was little opportunity to advocate for an enriched program. The issue, however, continued to percolate. For example, transit affordability emerged again in the

context of developing the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2009, during which community members highlighted the barriers posed by rising transit costs (City of Ottawa 2009). A coalition of the city's community health and resource centres in collaboration with the City for all Women Initiative proposed expanding access to the Community Pass. In the lead-up to the 2014 municipal election, the coalition developed a report with four broad policy recommendations designed to foster a healthier and more equitable city. One of these recommendations highlighted the need to extend the Community Pass to all low income residents. For the coalition, a challenge for transit planning in Ottawa was not to become so consumed by LRT planning and the politics of capital development as to lose sight of operational concerns related to safety and affordability (Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres 2014; CAWI 2014).

The prospect of developing a more inclusive low income transit pass began to gather momentum in advance of the 2017 municipal budget. This momentum was created by a broad-based advocacy coalition that brought together anti-poverty, public health, labour, environmental and civic equity groups. This coalition had lobbied Committees and Council for a number of years to take-up the issue of a low income transit pass in the context of rapidly rising fares. In response, the Transit Commission asked transit staff in 2015 to develop a report exploring the need for a low income pass and potential implementation options. This report, delivered the following year, provided fuller context to the discussion, outlining the diverse sources of public transit subsidy. Many low income transit riders, it showed, received subsidies through provincial social service programs, the Community Pass, or the student discount program. At the same time, the report also found that nearly one third of OC Transpo's low income riders did not receive any form of transit subsidy (City of Ottawa 2016).

On the basis of this report, the Commission recommended that Council petition the province to provide funding for a low income transit pass. For a number of councillors, petitioning for provincial support was justified on the basis that the pass would effectively function as a form of social program, and thus was most appropriately funded by the provincial government. At a projected cost of \$3.3 million, they were loath to add a new expenditure to the transit budget, particularly at a time when the City was working to improve the system's recovery ratio. However the provincial government was unwilling to meet the request, arguing that the City already received funding through the provincial gas tax, which it was free to allocate as according to its own priorities (Willing 2016).

Despite this, the City opted to move forward with a discounted fare program, albeit at a lower subsidy rate . As part of the 2017 budget, the City unveiled the EquiPass, a monthly pass made available to individuals whose household income fell below the federal low- income cut-off (LICO) at a price of \$57, or 50% of the cost of a regular adult pass. The following year, the City created a complementary EquiFare program to provide a discounted rate for single rides. This decision was noteworthy for a number of reasons, but perhaps most of all for the fact that it signalled an important shift in ideational terrain. In campaigning for a low income transit pass, advocates had successfully positioned equitable access to public transit as an essential social policy concern, what downtown councillor Catherine McKenney called “the greatest social responsibility this term of council” (Willing 2016). As a result, policymakers were forced to incorporate equity concerns into the broader discussion about fare rates, system operating costs, and taxation.

The ideational shift was captured with particular clarity in the way that Mayor Watson embraced the notion of equitable fare policy. Where only a few years earlier, Watson had denied

that public transit should entail a social policy function, with the introduction of the EquiPass he celebrated the importance of affordable and inclusive public transit:

A single person using the EquiPass will save \$56 each month – or about \$672 each year – leaving more money available for other basic necessities such as food, clothing and accommodations... This is the City's largest one-time increase in financial support to residents living below the low income cut off for public transit in the City's history. I strongly believe that this is a big step forward in building the type of City that we all want – a city that gives residents with low incomes the opportunity to benefit from public transit at a deeply discounted monthly fare. It will also create an even more affordable City for residents seeking employment, single parents, recent immigrants settling in Ottawa and for those residents temporarily out of work due to injury (Watson 2017).

While transit equity advocates were not able to alter the City's fundamental policy calculus or displace policymakers' basic transit priorities, they did succeed in challenging the narrow conceptualization of public transit as a commuter service and growth management tool. Through these advocacy efforts, policymakers were pressed to broaden their horizon of normative concern. The interests of ratepayers and commuters were now expected to be considered alongside those of dependent transit riders, whose interests and needs might require different types of intervention.

## **Conclusion**

The account presented in this chapter highlights a series of ideational and narrative positions, each exerting a degree of influence on various aspects of the transit policy process. In the capital sphere, the politics of LRT were shown to revolve around the perceived necessity to transform how people move about the city in order to manage the pressures of intense growth and constrained revenues. Investments were depicted as the only rational and progressive

response to Ottawa's transition into a 'little big city'. In the operational sphere, by contrast, I showed that policy has been shaped by the perceived necessity to manage 'unsustainable' cost escalation. In the operational sphere, the concern has been to not let the growth of the network impose too great a burden on local ratepayers. Finally, in response to the effects of operational austerity, local activists have worked to broaden the ideational terrain by introducing norms of transit equity. These norms were intended to moderate dominant conceptions of public transit as a growth management tool oriented around the needs of suburban commuters.

## Chapter 7

### The Political Economy of LRT in Waterloo Region

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I turn to a case study of light-rail transit development in the Region of Waterloo, a political jurisdiction in Southern Ontario encompassing the municipalities of Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge. While the Region of Waterloo is, like the City of the Ottawa, enmeshed in a multi-scalar institutional ensemble of urban regulation and infrastructure development, it presents a unique set of local conditions that have shaped its experience with transit-oriented reform. By analyzing this experience, the objective of this chapter is to augment our understanding of how local dynamics interact with wider political economic conditions in the urban transit sphere and in the production of sustainable urbanism.

Beginning in the early 2000s, a newly empowered regional government of Waterloo initiated an ambitious smart growth reform agenda. Building on ideas initially developed in its inaugural Official Plan in the 1970s, the Region sought to challenge the dominance of auto-centric development patterns through practices of mixed-use intensification and transit-oriented development. At the heart of this strategy was a proposal to develop a new light rail transit line along a ‘Central Transit Corridor’, linking together the municipalities of Waterloo, Kitchener, and Cambridge. The light rail transit project, given the name ION in 2013, was eventually approved at a cost of \$818 million, the largest infrastructure investment in the region’s history.

This chapter analyses the ideas and narratives that have structured the debate surrounding this transformative infrastructure project. In the first section, I trace the emergence of the Region’s smart growth agenda. Beginning in 2001, the government of Waterloo Region initiated

an ambitious period of planning reform that called for mixed-use intensification in the region's Built-up Area, transit-oriented development policies for designated activity centres, and the expansion of public transit service. These reforms were presented as a proactive response to emerging growth pressures in the region and were broadly embraced as part of a civic tradition of environmental planning.

In the second section I explore the role of the Region's light rail transit agenda in the context of historic efforts to revitalize downtown Kitchener. In the early 2000's, economic development officials in municipal Kitchener initiated a new amenity-oriented renewal strategy inspired by Florida's theory of the creative class. This strategy successfully capitalized on the urbanization of the region's technology sector and contributed to the formation of a high technology hub in the west end of Kitchener's downtown. The City's amenity-drive vision of tech-centered urban renewal became tied to the Region's LRT project through proposals for a new 'innovation district' at the site of an anticipated multi-modal station. When the project faced opposition in 2011, representatives of the technology sector emerged as vocal proponents, arguing that investment in LRT was both central to the inter-urban competition for 'talent' and the social and civic renewal of downtown Kitchener.

In the third section I describe the role played by the grassroots organization Taxpayers for Sensible Transit (T4ST) in directing ratepayer opposition to the project. The project was given preliminary approval in 2009 but faced intense criticism during the 2010 municipal and regional election. As a result, Regional policymakers were forced to revisit the issue before granting final approval to the project in June 2011. T4ST emerged during this period to become the key ideational force for the opposition movement, giving intellectual direction to loosely formed ratepayer anxieties. T4ST sought to transform concerns over Regional spending into a question

about the *value* of the LRT project. Members and supporters challenged the business case for the project and framed proponents as unrealistic and grandiose. An interesting dimension of this opposition movement was its connection to the public-private Uptown Vision Committee, which was responsible for advising municipal Waterloo on issues related to the city's core area. The Vision Committee also opposed the Region's LRT proposal, arguing that it would threaten the successful renewal of Uptown Waterloo.

In the final section, I turn to the issue of affordable housing. In recent years, massive land investment along the Central Transit Corridor has, on the one hand, helped the Region to surpass its intensification targets, but on the other, contributed to growing anxiety about housing affordability along the Corridor and in downtown Kitchener. Poverty activists, public health groups, support workers, and academics have joined a chorus of voices advocating for affordable housing development along the CTC to ensure equitable access to the LRT and Regional transit services. While many Regional policymakers appear to share these concerns, policy engagement, including through the Region's Affordable Housing Strategy, has been limited. Part of the challenge, according to policymakers, is a lack of financial support from senior governments, whose commitments to affordable housing have not kept pace with investments in rapid transit infrastructure.

### **From Urban Dispersion to Smart Growth**

The Region of Waterloo has earned a reputation as a leader in environmental planning and urban sustainability. This reputation stems from the Region's efforts to reform traditional practices of fragmented and auto-centric development. This initial section describes the

conditions out of which these institutional norms and practices have emerged. In particular, it traces the emergence in the early 2000s of a new smart growth planning regime in Waterloo Region, which introduced a vision of compact, integrated, and transit-oriented development for the region, anchored by the construction of a new rapid transit system connecting the constituent municipalities.

Historically, the area that constitutes the Region of Waterloo has been defined by a highly dispersed and fragmented urban form, which has a number of characteristics. First, the region has been characterized by a strong residential preference for low density, single family housing. Residential amenities have traditionally been associated with locations away from the core, with the result that most residents have chosen to migrate away from the region's central urban areas (Filion et al. 1999). Second, the region has lacked a strong concentration of either employment or retail activity. In 1999, the largest employment concentration in the region was located in Kitchener's central business district, but this location accounted for only 6.2% of the regional total. Relatedly, the share of regional retail activity in downtown Kitchener has also fallen precipitously, from a high of 59% in 1961 to less than 11% in 1990 (Bunting and Filion 1999).

This combination of residential and commercial decentralization has contributed to a regional transport system characterized by an overwhelming dependence on the automobile. Whereas nation-wide 75.9% of households own a personal vehicle, in Waterloo this rate reaches 92%. As a result, public transit in the region has historically been underdeveloped and of limited utility. In the late 1990s, only 4% of trips were conducted using public transit and ridership has historically been dominated by captive or dependent riders who lack any real alternative (Bunting and Filion 1999).

The development of a dispersed and fragmented urban form is related to a number of factors distinct to the region. First, the region has not been characterized by traditional center-periphery dynamics, and thus has been particularly susceptible to the postwar process of decentralization. Comprised of three core municipalities – Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge – each with its own traditional downtown, the region has lacked a single center of gravity. Second, the regional economy has historically been tied disproportionately to manufacturing industries, whose land use requirements were particularly conducive to suburbanization in the 1960s and 70s. Though the economy developed a strong technology cluster in the 1980s and 90s, these firms also chose to locate in suburban business parks. As a result, the decentralization of employment has been particularly pronounced in the region, leaving less residual concentration of traditional CBD functions. Finally, rapid regional growth in the postwar period conspired to overwhelm the scale of prewar development. For example, during the 1980s, a period associated with high rates of suburban sprawl, the region grew an annual rate of 2.4%, third amongst Canadian CMAs (Filion et al. 1999). This growth was accommodated primarily through the construction of an effective expressway network that connected most of the region's principal employment sites. As a result, the region has become characterized by low levels of congestion and a very high degree of auto accessibility (Bunting and Filion 1999).

Attempts to reform this dispersed and auto-centric mode of development began in earnest in the early 1970s. As with other regions across the province, Waterloo was affected by the wave of institutional restructuring set-off by the provincial government's embrace of regional governance in the late 1960s. In 1973, this led to the consolidation of municipal governments and the creation of a new two-tier system for the region. The fifteen municipalities that made up the metropolitan area were amalgamated into seven, including the core cities of Cambridge,

Waterloo, and Kitchener. These municipalities were then joined together as part of a new upper-tier government, the Region of Waterloo.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, the success of regional governance in mitigating forces of dispersion and implementing a more comprehensive planning regime was somewhat mixed. On the one hand, the new regional government struggled to exert real coordinating authority over constituent municipalities. This struggle was rooted in the history of inter-municipal competition in the region and divergent conceptions of the proper relationship between local governments. Policymakers in Kitchener, for example, had historically understood it to be the dominant municipal body in the region and a natural locus for amalgamation. Cambridge, by contrast, had a history of independence that left it strongly resistant to encroachments on its planning authority. To appease these tensions, the Region by and large deferred to local land use preferences, even though this enabled the continuation of fragmentation and duplication.

On the other hand, however, the new regional government also began to implement the institutional architectures and planning norms that would in later years serve as the basis for the region's emergence as a leader in sustainable planning. The Region of Waterloo's inaugural official plan of 1976 provided the first comprehensive plan for the region, which marked the beginning of the region's distinctive normative commitment to environmental planning. For example, the 1976 Plan established a series of 69 'Environmentally Sensitive Policy Areas' in the region that would require an impact statement before allowing any change to their designated land use. This was the first time any municipal government in Canada had included environmental policy in its official plan (Daley 2017). The Plan also attempted to protect agricultural areas by restricting severances on designated farmland. Finally, the inaugural plan for the region identified a new regional transit corridor connecting the municipalities of

Cambridge, Waterloo, and Kitchener. This Central Transit Corridor was expected to serve as the site of a new rapid transit system that would begin to challenge the dominance of the automobile in the region.

Through much of the 1980s and 90s, the ability of the regional government to realize this vision and to impose a more rational and environmentally sensitive planning regime was limited. Circumstances began to change in the late 1990s. Once again, this shift was tied to a provincial restructuring initiative, this time to a province-wide push for municipal amalgamation. While this push did not ultimately result in a new amalgamated structure in Waterloo Region (likely because of opposition from the local government MPP), it did result in a number of institutional changes that strengthened regional planning authority. The first important change involved the uploading of responsibility for public transit to the Region. By absorbing authority over public transit policy, the Region gained a critical planning tool that would allow it to better direct land use and development patterns. The second important change involved reforms to the process of regional elections and the composition of Regional Council. Here, the effect was to empower the regional government and support the development of a more coherent regional identity.

Before this period, Regional council-members were elected through a ‘double direct’ election, which meant that they were simultaneously elected to serve on both regional council and a local municipal council. Beginning in 2000, a majority of the regional council would be elected directly by voters to serve only at the regional scale. These members, including the directly elected regional chair, would serve alongside the seven municipal mayors. This move was significant because it enabled councillors for the first time to embrace a uniquely regional perspective, rather than an approach to regional policy colored by parallel responsibilities as municipal leaders (Daley 2017).

This marked a critical turning point in regional politics. While municipalities retained important powers related to land use, the Region emerged at this stage as a much more dominant planning authority. Empowered by a greater degree of political independence and with expanded responsibility for coordinating public transit, Regional Council became better able to challenge forces of fragmentation and to encourage a more integrated approach to regional development. Perhaps most importantly, the growing institutional clout of the regional government allowed policymakers to advance a normative agenda that emphasized the value of sustainable, transit-oriented, compact development. In 1976, for example, the inaugural Regional Official Plan articulated a quite progressive vision of environmentally-sensitive planning, yet its ability to realize this vision was curtailed by ongoing municipal competition and land use preferences, which favored decentralization. After 2000, the Region of Waterloo became better able to both articulate this vision and unite municipalities around a shared commitment to smart and sustainable growth.

The Waterloo Region had a strong tradition of environmental planning. This tradition was rooted in the region's agricultural history and Mennonite culture, which contributed to a much greater civic sensitivity to environmental issues, including land consumption and water resource protection. In addition to the creation of Environmentally Sensitive Policy Areas in 1973, the Region also implemented North America's first Blue Box recycling program in 1983, and was the first local government in Canada to develop a Water Resources Protection Strategy (Region of Waterloo 2006). This cultural tradition made the region particularly amenable to the early adoption of sustainability and smart growth discourses. Though the region remained a mid-size urban center and had yet to experience many of the serious consequences of auto-centric development, policymakers were nevertheless able to introduce sustainable planning reform as a

proactive measure designed to insulate the region from the consequences of growth (Daley 2017).

In 2001, the empowered regional government initiated the development of a new regional growth strategy. Beginning with a report from Regional Chair Ken Seiling entitled *Smart Growth and the Region of Waterloo: Planning our Future*, the process was designed to challenge the prevailing pattern of fragmented and auto-centric development in the region. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Region experienced rapid growth. And though seen to be largely desirable, planners also argued that this growth posed risks. If left unmanaged, growth would place essential groundwater resources at risk and threaten the ‘small town’ place qualities that residents valued (Brunt and Winfield 2005). The growth strategy was presented as a proactive response to these pressures, one in keeping with the Region’s history as a responsible environmental steward (Region of Waterloo 2003).

The government’s reform vision was institutionalized through the 2003 Regional Growth Management Strategy (RGMS). Though the RGMS did not impose new planning rules, it functioned as a guiding framework for future planning documents, providing a set of overarching principles. The RGMS proposed a ‘moderate re-urbanization’ strategy and was based on three essential components. First, the strategy called for the creation of a firm countryside boundary that would effectively limit the sprawl into valuable agricultural lands. Second, it continued the practice of designating and protecting sensitive environmental areas, with an emphasis on the need to protect the region’s water table. And finally, the strategy called for the intensification of land along a Central Transit Corridor (CTC) in conjunction with the development of a new light rail transit line (Region of Waterloo 2003). The Central Transit Corridor, which had been originally identified as part of the 1976 Regional Plan, traced a path through the downtowns of

Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge and connected to a number of major employment sites, including the Universities of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier. The basic goal of the RGMS was to direct future growth along this corridor.

The RGMS provided the foundation for a number of subsequent initiatives. The first was the creation of Grand River Transit (GRT). Formed in 2000 after the Region assumed responsibility for public transit, GRT consolidated transit services across the municipalities of Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge into a single regional authority. Through Grand River Transit, the Region began to invest much more aggressively in the public transit system, expanding the bus fleet, extending service hours, and introducing new routes. In 2005, the Region introduced what would become the iXpress system, a series of express bus routes connecting to and operating along the Central Transit Corridor. Funded in part by the short-lived federal Urban Transportation Showcase Program, the iXpress system marked the first step in the development of a new regional rapid transit network.

In 2009 and 2010, the Region's smart growth strategy was given more substantive direction with the introduction of a new Regional Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan. The Plans marked an important affirmation of the Region's normative planning vision and provided a more explicit policy framework for reform. For example, the 2009 OP presented what it called a 'vision for a sustainable and liveable Waterloo Region':

...the vision of this plan is that “**Waterloo Region will be an inclusive, thriving, and sustainable community committed to maintaining harmony between rural and urban areas and fostering opportunities for current and future generations**”. This vision embraces *sustainability* and *liveability* as central concepts... (Region of Waterloo 2009).

The Plan was founded on a four pillar conception of sustainability in which “Economic growth and prosperity are acknowledged as being fundamental to sustaining a high quality of life, but not at the expense of the other components of a *sustainable* community” (ibid).

The Official Plan established targets and parameters for the Region’s ambitious intensification objectives. In addition to reiterating the countryside boundary established in the RGMS, the Plan set a minimum re-urbanization target of 45%, which meant that at least 45% of all new development would be directed to the existing ‘Built-Up Area’, rather than to suburban greenfields. The Plan also established a series of transit-oriented development principles, including targeted intensification around designated station areas and rules to promote mixed-use forms and multi-modal connectivity (Region of Waterloo 2009).

The new Official Plan created the first real political test for the Region’s smart growth agenda. In the process of crafting the Plan’s development targets, Regional planners updated the methodology used to calculate its ‘land budget’, which determined the amount of new greenfield land that would be made available for suburban development. To support its intensification targets, planners adopted a conservative budget that designated only 85 hectares of new land. This decision was strongly opposed by greenfield developers, who successfully challenged the Plan in front of the Ontario Municipal Board.

The Board’s decision frustrated local policymakers, but also offended local civic sensibilities. As a number of observers noted, there was a great deal of civic pride in the Region’s environmental planning tradition and broad popular support for its smart growth agenda. In light of the strong political response, the Regional government chose to appeal the ruling at significant cost. As a result, developers were eventually forced to accept a negotiated compromise that included a modest increase in the regional land budget (Daley 2017).

The Regional Official Plan was also complemented by a new Transportation Master Plan. The TMP was meant to be a continuation of the planning and spending reforms that had been ongoing since the Region acquired responsibility for public transit. The objective was to reduce the automobile modal share from 85% of trips to 70%, primarily through the growth of public transit. Through investments in the regional transit system, the Plan envisioned an increase in modal share from a low of 4% to 15% by 2031 (Region of Waterloo 2010). These targets were extremely ambitious, but they reflected the significant success achieved by Grand River Transit since 2000. By 2009, after less than 10 years of Regional service, ridership on Grand River Transit had already increased by 74% (Daley 2017).

The development of the Regional Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan were carried out in parallel with planning for a light rail transit line along the CTC. For planners, reurbanization objectives were tied to a nodal development strategy that would concentrate growth in a series of mixed-use activity centers. This nodal development strategy, in turn, was seen to depend on the implementation of new rapid transit infrastructure, which could support higher rates of intensification.

The environmental assessment process for the project was initiated in 2006. The process included an evaluation of potential routes, as well as a comparison of light rail and bus-rapid-transit alternatives. While the evaluation found that BRT was, not surprisingly, less expensive, it suggested that light rail would provide an array of other benefits that would better support the Region's smart growth objectives (Region of Waterloo 2012). According to the evaluation, light rail was expected to provide a much more effective catalyst for development, supporting both higher rates of intensification and greater land value uplift:

Rapid transit, as a strategic street-level system along the Central Transit Corridor, will be a significant catalyst for achieving reurbanization and economic and demographic

intensification. Rapid transit will impact land access, image, value and desirability. Intensification and redevelopment resulting from rapid transit is expected to shape urban form in a more efficient manner and thereby avoid, delay or minimize the expansion of urban areas into the region's valuable agricultural, environmental and rural areas, thereby protecting our community's food and water supply and diverse economy (Region of Waterloo 2009b).

For Regional policymakers, it was these development considerations that appeared to be determinative. While Waterloo lacked the population size or transit ridership typically associated with light rail, the project was conceived from the outset as a development tool rather than a transportation project (English 2011). As Tom Galloway, the Chair of the Region's Planning and Works Committee, explained: "LRT is a planning tool that happens to move people" (quoted in Knowles and Rohr 2017). The goal was to use the light rail transit project as a lever to facilitate the intensification objectives at the heart of the RGMS and to support the revitalization of the region's core areas, in particular downtown Kitchener.

In 2009, Regional Council voted overwhelmingly to give preliminary approval to the LRT project. This preliminary approval was meant to allow staff and politicians to negotiate funding agreements with senior governments. The following year, the Region received funding commitments from the federal and provincial governments equal to two-thirds of the estimated \$818 million project. With these commitments in place, Regional Council was left to decide whether to fund the remaining \$253 million capital expenditure from local property taxes.

The question of whether to fund LRT dominated the 2010 election campaign and the early months of the subsequent term of council. In response to a vocal ratepayer backlash, policymakers were forced to decide whether to continue with the project or to settle for a less ambitious bus-rapid-transit alternative. This moment marked the second significant political

challenge to the Region's smart growth agenda. I turn to this debate and its surrounding context in the following two sections.

### **LRT, Economic Development, and the Revitalization of Downtown Kitchener**

In this section, I want to situate the LRT project in relation to the decades-long effort to stimulate economic development in downtown Kitchener. As Filion observes in his historical review of redevelopment efforts, the desire to renew the core in the face of relentless decentralization has been on the local policy agenda since the 1950s. The urban context has certainly changed over this time, but the underlying objective has persisted, even as it evolves in accordance with changes in macro-institutional environment (Filion 1993). Here, I want to describe the role that LRT has come to play in the most recent, and most successful, iteration of this agenda – the attempt to redevelop downtown Kitchener as a live-work space for an urbanizing technology cluster.

In the early 1960s, Kitchener became the first Canadian city to plan for the comprehensive redevelopment of its downtown. Eager to embrace the US model of downtown renewal, the Chamber of Commerce and other local boosters formed an urban renewal committee to develop a strategic plan for the downtown. At the time, the principal threat to the downtown was seen to be the growth of automobility and the rise of suburban retail competition. The renewal committee responded with a plan to improve road access, create a series of pedestrian malls, and intensify the area through high rise residential and commercial development. With funding from the federal urban renewal program, the plan called for

municipal expropriation of strategic sites, which would be transferred to the private sector for redevelopment (Filion 1993).

This plan reached an advanced stage of development, but was ultimately curtailed by a shift in federal priorities. In 1968, in response to reformist movements in Toronto and Vancouver, the federal government froze and eventually dismantled its urban renewal program, marking an end to Canada's Fordist-era experiment with large-scale core area redevelopment. The federal policy was replaced in the early 1970s with the Neighbourhood Improvement Program, a much smaller and more restrained program that placed greater emphasis on values of participatory planning and neighbourhood preservation.

While the local renewal committee in Kitchener remained committed to the concept of large-scale renewal, its plans no longer aligned with the more modest, community-oriented priorities of federal policy. In light of more modest federal funding opportunities and the normative turn against large-scale redevelopment initiatives, renewal advocates adapted their plans to better reflect the new context. In 1971, a new plan was approved in which the government would sell the site of the City Hall and adjoining parcels to a developer for the purpose of building a new central area mall. The initiative, though clearly smaller in scale, maintained many of the same objectives of the earlier 1963 Plan. The hope was that a new mall space would help to preserve the downtown's share of regional retail activity and provide a catalyst to wider private sector redevelopment.

Ultimately, these benefits failed to materialize and downtown Kitchener continued its decline through much of the 1980s and 90s. Not only did retail activity continue to migrate to the suburbs, but legacy industrial employers also closed down operations. By the 1990s, the downtown, rather than a center of socio-economic gravity, was becoming more and more an area

to be avoided. Increasingly visible signs of social distress and poverty, boarded-up retail space, and a general lack of urban animation contributed to an inhospitable environment that only helped to fuel the ongoing cycle of decentralization and decline (see English 2011).

Far from abandoning aspirations for redevelopment, however, in the early 2000s policy actors in Kitchener once again began to explore the application of new and emerging revitalization strategies. Influenced by the proliferation of new localist discourses pointing to the role of urbanity in post-industrial inner city economies, policymakers began to look to cognitive-cultural sectors as a basis for downtown development. Following the publication of Florida's 2002 *Rise of the Creative Class*, for example, policymakers became particularly interested in the potential for amenity-oriented strategies to attract 'talent' and promote the growth of high-technology clusters (Davies 2016).

In Kitchener, aspirations for knowledge-based economic development were strongly influenced by wider regional dynamics of inter-municipal cooperation and competition (see Liebovitz 2003). In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, while Kitchener's industrial economy deteriorated, the broader economy in Waterloo Region underwent a process of profound transformation, developing into one of the most dynamic clusters of high tech activity in the country (Bramwell et al. 2008). Much of this activity was tied to the University of Waterloo, which had developed an internationally recognized specialization in science and engineering disciplines and had become a powerful locus for intellectual property development. But while the growth of the tech sector had contributed to a regional economic renaissance, the fruits were not shared equally amongst local municipalities. Rather, the cluster remained closely tied to suburban office parks in the municipality of Waterloo, with positive spin-off effects in the city's 'uptown'. Downtown Kitchener, by contrast, benefitted little from this activity.

Beginning in 2004, the City initiated a new economic development strategy that was designed to capture a greater portion of this regional investment by directing it to Kitchener's downtown core. The strategy was founded upon two distinct elements. The first entailed a radical reconceptualization of the relationship between the City's economic development aspirations and the Region's broader sustainability turn. The new Regional Growth Management Strategy provided a spark to revitalization efforts by emphasizing the importance of regional downtowns as sites of intensification and future growth. But more than this, policymakers sought to harness regional leadership in smart growth to cultivate an image or brand that could be used to position Kitchener in a competitive inter-urban landscape. Following the advice of urbanist-boosters like Florida, policymakers seized on the notion that the City must effectively brand itself as a vibrant, cosmopolitan locale:

The City of Kitchener is promoting its new cosmopolitan identity to the world to attract investment and talent, which will in turn generate new employment, wealth, assessment, and high quality intensification (City of Kitchener 2007).

And this brand, the City realized, could be founded on the Region's emerging reputation as a leader in sustainable planning:

A renewed public consciousness around climate change, air quality, energy consumption, suburban sprawl and water resource protection have begun to affect economic decisions. People are beginning to choose where they live and work based on environmental factors - by walking to work, living close to transit routes, etc. While creative cities are now attracting creative workers, it's conceivable that a green Kitchener could attract environmentally conscious workers and companies (ibid).

Even at this early stage, downtown development interests recognized the importance of the Region's light rail plans to this revitalization project. In the 1960s, concerns about core-area decline were very much informed by the rise of automobility and its implications for the suburbanization of commercial life. As the region became increasingly auto-centric, the lack of a viable public transit system presented an ongoing barrier to downtown renewal and helped to

fuel a vicious cycle of automobile dependency and decentralization. The Region's Growth Management Strategy, with its commitment to light rail along the CTC, marked a critical turning point in this postwar trajectory. Rather than prioritize suburban auto networks, the Region was reprioritizing mobility in the central areas. This was, for economic development officials, welcome news:

For Kitchener, a potential rapid transit system would redefine our urban structure. Downtown and the mixed use corridors would instantly become more accessible to a larger employment pool and audience of urban dwellers (City of Kitchener 2007).

The second element of the strategy was somewhat more traditional, but perhaps more immediately impactful. In 2004, Kitchener City Council approved a new \$110 million Economic Development Investment Fund (EDIF). The EDIF was designed as a partnership vehicle that would allow the City to subsidize 'catalytic capital projects' in the core. The objective was to identify specific institutional partners and development opportunities that could have an outsized impact in terms of attracting further private sector investment and anchoring desirable types of activity. The Fund was used to significant strategic effect, leveraging the development of a number of important projects. First, in 2006, the City used the fund to partner with Wilfrid Laurier University to relocate the School of Social Work. In 2008, it made a similar investment to establish the University of Waterloo's School of Pharmacy. The \$30 million investment in School of Pharmacy helped to anchor the subsequent development of a larger Downtown Health Sciences Campus, which became home to a School of Optometry, McMaster University's satellite medical school, and a number of life sciences firms.

The other critical project enabled by the fund was the Communitech Hub. Created in 2010, the Hub was conceived as a kind of start-up incubator, providing space, networking services, and mentoring to early stage technology firms. The Hub was located in a prominent

new development, the Lang Tannery, a decommissioned leather manufacturing complex converted with support from the Fund into a revitalized space for new economy tenants. Alongside prominent tenants like Google and Desire2Learn, the Communitech Hub quickly developed into a powerful institutional anchor for a burgeoning high tech cluster in the west end of Kitchener's downtown.

The development of the Communitech Hub was significant in at least two respects. Most obviously, it marked an important moment in the creation of an urban technology cluster in the region. Whereas the region's high tech economy had developed in the suburban office parks of municipal Waterloo, the development of the Communitech Hub was intended to support a trend towards the urbanization of start-up culture. By 2012, the Hub was already home to 100 start-up companies and was functioning as a magnet for new employment. In addition to this direct economic impact, the development of the Hub also helped Communitech to acquire a more prominent role as an economic development actor – it signalled the growing political clout of both the organization and the technology sector at large.

Communitech was formed in 1997 by a small coterie of technology sector CEOs, including Jim Balsillie, the CEO of Research in Motion. The impetus for the organization was a concern that the interests of the sector were not being effectively articulated or represented by existing actors. For example, while organizations like the Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce advocated on behalf of local business, its membership was comprised largely of small business interests, whose concerns were in many ways distinct from those of the tech sector (Leibovitz 2003). From its inception, Communitech sought to take a broader view of its role as a 'uniting force' in the sector. It functioned not only as an advocate, but as a critical node in associative governance networks, helping to create connections between local firms, civic

groups, educational institutions, and political actors (Bramwell et al. 2008). In this regard, one of its key roles became to articulate a planning and urban development vision that reflected the emerging needs of local technology firms and the lifestyle ambitions of its workers.

The crystallization of this vision became apparent with the 2011 update of the City's economic development strategy. This strategy, clearly motivated by the early success of the Communitech Hub, tied the City's economic development prospects even more closely to a vision of tech-powered urbanity. The Plan was organized around five core areas, which together comprised a singular strategy to transform the downtown into a revitalized hub for living and working in the knowledge economy. The first three areas entailed a commitment to become a 'start-up city', to support 'leading edge cluster development', and to set in place the amenities needed to become a 'talent magnet' (City of Kitchener 2011).

Importantly, these elements of the strategy were understood to be tied to a fourth objective: to establish the downtown as one of the 'coolest downtowns in North America'. The prospect of becoming a magnet for talent and incubator of leading edge clusters was expressly tied to the development of an urban environment attractive to people living and working in the sector (City of Kitchener 2011). What precisely such an environment entailed was fleshed out in the associated Downtown Kitchener Action Plan, released in 2012. Drawing from a menu of urbanist buzzwords, the Plan explained the aspiration for the downtown in this way:

To our community a great downtown means: a unique urban feel, creative work environments, bustling sidewalks, unique stores and restaurants, a live music scene, a strong sense of community, attractive buildings and storefronts, collaborative work spaces, street festivals, a vibrant arts & culture scene, innovative housing options, eco focused, leading edge, culturally diverse & accessible (City of Kitchener 2012).

The fifth objective represented the culmination of the City's strategy. It entailed the development of an 'innovation district' in the west end of the downtown in the area surrounding

the established health sciences campus. The goal was to rebrand the former Warehouse District as a live-work hub for the new economy. By leveraging city assets and partnering with the private sector, the City wanted to create a new ‘urban research and business park’ that would provide space appropriate for the growth and expansion of knowledge economy firms. The ultimate ambition was to develop space for 15,000 new jobs and 4,000 new residents over a twenty year period (City of Kitchener 2011).

The use of the term ‘innovation district’ was revealing. As described in Chapter 3, the innovation district concept was developed and popularized by organizations like the Brookings Institute to describe a shift in the relationship between innovative economic activity and the built environment. According to researchers like Bruce Katz, this activity was increasingly becoming rooted in pedestrianized, mixed-use urban areas with strong connections to quality public transit (Katz and Wagner 2014). This connection was seen to be tied to broader trends affecting the locational preferences of people and firms in advanced sectors. In this context, the role of economic development actors was to support the physical transformation of the built environment, ensuring an adequate supply of urban amenities, a vibrant streetscape, and access to effective public transit networks.

In Kitchener, the mobilization of the innovation district concept was intimately bound-up with the evolution of the Region’s LRT planning. According to the Region’s LRT plans, the corner of Victoria and King St. W. was to be the site of a new multi-modal transit station. This station would serve both as an anchor for regional LRT and a point of connection to the provincial GO Transit system. Rod Regier, the City’s head of economic development, described plans for the station as a ‘game changer’ (Regier, quoted in Pender 2011). The innovation district was planned as a form of transit-oriented development, occupying an 800 metre area around the

proposed station. The LRT would act as a lever for intensification, allowing the city to capitalize on the success of the Communitech Hub and Health Sciences Campus to create a vibrant, pedestrianized, mixed-use neighbourhood that would integrate into the expanding tech ecosystem of Southern Ontario (City of Kitchener 2011).

By 2011, then, the Region's plans for light rail development along the CTC had become closely aligned with both the aspirations of the urbanizing tech sector and the long standing civic objective of revitalizing downtown Kitchener. The innovation district was expressly tied to the LRT project, which was viewed as the essential spur for continued intensification in the area and as a vital amenity needed to attract tech-sector workers and firms. It is thus not surprising that when opposition to the project intensified following the 2010 municipal campaign, it was viewed as a threat to the sector and the associated vision of tech-centered redevelopment. It was an indication that the particular needs of the sector were neither well understood nor sufficiently valued.

Notable in this regard was the failure of traditional representatives of the local business sector to articulate an effective economic defense of the LRT. As was noted, Communitech formed in part out of concern that traditional associations like the Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, were not sufficiently attuned to the interests of the Region's growing tech sector. In a number of important ways, the LRT debate in 2011 appeared to validate these concerns. While the Chamber offered 'conditional support' for the project and acknowledged in general terms the economic value of transportation infrastructure, it also emphasized its members' concerns about public spending, taxation levels, and construction disruptions (CTV 2011). The organization's constituency of small business interests forced the Chamber to adopt an ambivalent position on the largest infrastructure project in the region's history.

Communitech, by contrast, emerged as a strong and articulate proponent of the project. Unlike the Chamber, Communitech was able to present a clear economic rationale for the investment, one rooted in a more comprehensive conception of urban systemic competitiveness. In presentations before Regional Committees and Council, media interviews, and opinion editorials, Communitech celebrated the LRT as a progressive response to the intense pressures of interurban competition. In the global competition for talent, argued Communitech CEO Iain Klugman, successful regions would be the ones willing to set aside parochial concerns in order to make ambitious investments that improve the quality of the built environment (Klugman 2011).

For Communitech, the LRT was viewed as an essential amenity for technology workers, who were increasingly drawn to dynamic, mixed-use, multi-modal urban environments. To demonstrate this, the organization commissioned a poll of sector employees, which showed overwhelming support for the project. The continued success of the regional economy, Klugman argued, demanded that policymakers pay attention to these preferences:

This is a clear endorsement by the people who power our tech ecosystem that LRT is a priority for them...As one of Canada's leading tech clusters, this community needs to support existing workers and attract new talent by implementing fast, clean, green and affordable transit solutions...

We can't go backwards. The proposed LRT option is the best option for creative talent attraction and to support those who currently work and invest in the regional technology sector...Rail transit is what will meet the future needs of the community. Anything less is a half measure, and that's not the kind of thinking this community was built on (Klugman cited in Communitech 2011).

This sentiment was echoed by other sector representatives, including Canada's Technology Triangle (CTT), and a number of large sector employers. John Jung, chief executive of CTT, for example, argued that the LRT project was needed in order to become "an enviable and vibrant place to live." The LRT was not just an amenity, it was a competitive asset: "There is intense

international competition for talent, and we need to offer greater infrastructure and lifestyle to remain competitive” (quoted in Waterloo Region Record 2011a).

Communitech also played a constructive role coordinating advocacy campaigns and collaborating with other civic groups (Daley 2017). For Communitech, there was a strong desire to connect the needs of the sector to a broader community interest in smart growth and downtown renewal. The LRT was integral to the urbanization of start-up culture in the Region, but this economic development was in turn contributing to the quality of life in downtown Kitchener. This idea was captured in an opinion editorial written by Communitech staff writer Anthony Reinhardt:

Locals with long memories...will recall that this heart was in dire need of a defibrillator just a decade and a half ago. Big old factories — the Tannery, Breithaupt Block and Kaufman Footwear, most notably — sat dormant or doomed, shops were shuttered and street fights after last call were among the few signs of life downtown.

The region's tech sector was active and growing even then, but less conspicuously, almost exclusively in low-slung, suburban-style buildings outside the core.

Much activity remains there today, but there's been a big change: The startup explosion, demographics and evolving preferences have brought an increasing amount of tech activity downtown, adding fresh tissue and new blood to that old heart.

The Tannery is teeming with innovative bustle, anchored by the Communitech Hub, the University of Waterloo VeloCity Garage, Google and Desire2Learn. The Breithaupt Block is similarly abuzz, and home to new development offices for Square and Motorola. The Kaufman building, arguably the catalyst development for much of what's happened since, is filled with loft tenants, many of whom work in the tech sector...

And it's not just happening here. All across North America, urban cores are attracting entrepreneurs and young knowledge workers who aren't interested in the suburban lifestyles of their parents' generation, at least not yet.

Modern, efficient transit is a key component in providing urban tech hubs with talented young workers, many of whom aren't interested in the cost and hassle of driving, maintaining and parking a car — even when they can afford it (Reinhardt 2014; and see Reinhardt 2011).

The revitalization of downtown Kitchener had existed as a civic priority since at least the early 1960s. Despite multiple attempts, these efforts had been by all accounts unsuccessful. The

urbanization of the regional technology sector appeared for the first time to hold out the promise of reinvestment and renewal. This common civic interest in the health of the downtown allowed Communitech and others to present a post-political vision in which economic objectives reinforced and coincided with the social and environmental objectives of smart growth and re-urbanization. At a moment when ratepayer opposition appeared to be gaining momentum, Kitchener growth interests rallied around the LRT as a progressive and visionary response to the dilemmas of regional development. On the eve of the final Regional Council vote, the editorial board of the Waterloo Region Record (located and historically rooted in downtown Kitchener), expressed the vision in this way:

New development, new homes and new businesses are already gravitating to this corridor. Trains gliding along a fixed track with fixed stations would act as a magnet for even more growth.

A light rail line would slow the spread and sprawl of subdivisions onto the ever-dwindling supply of green fields. It would ease the pressure to pave over farms beyond our city limits. It would be a boon to an educated, ambitious workforce whose members want to spend as little time commuting as possible. It could also give us cleaner air and a cheaper alternative to gasoline that has risen in price by a third this year and will only rise higher.

Light rail would serve our local economy in a transitional stage. No wonder Communitech, Canada's Technology Triangle, Christie Digital, Open Text, Manulife Financial, the Economical Insurance Group and the University of Waterloo all back it. To those voices, we add our own, the voice of the Waterloo Region Record which has, under various names, been part of this community for 133 years. It's better to reach for the future than just let it come. We say: Build this railway (Waterloo Region Record 2011).

## **T4ST and the Question of Value**

In 2009 the Region of Waterloo approved LRT as the preferred technology for rapid transit along the Central Transit Corridor. This decision marked the culmination of a planning process that began in 2003 and the realization of a public transit vision for the Region that had been specified in the first Official Plan of 1973. The first stage of the project entailed 16 stops along a 19 kilometer grade-separated LRT line between Waterloo and Kitchener, as well as 17 kilometers of bus rapid transit connecting the municipality of Cambridge.

The following year, the Region received funding commitments from both federal and provincial governments for \$265 and \$300 million respectively, or approximately two-thirds of what was to be an \$818 million project. The provincial contribution in particular was closely scrutinized. In 2007, before the scale of the project had been determined, the provincial government announced a commitment to fund up to two-thirds of the eventual project. When combined with federal funds, the provincial commitment held out the promise that the Region itself might not be required to include a significant capital contribution. In the event, the province was unwilling to fulfill this pledge, leaving the Region to finance approximately \$250 million in capital costs.

This funding shortfall changed the political dynamic in a dramatic way. While there was certainly opposition to the LRT in 2009, criticism was muted by the uncertainty surrounding Regional funding obligations. The revelation that Regional taxpayers would be required to finance one-third of the project transformed the public conversation. This was only amplified by the fact that the details of the intergovernmental funding arrangement came into view shortly in advance of the 2010 civic election. The timing ensured that the light rail project would occupy center stage during the campaign.

The 2010 campaign was dominated by the civic debate over LRT. While many incumbent regional and municipal councillors sought to defend the project, they were confronted by vociferous opposition from both electoral challengers and voters. As opposing sides debated the fiscal implications of the project, ratepayer opposition to an LRT-related tax increase emerged as the defining theme of the campaign. As a result, many successful councillors, including Waterloo Mayor Brenda Halloran, chose to adopt a more equivocal position on the project by promising to revisit the issue during the next term of council. In keeping with this promise, staff were directed early in the term to conduct a review of the project and to reconsider the viability of bus-rapid-transit alternatives. Though staff reiterated its preference for light rail, Halloran asked Regional Council to hold a public referendum on transit technologies. This referendum vote and the subsequent vote to confirm the Region's commitment to LRT served as the principal site for the mobilization of political opposition.

Ratepayer opposition to the LRT was not of a singular type, but rather was tied to an assortment of particular critiques. For example, one line of opposition was rooted in the resentments felt by residents of Cambridge, who were being asked to fund the development of light rail in Kitchener and Waterloo, while accepting a more limited BRT connection to Cambridge. This phased approach, which required Cambridge to wait until future years to benefit from a rail extension, helped to flame historic inter-municipal tensions and fuel a perception that Cambridge was a less-regarded Regional partner. As a result, Cambridge Mayor Doug Craig emerged as a reliable opponent of the project in his role on Regional Council, providing consistent voice to ratepayer opposition in his municipality.

A more potent oppositional force took form in the grassroots ratepayer movement T4ST. Originally formed in 2009, Taxpayers for Sensible Transit emerged as the principal

organizing force for opposition to the LRT. A loose citizens association, T4ST functioned as a kind of thought leader, giving ideational direction to the relatively unformed ideological opposition to property tax increases. What distinguished T4ST in particular was its success in transforming this reflexive ideological opposition into a more interrogating question about the *value* of the project. T4ST and its allies were careful to distinguish their challenge to the LRT from any broader critique of the Region’s smart growth agenda or the principal of expanded public transit. Instead, their critique sought to challenge the project on its own terms.

To unsettle the elite-defined narrative surrounding the LRT, T4ST and its allies were forced to confront the popular depiction of critics as parochial, unconstructive, and conservative. As discussed above, organizations like Communitech successfully framed their support for LRT as part of a shared civic commitment to economic and built renewal. Critics, by contrast, were said to lack this progressive vision. Communitech staff writer Anthony Reinhardt, for example, lamented that:

[Critics] dismiss the fact that our community is changing from what it has long been – namely, a big small town – into what it soon will be – a small big city. And they cling to a disappearing past, instead of grabbing hold of a future they could help shape (Reinhardt 2014).

There was a perception that critics of the LRT were older residents, rooted in prosperous neighbourhoods, who were unable to appreciate the aspirations of a new generation. Regional Chair Ken Seiling, for example, described opponents of the project as “people who had had great benefits of all the spending that had gone on in the seventies, eighties, and nineties. And now suddenly [they] want to turn the tap off for young people coming along after them” (Seiling, quoted in Daley 2017).

T4ST and its allies sought to challenge this framing in two ways. First, members challenged the popular notion that project proponents were somehow more progressive or

visionary than opponents. In reality, LRT advocates were not motivated by any rational assessment of the economic, environmental, or civic benefits of the project. Rather, they were seduced by unrealistic expectations and the kind of untethered exuberance that was often associated with mega-project development (see Flyvbjerg 2005).

One prominent member of T4ST, Peter Shawn Taylor, suggested that project proponents were infected by what he referred to as ‘light rail disease’, a new ‘billion dollar contagion popping up across the country’. An opinion writer and editor for Maclean’s Magazine, Taylor used his profile to wage an editorial campaign across a variety of media outlets. He consistently sought to challenge the rhetoric of project boosters as unrealistic, even delusional:

Symptoms include visions of grandeur, severe loss of reality and a propensity to enact massive tax hikes. It’s called LRTS: Light-rail transit syndrome.

And while the surest cure for this new ailment is a large application of public input and a quick dose of common sense, the antidote appears in extreme short supply.

Patient zero in the current Canadian outbreak of LRTS is southwestern Ontario’s Region of Waterloo, a high-tech hub as home to BlackBerry-maker Research In Motion and the University of Waterloo. The diagnosis was confirmed this June when the region, population 500,000, approved an \$818-million light rail transit project.

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

A more nuanced and less polemical version of this critique was developed by another prominent LRT critic, John Shortreed. Though Shortreed was not an official member of T4ST, he provided the group with technical advice and was seen to be closely allied with the ratepayer movement. Shortreed was a retired professor of civil engineering and emerged as a kind of countervailing expert. Through a series of opinion editorials, open letters, media interviews, and

council and committee deputations, he questioned many of the assumptions underlying the LRT project and advocated for a bus-based rapid transit alternative.

Like Taylor, Shortreed argued that the dominant vision of LRT was divorced from any realistic planning rationale or business case. According to the project business case, there were a wide range of benefits associated with LRT. Compared to BRT, for example, LRT would support twice as many jobs in station areas, lead to hundreds of millions in additional land value uplift, reduce GHG emissions by 10,000 additional tonnes by 2031, and lead to more than \$150 million of additional transportation user benefits (Region of Waterloo 2012; 2009). The problem with these figures, according to Shortreed, was that they were premised on highly unrealistic ridership assumptions. For example, according to the Region's analysis, by 2031 the LRT was expected to attract 58,000 annual rides. Yet, the City of Edmonton, Shortreed pointed out, a municipality with a population twice as large as Waterloo and with four times as many downtown jobs, attracted only 55,000 rides on its system (Shortreed 2011). If the system failed to achieve these ambitious ridership objectives, the transformative benefits of the project would fail to materialize.

As a ratepayer movement, T4ST was particularly concerned with how an unrealistic evaluation process might affect Regional spending levels. The capital expense for the LRT was expected to require a 10.5% increase in local property tax revenue - a principal driver of popular political opposition (Ipsos-Reid 2011). Project proponents responded to such concerns by arguing that LRT capital expenditures would be effectively offset by corresponding reductions in road spending. According to the Regional Transportation Master Plan, LRT was central to a broader planning vision that would allow spending to be efficiently re-allocated away from the road budget and towards public transit:

Without ION, the Region would need to build 500 new lane kilometers of roads over the next 20 years to accommodate expected growth. These new roads – the equivalent of 25 Hespeler Roads – would cost approximately \$1.4 billion and would need to be built through existing neighbourhoods... Building ION allows the Region to reduce the need for new roads and limit new road construction costs by nearly 40% or \$500 million (Region of Waterloo 2014).

Once again, however, Shortreed argued that this assessment was founded on a set of unrealistic modelling assumptions. According to the model used in the TMP, these cost savings depended on changes in suburban travel behaviour comparable to those seen in cities like Ottawa. Ottawa, however, was not only a much larger City, it also had a more highly developed commuter transit network and higher proportion of downtown employment. Whereas Kitchener-Waterloo had downtown employment of less than 20,000, Ottawa had a downtown employment base of 120,000 (Shortreed 2011). While Regional planning staff described these divergent assessments as a ‘difference of opinion’, critics saw a systematic tendency to overestimate the benefits of LRT and underestimate the risks. Rather than shift the allocation of transportation spending, the more likely scenario, according to critics, would be a need to fund both roads and an underperforming public transit network. As Peter Shawn Taylor quipped, “...even after spending nearly a billion dollars on light rail, we could end up needing 25 new Hespeler Roads after all. And that would truly be a disaster” (Taylor 2011b).

Alongside this critique of the aspirational nature of the Region’s cost-benefit analysis, T4ST also sought to challenge the idea that critics of the project were unable to grasp the progressive vision of downtown renewal. Opposition to LRT was not, members insisted, simply a conservative attempt to thwart a valuable civic project. Rather, it was an expression of an alternative vision for how the region ought to grow and develop. This was a view expressed most forcefully by Ruth Haworth, the principal spokesperson for T4ST. Appearing before Regional

Council, Haworth decried the claim that “LRT supporters are visionaries, and those of us who oppose LRT lack vision for the future. This is false. Those of us who opposed LRT have a different vision for our community, and LRT threatens it” (Haworth 2011).

This notion that opinions on the LRT reflected competing visions for the Region was an important one, particularly because it appeared to reinforce the perception that the benefits and risks associated with LRT were not equally shared across the region. It is noteworthy that both Haworth and John Shortreed were members of the City of Waterloo’s Uptown Vision Committee. The Committee was a public-private civic group appointed by the municipality to provide official advice on issues related to the development of the ‘Uptown’ (the central core of municipal Waterloo). In contrast with growth actors in downtown Kitchener, those most engaged in the fate of the Uptown were by and large unconvinced of the positive benefits of LRT.

The Committee’s Vision 2025 strategy document, released in 2011, was intended to continue the work of the Committee’s 1992 strategy, Project 2007. That earlier strategy was widely considered a success, leading to a new public square, the construction of more pedestrian-friendly streets, and a healthy retail environment. As a result of this success, and the relative affluence of surrounding neighbourhoods, the concerns of the Vision Committee were quite distinct from those articulated in, for example, the Downtown Kitchener Action Plan. The Vision 2025 strategy focused predominantly on managing the process of intensification in order to preserve and reinforce the place qualities valued by residents. It emphasized the importance of good urban design, heritage protection, neighbourhood stability, a healthy mix of land uses, and support for culture and recreational spaces (City of Waterloo 2011).

The Vision Committee developed its Vision 2025 document in the early part of 2011, in the midst of the regional debate over LRT. It is noteworthy that despite this the document

contains no discussion of the project or its potential value for the Uptown. This omission was clearly intentional. The Committee did of course give serious consideration to the LRT and its relationship to their vision for the Uptown, but it voted unanimously against the project. The reasoning behind this decision was explained by John Shortreed:

The main concern of the Uptown vision committee was the impact on the ambiance for visitors to Uptown...

The Uptown is under extreme pressure from an expanded Conestoga Mall and the new west side big box development. The essence of Uptown's success is a different, green and pleasant experience, complete with a public square and many independent merchants. In spite of recent momentum, Uptown is in critical care. The surrounding of Uptown's core with a railway track may have a deadly effect. Rather than light rail transit saving the Uptown, the transit line may doom it.

A bus-based system, by contrast, would better "suit the international small town atmosphere of the Uptown" (Shortreed 2011).

It is interesting in this light to consider T4ST not just as a ratepayer movement, but as a kind of counterweight to the tech-centered growth movement centered in downtown Kitchener. Local historian John English suggests that there was a geographical element to LRT boosterism that effectively divided the municipalities of Kitchener and Waterloo. This was reflected, for example, in the very different editorial positions adopted by *The Record*, located in Kitchener, and the *Waterloo Chronicle* (English 2011). T4ST and its allies also exemplified this divide. Members were skeptical of the project's value, but this skepticism was not easily divorced from an ambivalence about the implications of the project for the Uptown.

## **The Challenge of Affordable Housing**

From its inception, LRT in Waterloo Region was conceived first and foremost not as a transportation project, but as a development tool. When asked to compare the new LRT systems in Ottawa and Waterloo, Regional Councillor and Chair of the Planning and Works Committee Tom Galloway emphasized this fact: “They’re very different systems... This is a development tool. Ottawa’s is a mass transit system” (quoted in Crawford 2019). In Waterloo, the value of LRT was seen in terms of its ability to encourage intensification and support economic renewal:

The LRT is a planning tool that happens to move people. The moving of people is not unimportant, but the more important piece is the intensification, the piece that drives investment in both the residential and commercial areas, and deals with recruitment and retention of talent” (Galloway, quoted in Knowles and Rohr 2017).

The decision to invest in LRT was informed in significant part by the belief that light rail technology was best suited to the Region’s development objectives (Region of Waterloo 2009). While a BRT system would by many accounts have provided sufficient ridership capacity, light rail was seen as more likely to attract developers. Unlike a bus-based network, light rail entailed fixed infrastructure and thus more secure land values. Furthermore, LRT was viewed as a more attractive technology to the type of choice rider to whom developers would most like to appeal. As a result, planners and expert evaluators saw LRT as integral to achieving the intensification and economic development objectives set out in Regional and municipal planning documents.

Viewed from this perspective, the LRT project proved to be an enormous success, even before its anticipated launch in 2019. Between 2011, when the project was approved, and 2016, government figures showed over \$2 billion in building activity in designated station areas along the Central Transit Corridor (Region of Waterloo 2017). While attributing this investment to the light rail project is complex (see Johnson and Nicholas 2019), it is nevertheless clear that many developers viewed proximity to LRT in precisely the way that planners had hoped. For example,

Joey Tsang of Queensgate Homes, the developer of the Victoria Commons project in downtown Kitchener, explained that:

In Kitchener, there's just so much opportunity to grow. Plus, it's been able to revamp itself from an industrial town to a high tech town that will attract an even higher population of people. And you don't put LRT in a place that doesn't have growth. So, for us it was like a sign, a beacon that the boom is going to happen (Tsang, quoted in Beattie 2017).

Brian Prudham of Momentum Developments, which was responsible for at least three large projects along the CTC, made a similar observation: "It's similar to how in Toronto the most valuable sites are near subway stops. Being on a line is great, and in proximity to a platform is the golden ticket" (Prudham, quoted in Beattie 2017).

Regional policymakers were of course eager to support this investment and to give effective guidance to infill developers. The primary mechanism for this was the Region's Central Transit Corridor Community Building Strategy. Released in 2013, the Community Building Strategy was meant to create a planning structure for the LRT corridor that would complement and inform other elements of the Regional growth strategy. More specifically, it was conceived as an overarching transit-oriented design framework that would guide the development local TOD plans for the each of the LRT's station areas (Region of Waterloo 2013).

Broadly, the Community Building Strategy had two objectives. The first was to provide investment information to potential developers, including demographic and employment trends in station areas, and to create a fuller picture of how development might evolve in these areas. For example, the Strategy conducted a high level market assessment in order to better understand the evolution of development demand. It also conducted detailed examinations of each station area, identified a list of development opportunities, and sorted the 23 stations into a series of 'Market Corridors Areas' that described specific assets and opportunities. Underlying these

efforts was the belief that “[i]nvestment in enhanced transit should be a catalyst for creating a supportive environment for new investors, one that can help attract investment dollars to Waterloo Region” (Region of Waterloo 2013).

The second objective was to direct this investment in accordance with an overarching set of development and design principles. Anticipating over \$4 billion in future investment in the Central Transit Corridor, the Strategy was meant to ensure that development contributed to a high quality and rationally planned public realm. The community building vision was based on five principles: an inclusive and well connected corridor; enhanced public spaces and complete streets; protection of neighbourhood character and heritage; an insistence on high quality design; and the pursuit of multi-stakeholder partnerships. The Strategy focused particular attention on ‘placemaking’ – that is, on guiding investment so as to make public and private spaces more inviting, vibrant, and sustainable (Region of Waterloo 2013).

While the Community Building Strategy entailed a commitment to ‘inclusivity’, the vision included little discussion of concrete measures or investments that would help to ensure that the Corridor remained accessible and affordable to lower income residents over time. Instead, the Strategy focused almost entirely on mobilizing investment to create spaces that would be attractive to new and relatively affluent residents. While this focus was consistent with the Region’s broader growth management strategy, it nevertheless fuelled concerns that intensification was being designed according to a narrow and exclusionary conception of community needs. Beth Davies, for example, in her analysis of gentrification in downtown Kitchener, observed the way in which planning policies had become oriented around the pursuit of a particular kind of urban young professional:

When we set out on the search for our ideal Downtownee, we were thrilled to meet Stacey. She lives in an amazing downtown apartment, works at the tech startup,

MappedIn, a few blocks away in the newly revitalized 305 King building and does her grocery shopping at the Kitchener Market (City of Kitchener, quoted in Davies 2016).

The Community Building Strategy, with its narrow focus on reinvestment and placemaking, appeared designed to extend this project into the realm of transit-oriented development.

Concerns about the relationship between regional smart growth, transit-oriented development, and gentrification were not new. As early as 2003, for example, the Waterloo Region Healthy Communities Coalition, a coalition of community and public health organizations, was working to draw policymakers' attention to the risks of gentrification and exclusion along the CTC. While the Coalition noted the public health benefits of smart growth, it also asked the Region to think proactively about the challenge of affordable housing in the context of transit-oriented intensification:

The higher property values along the CTC that the intensive option would likely engender would inhibit the Region's ability to provide affordable housing choices in the core. Can the CTC support the proposed levels of intensification and still avoid gentrification that would force low-income people out into the suburbs? That would be an unfortunate side-effect of intensification, given that the people most likely to rely on public transit would be priced out of living close to the transit backbone (Waterloo Region Healthy Communities Coalition 2003; and see 2009).

These concerns only intensified with the final approval of LRT in 2011, particularly in light of the transformative development that was occurring in places like downtown Kitchener. Public health organizations, anti-poverty activists, social support workers, and local academics began to problematize publicly the challenge of transit-oriented gentrification. While acknowledging the value of LRT as an instrument of sustainable development, housing advocates began to ask whether policymakers were sufficiently attuned to the risks of exclusion that would inevitably attend large-scale reinvestment in the core areas (see Bueckert 2017). In a 2012 opinion editorial, for example, Markus Moos, a housing and urban development researcher

at the University of Waterloo, encouraged policymakers to prioritize affordable housing as part of the LRT planning process. Citing the growing body of research on the dynamics of transit-oriented gentrification, Moos asked whether policymakers would intervene to mitigate the effects of rising land values on low income residents most dependent on affordable access to public transit:

...cities must be proactive about ensuring that housing remains affordable to families near transit and in the downtown. Will development near the light rail transit be required to include a share of new housing priced below market rates? Will the region partner with senior governments to provide affordable housing stock specifically near the LRT? Will there be planning requirements encouraging a variety of unit sizes near LRT (Moos 2012)?

Concerns about transit-oriented gentrification emerged first amongst a relatively small and specialized community of academics and social policy advocates, but they soon began to attract more widespread media attention. In 2014, for example, on the occasion of the release of the Regional Affordable Housing Strategy, the Waterloo Regional Record published an editorial calling on policymakers to prioritize more resources for low income residents in the core:

As the pieces of the puzzle for a vibrant Kitchener downtown are finally put together, the city must ensure one vital part doesn't go missing. That's a place for the poor. That's a place for the people who scrape by on welfare and minimum wage jobs, who need a home where the rent isn't too high and a neighbourhood where they can find a helping hand. There has to be room in the core for people like this. It's their city, too. The old factories being transformed into new businesses and living spaces, the shiny new condominiums that are rising up, and the tracks for the light rail trains that will soon be laid down are all helping to deliver the downtown's remarkable rebirth — a goal toward which the city has worked for the past 40 years. Kitchener can take pride in what's happening. All the new residents, businesses, workers and shoppers that are flooding back to the core are worth celebrating. It's an urban renaissance. But while the city's leaders deserve applause and city taxpayers can feel assured tens of millions of public dollars have been put to good use, there are legitimate concerns that low income residents are being pushed out of the core by redevelopment and rising land values. As old buildings are knocked down or renovated for more upscale tenants, the stock of housing for some of Waterloo Region's poorest citizens could be declining... Kitchener's downtown is changing, and largely for the better. But as the city moves forward it should do its best to see that no one is left behind (Waterloo Region Record 2014).

The Waterloo Chronicle expressed a similar concern, noting a growing chorus of voices seeking to draw attention to the problem of affordable housing along the CTC:

...more and more people are also sounding the alarm for what the development of the Ion will do to the housing mix around the LRT line. We already know land values along the route have increased, and uptown Waterloo and the condo culture it is creating are a sign of things to come along other sections of the route.

What does this development surge do to affordable housing and low-income housing along the LRT? Are the poor and working poor going to get pushed to the margins of that development and away from a transit system that could possibly benefit them the most (Waterloo Chronicle 2014)?

The response from policymakers was mixed. As noted, the CTC Community Building Strategy largely avoided questions related to affordable housing or equitable transit-oriented development, focusing instead on problems related to investment attraction and community design. At the same time, however, policymakers did appear to acknowledge the concerns highlighted by housing advocates, though there remained considerable uncertainty as to how local and regional governments might respond. The policy response became comprised of two distinct initiatives: a monitoring program to track changes in the Corridor and a renewal of the Region's Affordable Housing Strategy.

The Central Transit Corridor Monitoring Program was established in 2011. The objective was to devise a set of baseline indicators and monitor these indicators over a ten year period to assess how conditions in the Corridor were changing. Of the 16 indicators chosen, many focused on metrics related to growth, density targets, building activity, employment, and investment. In addition, however, the program also included measures related to inclusion, the protection of community assets, and housing affordability. One of the interesting features of the monitoring program was the creation of a research partnership with academics from the University of Waterloo, who were provided funding to conduct a series of supplementary analyses and issue

reviews. As a result of this partnership, the Baseline Monitoring Report included an extensive review of the relationship between transit-oriented development, land value uplift, and gentrification (Region of Waterloo 2015).

Building on this analysis, the Monitoring Report for 2017 included a more detailed examination of housing affordability issues in the Central Transit Corridor. The report included an analysis of changing income dynamics in the Corridor, rates of rental affordability, and access to social and supportive housing. While the relatively short time frame made it difficult to draw definite conclusions, the report pointed to significant gentrification pressures in LRT station areas. Specifically, it showed that median incomes in the Corridor were increasing at a rate far greater than the region as a whole. In Uptown Waterloo, median income increased from \$49,464 in 2005 to \$68,651 in 2015. In downtown Kitchener, median incomes increased over the same period from \$29,101 to \$41,088 (Region of Waterloo 2019). These income dynamics were clearly the result of an influx of more affluent residents into these neighbourhoods and combined with other indicators pointed to the growing risk of gentrification and exclusion in areas proximate to the LRT:

Within the CTC there are indications of gentrification, particularly in certain station areas. Visible signs include the construction of several condominium, rental housing and commercial developments. Other indicators support the case for gentrification as well. Since 2011, when LRT was approved by Council, building permit investment and property assessment values have increased in the CTC. The 2016 Census provides further evidence. A look at household income by census tract shows that most census tracts that intersect with the CTC have seen increases in the median household income between 2006 and 2016. Census tracts that comprise most of the cores of Waterloo and Kitchener, where construction of Stage 1 of ION was completed in 2017, have seen increases in median household income of 18 and 20 per cent respectively compared to an overall Regional increase in household income of 1.6 per cent. All of these changes suggest that gentrification is taking place within the CTC (ibid).

The principal mechanism for responding to these gentrification pressures was the Region's Affordable Housing Strategy. The Strategy was first developed in 2001 after the provincial government downloaded responsibility for social housing. Since that time, the Strategy had functioned as the framework for an assortment of housing policies, including capital subsidies for affordable housing construction, rental supplements for low income residents, and funding for the repair and revitalization of existing affordable housing assets. In 2014, the Strategy was once again renewed, but this time in the context of growing concerns about transit-oriented gentrification. This context gave new urgency to the problem of affordable housing development and raised pointed questions about the Region's priorities.

The 2014 Strategy, entitled *Renewing our Commitment*, laid out the measures that the Region intended to take over the ensuing five years to address the challenges of affordable housing in the community. As the Strategy observed, this need was substantial and growing, particularly for low income households in need of affordable rental accommodation:

There is great demand for rental housing affordable to lower income households in the Region. The Community Housing wait list remains above 3,000 households, but fewer households are being housed every year, resulting in an increase in wait times for most households (Region of Waterloo 2014).

While there had been a notable increase in rental construction since the early 2000s, the majority of this new stock had been developed for more affluent segments of the market. As a result, while the regional vacancy rate had relaxed considerably over time, there remained a lack of accommodation for lower income households. Given the economics of rental housing construction, policymakers argued, creating affordable housing for these households required public intervention, particularly in areas like the Ion Corridor where land values were rising more quickly (*ibid*).

For housing advocates, the Affordable Housing Strategy was widely seen as a disappointment. While policymakers effectively diagnosed the problem of affordable access for low income households, it offered very little in terms of meaningful intervention or investment. In total, the plan committed to creating and preserving only 700 total units over the course of the five year strategy. At a time when housing pressures were seen to be increasing, the Region's Affordable Housing Strategy supported 200 *fewer* units than had been supported by the previous Strategy approved in 2008 (Murray 2014b). What is more, over half of this commitment involved support for affordable homeownership and unit preservation, rather than for expanded rental accommodation. The plan anticipated the development of only 250 new affordable rental units (Region of Waterloo 2014).

For a number of Regional councillors, the modest commitment to new rental construction was of particular concern within the Central Transit Corridor, where evidence pointed to rapidly increasing land values and development pressure. Councillor Geoff Lorentz, for example, pointed to the failure of Regional policymakers to develop an affordable housing strategy that was commensurate with its efforts to promote redevelopment in the Corridor:

I think I'd be a lot more comfortable if we had something in our strategy for the next five years talking about the Ion corridor and what we feel our commitments to that are. I know the idea of just hanging on to what we have is OK, but I don't think that's good enough. I think we need to have a hard look at that. We are creating change along that corridor, but we also have a responsibility to make sure there is some affordable housing not only maintained, but continuing to grow along that corridor (Lorentz, quoted in Murray 2014b)

Councillor Jane Mitchell was similarly concerned that the Strategy failed to advance the Region's commitment to an inclusive, mixed-income community along the CTC:

The LRT does raise property values, and that is a good thing because we'll get more taxes, but on the other hand there is a concern that it might be just high-priced condos, which is pretty much a monoculture and not what we are looking for as we try to have a thriving city.

It's a case of equity as well that everyone gets the chance to use the LRT. I don't want to see people who have to use transit end up in the mid-boonies and have to take long bus rides everywhere when there are a lot of services that are clustered around the LRT area and it would be nice for them to live there (quoted in Murray 2014a).

Policymakers were conscious of these concerns, but defended the Strategy as commensurate with current levels of federal and provincial housing support. The Strategy itself pointed to the importance of senior government contributions and the challenge posed by the existing policy context:

We will continue to ensure that we remain both strategic in our investments and sustainable in our outlook, recognizing that fully achieving our goal will depend on additional funding from senior levels of government. Our collective community has made great strides in growing the number of affordable housing options available for low to moderate income households as our community continues to grow, but we need to be **'renewing our commitment'** to affordable housing to address our growing needs (Region of Waterloo 2014).

Policymakers, in other words, recognized the need for more ambitious investments, but argued that responding to the scale of need was not possible in the absence of the kinds of robust federal and provincial programs that existed in an era before housing policy was downloaded to the local scale. As Councillor Sean Strickland explained, "It's an affordable housing strategy that makes sense for the current fiscal climate we are operating in as a region and the lack of commitment from federal and provincial levels of government. This is a good plan, but it's not an ambitious plan" (Murray 2014b). Tom Galloway defended the Strategy in similar terms. While investments levels were low, he argued, "...in the past we've had funding announcements and funding available, and now we're in a vacuum of funding announcements. I think by necessity it has to be a more modest plan" (ibid).

It is interesting to note that this reasoning was precisely the inverse of the type of argument employed by advocates of the LRT project a few years earlier. For LRT supporters, the local value of the project had to be evaluated in light of the \$550 million of capital funding made

available by federal and provincial governments. This funding altered in a profound way the business case for LRT and enabled a valuable project that would not have been affordable without senior government support. By contrast, the absence of equivalent federal and provincial commitments for affordable housing meant that Regional policymakers were unable to implement an equitable and inclusive form of transit-oriented development along the Central Transit Corridor. This disjunction was captured by Brian Doucet, an urban development researcher at the University of Waterloo, in a recent opinion editorial:

While the Ion represents a bold vision for the region's future that is meant to stimulate new housing developments in the urban core, there have been no similarly bold visions to ensure that housing that gets built is affordable. Questions of what to build, and for whom, have been left almost entirely to the market to answer. What does the market build? It builds what is most profitable. In today's context, these are small units popular with young professionals and investors. Other housing needs, such as larger units for families, affordable housing for those with modest incomes, and social and supportive housing for the poorest members of our community are absent from this developer-driven building boom (Doucet 2019).

## **Conclusion**

The objective of the chapter has been to analyze the ideas and narratives that have structured the debate surrounding Waterloo Region's \$818 million light rail project. In the first section, I traced the emergence of the Region's smart growth agenda in the early 2000s. The agenda, I argued, was a proactive response to emerging growth pressures and built upon the Region's unique civic tradition of environmental planning. In the second section, I explored the development of light rail planning in relation to the evolution of downtown revitalization strategies in municipal Kitchener. Here, the goal was to highlight the ideational link that emerged between the Region's smart growth planning regime and the urbanization of Waterloo Region's high technology sector. In the third section, I turned to a discussion of the ratepayer movement

that developed in opposition to the LRT and its role in challenging the dominant narrative surrounding the project. I also pointed to an interesting connection existing between a number of prominent opponents and the City of Waterloo's Uptown Vision Committee. This connection suggested that divergent beliefs about the value of LRT were linked in part to beliefs about the relative benefits of the project for the cities of Kitchener and Waterloo. In the final section, I considered the problem of affordable housing along the Central Transit Corridor and the tension between the dominant vision of LRT as an instrument for intensification and redevelopment and concerns about inclusive community development and affordable access to public transit. This tension, I argued, has been exacerbated by federal and provincial policies, which have prioritized the problem of transit infrastructure to a much greater degree than the problem of inclusive access.

## **Conclusion: Making Sense of Canada's Public Transit 'Fix'**

This thesis has been motivated by a simple observation. Since the turn of the century, spending on public transit capital projects in Canada has increased dramatically. In the period from 1999-2003, combined capital expenditures across government totalled less than \$5 billion. In the period from 2012-2016, combined expenditures reached nearly \$29 billion, or an average of \$5.7 billion per year (CUTA 2019). The objective of this thesis has been to understand this shift. Why has the Canadian state embraced transit-oriented reform as a basis for urban growth and redevelopment? What are the objectives that policymakers aim to achieve? What are the ideas and values underpinning the transit policy agenda?

In short, what I have found is that Canada's transit policy agenda is rooted in a vision of 'sustainable competitiveness'. According to this vision, the problems facing Canadian cities are understood first and foremost with respect to the role that cities play as agents of inter-urban competition and drivers of economic growth. From this perspective, sustainable urban development is seen as an antidote to the dysfunctions of automobile-centric suburban sprawl that threaten the economic vitality of cities. In particular, planning paradigms like smart growth and transit-oriented development have become favoured as a solution to the 'crisis of mobility' that is plaguing many large cities, as well as a means to guide reinvestment and sectoral restructuring in the urban core.

The urban sustainability turn is of course not being driven solely by economic concerns. As a number of political economists have argued, sustainability policies often represent an attempt on the part of the state to renegotiate the relationship between economic development and social reproduction (Krueger and Savage 2007). In Canada, the transit agenda has emerged

as one site where governments are attempting to establish a more politically consensual approach to urban growth. For example, investments in public transit have been rhetorically tied to government climate change strategies and to urban livability agendas. Nevertheless, it appears that non-economic concerns, to the extent that they are incorporated into policy, occupy a subordinate position. In Jessop's terminology, economic concerns seem to exert ecological dominance within the system of sustainability (Jessop 2000). This normative ordering is well expressed in the views of David Miller, the former Mayor of Toronto and a leading advocate of transit-oriented reform:

Clearly, while public transit is about a lot of things – a greener city, equitable access, cost-effective transportation – its primary role is economic, contributing to the wealth and well-being of all of us (Miller 2013).

In this light, one objective of the thesis has been to identify the contours of this vision and to trace the process of its development. The thesis has explored the emergence of this conception of public transit as the result of a multi-scalar process. In other words, the constitution of the transit agenda in Canada has involved the collaboration of federal, provincial, and local policymakers. This has required the construction of a coherent vision across scales of governance. A second objective has been to explain the political and policy implications of this vision. A defining characteristic of the transit agenda in Canada has been an overwhelming emphasis on the problem of infrastructure. The infrastructure-led approach, I have argued, reflects policymakers' prioritization of problems related to efficiency, circulation, and redevelopment. While the sustainability turn has encouraged inter-governmental partnerships in the capital arena and the significance of expansion of public transit infrastructure, the need for equity-oriented investments has received far less attention from policymakers.

## **Contributions to the Literature**

The thesis has meant to contribute to current lines of research in three principal ways. First, I have worked to improve upon current understandings of the role of public transit policy in the constitution of an urban ‘sustainability fix’. There is, to be sure, an extensive critical literature concerned with the state of public transit policy. Overall, however, the connection between this literature and accounts of urban sustainability as a governance project remain relatively underdeveloped. This thesis helps to make these connections clear and suggests public transit policy as a fruitful window onto the political economic dynamics of sustainable urbanism.

Transit policy, I have shown, helps to illuminate the logic of sustainable urbanism in at least three ways. The first concerns the role of transit-oriented reform as a ‘fix’ for the dilemmas of automobile-centric mobility. Postwar automobility was associated with a maximalist conception of mobility, defined by an ethos of ‘ever further, ever faster’ (Low et al. 2003). While maximalist transport planning was consonant with the logic of Keynesian-Fordism, the influence of ‘new realist’ critiques have in recent years begun to challenge the long-term viability of automobile-centric growth strategies. ‘Predict and provide’ planning increasingly appears to be running up against technical and institutional limits. Not only are road building strategies unable to contain the costs of congestion, but the fiscal expense of auto-centric sprawl is no longer consonant with the state logic of permanent austerity.

Transit-oriented reform can be understood as an attempt to re-establish conditions for functional urban growth. The overextension of automobility has become intimately bound-up with the crisis of collective provision and the widening urban ‘infrastructure gap’. To resolve this problem, planners have been forced to re-imagine the logic of urban mobility, prioritizing efficiency and accessibility rather than simply maximal movement. Transit-oriented development

has become integral to these efforts, promising to both enhance connectivity and reduce overall demand for travel.

Second, transit-oriented reform provides an illuminating view of the ways in which the state is seeking to re-negotiate the conditions of collective consumption. Retrenchment and austerity in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to profound urban growth dilemmas, characterized by a growing gap between the demand for growth-related infrastructure and the capacity of the state to provide (Kirkpatrick and Smith 2011). Alongside privatization initiatives, one of the principal responses to these dilemmas has been a prioritization of efficiency in planning and development practice. In contrast to the profligacy of the postwar development model, today policymakers are searching for ways to lower the public sector costs of growth. Even with this push for cost containment, however, policymakers have increasingly acknowledged the need for renewed investment in collective infrastructures. The challenge has been to articulate a vision of selective reinvestment that aligns the need for state support with the ongoing demand for public sector restraint.

Large public transit infrastructure projects have emerged as a key site where such visions are articulated, contested, and re-negotiated. Transit mega-projects can require the state to invest billions of public sector dollars. In an ideological environment that remains skeptical of ‘big government’ and resistant to taxation, advocates of such projects must expend significant effort to justify spending on this scale. As a result, large transit capital projects often become intense political arenas where urban boosters, growth actors, and other civic elites are forced to explain the value of such investment. This type of political event provides a unique opportunity to analyze the values and logics that are guiding processes of sustainable urban reform.

A third and related reason to analyze sustainable urbanism through the lens of public transit policy is that it provides a particularly illuminating view of the distributional stakes at play in sustainable city-building. In this thesis, I have emphasized the post-political aspirations that underlie the sustainable city. The search for a sustainability fix is in significant part a search for a new, more consensual approach to urban growth. Whereas the traditional growth machine governed via an ideology of value-free growth, the ‘smart growth machine’ insists that growth can and should be reconciled to other environmental, social, and civic values. As a political project, sustainable urbanism seeks to line political factions behind a vision of progressive development that can be difficult to contest, particularly when it is set against the failures of auto-centric sprawl (Bunce 2004).

Investments in public transit are often depicted as an example of sustainable development *par excellence* – an investment that can address problems of economic development, environmental sustainability, social exclusion, and quality of life simultaneously. What I have shown in this thesis, however, is that transit policy is anything but post-political. In reality, policy decisions invariably entail choices that prioritize some interests at the expense of others. Decisions related to technology, network configuration, adjacent land use planning, operational spending, and fare policy, all combine to create an uneven landscape of mobility and access. In the sustainable city, transit policy reveals in particular a tension between objectives of efficiency and equity. Efficiency entails the prioritization of ridership objectives and the interests of choice commuters. Equity concerns, by contrast, are occluded by a policy agenda that is narrowly concerned with reducing demand for auto travel.

The second contribution that this thesis makes to current lines of research concerns the role of ideas in the constitution of multi-scalar urban governance regimes. In Chapter 1, I

developed an ideational-institutional account of urban governance. It proceeded in three steps as a means of locating the role of ideas in the production of public policy. In an initial move, it pointed to Clarence Stone's Regime Approach as a novel treatment of the question of local agency. Stone's social production model of power conceived local politics as constrained but underdetermined by external institutions. Yet, while the Regime Approach recovers a role for local politics within a capitalist political economy, it does this by creating an unrealistic barrier between the local and its external environment. In a second move, then, I followed state-theoretic approaches that work to dissolve this barrier and situate local politics more effectively within the institutional apparatus of the state. I argued that the insights of a new urban institutionalism could be aligned with the more radical account of state-space articulated by authors working within a political economy of scale. Here, urban governance evolves as part of place-specific state spatial projects and strategies that seek to adapt the institutional apparatus of the state to a shifting global political economic landscape.

The weakness of the state-theoretic lens, of course, is that it shifts the weight of causal explanation back towards the structuring force of institutions. This leads to a third move: a turn towards ideas and interpretation as a basis for situated political agency. Consonant with a wider scholarly embrace of ideational-institutional approaches to policy studies, I looked to Jessop's formulation of cultural political economy as a way to re-align the question of structure and agency. Politics, on this view, is constituted at a material-semiotic nexus. Agency is constituted through acts of interpretation that give meaning and form to a shared, but complex, material and institutional environment. Political power is exercised through attempts to exert intellectual leadership and define a general common sense against a background of structurally selective state institutions.

The empirical sections of this thesis are intended as examples of this mode of ideational-institutional analysis. They reveal how urban governance can be studied in such a way as to both take agency (constituted across multiple-scales), seriously and still retain the political economic insights that allow us to connect state projects and strategies to the systemic transformation of global capitalism. Through Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I developed a narrative account that explains how policy actors at federal, provincial, regional, and municipal scales worked to construct the problem of transit-oriented reform. At each scale, actors elaborated visions of transit-oriented reform, each based on a distinct set of normative concerns and problem priorities, and each articulated in various ways to other ideas, political expectations, and perceived institutional constraints. What I have tried to show in these chapters is the way in which politics plays out through the circulation of imaginaries, including the depiction of some demands as necessary and others as unrealistic or constrained. The negotiation of these ideas across state space result in their selective deployment through policy programs, which in turn reflect back, prompting actors to continue their practice of interpreting reality and projecting future possibilities.

This leads to a third and related contribution that the thesis hopes to make to current literatures. Through the narrative accounts developed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I have tried to explain the role that public transit is playing in the constitution of Canadian urban governance regimes. The (re)engagement of the state with the problem of public transit has taken place as part of a broader response to the failures of neoliberal urbanism in the 1980s and 1990s. The emergence of a new localist policy agenda in the early 2000s acknowledged the effects of institutional downloading and state austerity on the urban environment. It represented an attempt to come to terms with the erosion of the Canadian urban model, as well as an acknowledgement of the need to cultivate a new consensus around urban growth. In this thesis, I have explored the

multi-scalar constitution of transit-oriented reform agendas as a way to shed light on this process. Transit policy, I have argued, provides important insight into how the state is seeking to resolve the contradictions of neoliberal urbanism and re-establish conditions for functional and legitimate urban development.

In Chapter 4, I described three pathways of institutional reform that were identified by advocates of a new urban agenda at the turn of the century. Some advocates saw the solution to urban decline in terms of enhanced municipal autonomy – they insisted that municipalities should have the power to raise revenue and exercise authority in ways that were commensurate with the importance of cities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Others advocated for novel forms of multi-level governance based on the collaborative assemblage of governance resources. This route was favoured in particular by social policy advocates who saw the new urban agenda as an opportunity to renew investment in social infrastructure. As I show, the transit agenda exemplified a third alternative, which focused attention more narrowly on the problem of urban capital deficits. This infrastructure-led approach was more than a convenient path of institutional least-resistance – it reflected policymakers’ primary concern with problems of growth management and competitiveness.

At the federal scale, this approach was exemplified by the decision to prioritize infrastructure programs as the primary vehicle for urban policy. In the early 2000s, social policy advocates encouraged policymakers to develop an integrated approach to ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ urban policies through the expansion of Urban Development Agreements. The hope was that the federal government would adopt a broad, inclusive view of the urban deficit and combine investment in capital projects with renewed forms of social support. Ultimately, however, federal policymakers chose to pursue sustainable urban development through a narrow focus ‘hard’

infrastructure. In the transit arena, this approach yielded the first substantial modern federal investment in urban transit projects and ushered in a new era of intergovernmental partnership.

This orientation was mirrored at the Ontario provincial scale, where sustainable urbanism was also construed as essentially a project of built reform. Responding to the anti-urban and austerity-driven neoliberal agenda of their Conservative predecessors, the Liberal government embraced a more statist vision systemic competitiveness oriented around norms of sustainability and smart growth. This reform agenda envisioned the sustainability fix as a basis for a renewed political consensus around the conditions of urban growth (Macdonald and Keil 2011). In the transportation sphere, policymakers emphasized the problem of congestion as a site where this consensus could be moulded. By reinvesting in commuter-oriented public transit infrastructure, policymakers pointed to the promise of a new growth model in which cities would become at once more competitive, livable, and environmentally sustainable (Nugent 2015).

The infrastructure-led approach to transit-oriented reform had significant consequences at the local scale, where policy actors were forced to navigate an environment structured by selective and partial forms of senior government engagement. As I have argued, this structured context did not determine local policy in any straightforward way, but it did favour the elaboration of certain forms of political and policy dynamic. In both Ottawa and Waterloo Region, the dominant policy regimes prioritized capital investment, increases in transit ridership, and market-based land development. Equity-oriented dimensions of transit-oriented reform, by contrast, received less attention and much less institutional support.

In Ottawa, the expansion of federal and provincial capital programs helped to overcome a political logjam that resulted in the cancellation of a planned ‘north-south’ light rail project. Faced with rapid rates of suburban growth, local policymakers embraced a return to transit-first

planning, coupled with a program of sustainable land use reform. Following the failure of the City's initial project, policy actors were able to coalesce around an alternative, but more ambitious project. This project allowed planners to resolve the tensions that inhered within the city's longstanding 'outside-in' approach to rapid transit planning. The Downtown Tunnel project set the stage for a much more consensual approach to transit capital planning based on the promise of light rail extensions to each of the city's major suburban areas.

The consensual politics of transit capital development, however, contrasted sharply with the politics of austerity that characterized the operation of the City's expanding network. Here, a conservative ratepayer politics placed enormous pressure on policymakers to reduce the rate of taxpayer subsidy used to support the public transit system. In an effort to contain public spending, policy moved in a variety of regressive directions. This included a two month labour disruption, dramatic fare increases, and a historic suite of service cuts. To be sure, policymakers also attempted to come to terms with critics who called for policy that was more sensitive to the needs of vulnerable and low income residents. For example, planners introduced equity considerations into the network planning process and the City created a low income transit pass for qualified riders. These measures, however, remained limited by the political power exercised by ratepayers, which required that transit operations continue to become more 'financially sustainable'.

The logic of transit policy in Waterloo Region was distinct from that in Ottawa, but nevertheless shared certain common tendencies. In Waterloo, the embrace of transit-oriented reform was motivated less by growth management concerns than by a desire to promote intensification in central areas. In conjunction with a suite of land use reforms, the Region approved the development of an \$818 million LRT project along a Central Transit Corridor

linking its constituent municipalities. For policymakers, light rail was seen as the key amenity that would help to incent development along the Corridor. This was particularly the case for economic development actors in the municipality of Kitchener, who incorporated the LRT project into their strategy for tech sector-driven revitalization in the downtown. In Kitchener, the LRT became the infrastructural anchor for a new transit-oriented ‘innovation district’ designed to attract the region’s urbanizing technology firms.

The Region’s development strategy proved to be quite successful. Convinced of the value of LRT, land developers invested billions of dollars along the Central Transit Corridor, leading to a renaissance of areas like downtown Kitchener. The prioritization of market-led redevelopment, however, had the unintended (though not unanticipated), effect of triggering gentrification pressures along the LRT. These pressures gave rise to serious concerns about the ability of low income residents to maintain access to housing and basic services, including public transit. While many policymakers echoed these concerns, they also sought to deflect responsibility, arguing that a lack of senior government support prevented meaningful investment in the Region’s Affordable Housing Strategy.

What I have argued throughout this thesis is that the multi-scalar constitution of transit-oriented reform in Canada has been based on a highly selective interpretation of the transit problematic, one which conceived public transit primarily as a fix for growth and development-related urban dilemmas. While advocates of equitable transit-oriented development have pressed their case with policymakers, they have encountered a state apparatus that is strategically selective in the way that it incorporates particular value claims. At each scale, policymakers have in various ways insisted that the primary objective of transit policy is to manage and redirect the urban growth process. To the extent that policymakers have acknowledged equity-oriented

concerns, they have remained subordinated to not only the overriding concern with growth, but also the exigencies of selective austerity. In the hierarchy of values, the needs of the most dependent transit users are important, but not important enough.

### **Directions for Future Reform**

By way of conclusion, I would like to consider briefly how the transit policy landscape might be amended so as to better attend to equity-oriented concerns. The research presented here highlights two areas that require immediate attention: operational subsidies for local transit systems and coordinated investments in affordable housing. From an institutional perspective, these issues might be addressed either by broadening the revenue raising capacity of local government, thereby creating more political space for social policy interests, or through a more inclusive approach to multi-level governance. While there is certainly much to recommend the local autonomy approach, in the current conjuncture multi-level governance would appear to be the more likely pathway. I will thus focus my comments on the ways in which federal and provincial governments might support local policymakers in their efforts to implement more equitable visions of transit-oriented reform.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the role that operating subsidies play in the transit policy arena. Unlike capital subsidies for new infrastructure, operating subsidies are required to defray the cost of daily service. In the absence of operating subsidies, service costs need to be fully recovered through the fares. As a result, the rate of operating subsidy effectively determines the degree to which policymakers can regulate fares and provide service according to norms or objectives other than supply and demand. The decision to provide local service at off-peak hours, for

example, or to provide fare discounts, depends on government's willingness to subsidize transit operations.

The case of Ottawa illustrates what happens when these subsidies come under pressure. While federal and provincial governments helped to subsidize the City's ambitious capital plans, the City was forced to rely on a limited property tax base to subsidize the operation of a growing network. Pressure from ratepayers led to a variety of cost containment measures – most notably the 2011 'network optimization' process. Throughout this period, the demand to increase OC Transpo's 'cost-recovery ratio' acted as both a justification for regressive policy changes and as a brake on efforts to make the system more equitable and effective for dependent riders.

In the 1970s, the Ontario provincial government provided generous operating grants for local transit systems, covering 50% of the public subsidy. This subsidy was reduced in the 1980s before being eliminated entirely in 1997. When the Liberal government embarked on an 'era of renewal' in the mid-2000s they demonstrated a strong commitment to investing in public transit infrastructure but chose not to re-establish the operating subsidy program. While the province provides modest operating support through its Gas Tax program, rates of operating subsidy remain a fraction of what was provided in the 1970s.

It is noteworthy that since 2011 the provincial NDP has included as part of its platform a promise to re-establish a provincial program to subsidize 50% of local operating costs. This promise has been explicitly tied to the problem of rising transit fares and suggests a commitment to a more inclusive and equitable vision of provincial transit policy. If such a policy were to be implemented it would immediately transform the political context in which local priorities are defined and negotiated. In Ottawa, for example, an expanded provincial operating subsidy would

help to mitigate the tension between the City's cost recovery objectives and its commitment to filter network planning decisions through an Equity and Inclusion Lens.

In Chapters 2 and 3 I also explored the relationship between transit-oriented development and the housing market. While the direct effect of public transit on land values remains a matter of investigation, research shows a clear link between transit-oriented development and housing costs – the more successful planners are in creating vibrant, pedestrian-oriented station areas, the greater the rise in residential land values (Kahn 2007). This association enhances the argument for transit-oriented reform as a tool for neighbourhood revitalization. But at the same time, it also reinforces concerns about gentrification and the compound forms of inequality that result when low income residents are pushed out of areas of high transit connectivity (Kramer 2017).

The case of Waterloo Region provides a clear illustration of the need for new forms of integrated policy development that combine transit infrastructure projects with investments in affordable housing. As Suttor recounts in his history of Canadian social housing policy, the federal urban agenda of the early 2000s lacked a comprehensive vision of how social housing might align with the government's infrastructure agenda. In Waterloo, the consequences of this were plain to see. Investment in LRT helped to subsidize development in station areas, inflating land values and leading to gentrification along the Corridor. Though the connection between housing affordability and LRT development was well understood, in the absence of a complementary housing program, local policymakers struggled to craft an effective response.

There are signs that the orientation of federal policy is beginning to change. In 2017, the government unveiled its National Housing Strategy, which promised to build up to 125 000 new homes over a ten year period. While the Strategy is predominantly concerned with housing development, it does hint at the possibility of new 'joined-up' approaches to multi-level

governance. Notably, it argues that federal housing programs should align with a wider set of community development objectives, including public transit:

Our plan will promote diverse communities. It will build housing that is sustainable, accessible, mixed-income, and mixed use. We will build housing that is fully integrated into the community – close to transit, close to work, and close to public services (Government of Canada 2017).

This type of joined-up thinking is well past due.

At the core of this thesis has been an attempt to challenge post-political representations of public transit policy. Throughout, I have argued that equity objectives do not align easily or naturally with a transit agenda that is narrowly concerned with issues of growth management, efficient circulation, and economic development. Equitable forms of sustainable urbanism and transit-oriented reform require policymakers to eschew typical notions of ‘three pillar’ development and to instead develop intentional policies that dedicate resources to the distinct needs of dependent or marginalized transit riders. If there is a single takeaway it is that equitable and inclusive cities are not produced through technocratic management – they are produced by policies that prioritize equity and inclusion.

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