
TOPIC

**In Response to
The Robarts Report**



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Better Government through Research

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In Response to The Robarts Report

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THIS TOPIC IN BRIEF

The Bureau generally endorses the approach recommended by the Robarts Report as a timely and positive step in the evolution of metropolitan government in Toronto. The proposals aim at giving more decision-making power to both the Metro and area municipal councils at the expense of the provincial government and special purpose bodies.

The proposals to give the Metro and area municipal councils general powers to legislate, to delegate responsibility and to vest in them the authority over all special purpose bodies (except for school boards) are among the most innovative in the Report. We support this effort to strengthen the hand of local government and view the acceptance of these recommendations by the Province as vital.

The BMR also supports the proposed division of responsibilities between the two tiers, with Metro having a somewhat enlarged co-ordinating role. Given this, we agree with the Commission that direct election of Metro councillors becomes imperative.

We do have a few reservations. One is the potentially increased vulnerability of the City of Toronto resulting from the shift in the balance of power to a directly-elected, suburban-dominated Metro Council. This Topic offers specific suggestions for helping to safeguard the City's position at Metro; these include a modification of the City's ward size and representation to Metro Council and a guaranteed minimum number of seats on Metro Executive. Another option, which makes sense on several counts, but might be politically difficult, would be to add York and East York to the present City of Toronto and thus create a four-city federation.

We point to the concern at the area municipal level that local government may become too centralized under the Robarts plan. We suggest that, in part to help assuage these anxieties about Metro's co-ordinating role in planning, Metro Council not be required to adopt an "official plan" to which area municipal plans and by-laws would need to conform. Instead, following the approach proposed by Comay in the Planning Act Review, Metro should guide planning by means of its municipal plan or specific policy statements, Metro could object to local plans or planning decisions on the basis of these established regional policies.

With respect to Metro's internal boundaries, we do not find the proposed revisions satisfactory, although the general rationale upon which they are based is sound.

RESPONSE TO THE ROBERTS REPORT

Introduction

On July 4th, 1977, the Honourable John Robarts, former Premier of Ontario, brought down the Report of the Royal Commission on Metro Toronto. This was the third major review of local government in Metropolitan Toronto since the two-tier federation was set up in 1954. After more than two and one half years of intensive examination, which included extensive public consultation, the Commission published its final report containing 126 recommendations on the structure, organization and financing of local government in Metro.

The Bureau finds itself in general agreement with many of these proposals. Indeed, several recommendations which had been made by the BMR in its publications during the past three years--on such varied issues as the electoral system, the organization of fire protection services, accountability of the Metropolitan Toronto Police Commission and citizen participation--are consistent with the Commission's findings. We shall refer to some of these earlier studies in greater detail as they relate to the analysis in this Topic.

We endorse the general thrust of the Commission's findings as a very positive one for local government in Metro. We do have some reservations which we discuss in this paper. One is the potentially increased vulnerability of the City of Toronto as a result of the shift in the balance of power to a directly elected, suburban-dominated Metro Council. Of greater concern is the solution proposed for financing the new system, with its expanded authority and responsibilities.

The purpose of this Topic is to respond to the Roberts Report in a selective rather than a comprehensive way. We shall concentrate on the main features of the proposed system, pointing out both the positive aspects and those which cause concern.

The Roberts Report seeks to move in two essential and parallel directions. One set of reforms is intended to strengthen the entire local government system in Metro Toronto by reducing provincial supervision and increasing the discretionary authority and the scope for governing of Metro and its constituent councils. Within this context of increased municipal autonomy, a second set of reforms seeks to create a healthy balance of authority between the two tiers and increase accountability by concentrating power within the elected councils. In brief, the proposals taken together aim at bringing power down from the Province and power into the elected councils.

-the transforming of all special purpose bodies with the notable exception of school boards into creatures of the municipality, rather than continuing as agencies created by or according to provincial legislation. While municipalities might decide to continue to provide library services, child welfare services, planning, etc., through special purpose bodies, that decision should be left up to the municipality. (Recommendation 6.4) The essential point is that, if these agencies are retained, the authority for their functions will lie with the relevant municipal council.

-the transfer of some powers from the Province to the Metropolitan Toronto system, including the responsibility for the administration of the Family Benefits Act (Recommendation 19.1), the responsibility for the existing OHC housing stock and for direct provision of all low-income family and senior citizen housing in Metro. (Recommendations 12.4 and 12.5)

-the replacement of existing conditional grants by three-year cost-sharing programs for major services. (Recommendation 10.4)

Leaving aside the finance issue, which is dealt with in another section of this Topic, we support the general approach taken by the Commission. One cannot be certain that the proposals which seek to increase the ability of local government in Metropolitan Toronto "to act effectively and independently" (V. 1, p. 35) will result in tangible improvements. We cannot know, for instance, whether the proposals regarding special purpose bodies will result in local councils governing in these areas more effectively. Nor can we predict how the power of delegation or the general power to legislate will be exercised.

At this stage we see no reason for assuming that these tools of government won't be used. *We therefore strongly endorse the general thrust of the Report with respect to the scope for decision-making as offering an important opportunity for increasing local authority.*

It is perhaps regrettable that the Commission did not set out the implications of the delegation power in detail and discuss some of the administrative options for council. The Commission does not, for instance, specify the kind of committee system or management system which should be used, nor does it describe the nature of the relationships which should exist between council and the various persons or agencies to whom power is delegated. Yet this absence of detail is consistent with the central premise of the delegation proposal which is that a municipal council in Metro should be able to conduct its own affairs as it sees fit.

At the recent IPAC Seminar in Toronto¹, several speakers suggested that there was a real danger that this power of delegation could be abused, that it could accrue to appointed officials, for example, thereby undermining the overall accountability of the reform. However, the Robarts Report does provide certain safeguards to prevent the power to delegate responsibility from turning into "a power to abdicate responsibility".²

Above all, if one accepts the concept of the power to delegate, as the Bureau does, one must have faith in the will and ability of Metro's municipal politicians to use such power wisely. Such confidence really lies at the heart of the entire Report. Obviously, if the Province does grant the delegation power as proposed, the councils will need to take time and care in addressing the organizational and administrative issues.

2. The Distribution of Powers between the Two Tiers

The problem of distributing powers between the two levels of government has always been the bane of federal political systems. Still, for the same reasons that federalism was adopted and has been retained in so many democratic nations, the Commission has chosen to retain Metro's two-tier system. Under a two-tier or federated structure services can be adapted to suit local needs and individual participation is encouraged, while at the same time region-wide interests are protected, possible economies of scale in service delivery are achieved and minority rights are protected.

To distribute the powers of local government between Metro's two tiers on a satisfactory basis presents a formidable challenge. The decision inevitably involves several factors:

- competing values such as local autonomy versus ensuring equitable distribution of services for all citizens in the region;

1. Fall Seminar of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, Toronto Regional Group (September 20, 1977).

2. The Commission proposes in Recommendation 6.3 that the power of delegation be circumscribed by four conditions to prevent it from being abused: that councils accept ultimate political and financial responsibility for the actions of those to whom they delegate, that councils not be allowed to create new elective offices, that the delegation be renewed by each new council, and that the exercise of the power be compatible with the principles of the rule of law and natural justice.

- contradictory arguments as to which level can deliver a given service more efficiently and effectively;

- the force of political tradition and attachment to the existing system (as in the case of Ontario's educational system).

The decision is made all the more difficult by the fact that any modification in the current division of responsibilities will necessarily affect the overall balance of power and will have implications for the system of political representation.

The Robarts proposals, if implemented, will shift the balance of power in favour of Metro Council. In large part this strengthening of Metro will be at the Province's expense, as explained above. While the existing division of responsibilities will remain the same for the most part, Metro's role within the federation will be bolstered:

- Although its actual powers will not be expanded, Metro's supervisory role in planning and housing will be underscored. While Metro is supposed to have an official plan, in fact the 1966 draft official plan has never been submitted for provincial approval. Under Robarts, the official plan to which all area municipal plans will have to conform, would become a reality. Metro will also be explicitly responsible for setting housing targets in the City and five boroughs, with the power to tell the local municipalities how much housing and what kind to accept; again, while Metro has this power now, it has not forced the issue with the area municipalities.

- Metro's policy-making role in the field of human services will also be enhanced. The Commission recommends that Metro Council be given the responsibility for developing an overall human services policy (including health, education, social services, recreation, and libraries) for Metro Toronto. Metro will have the primary responsibility for research and for the allocation of provincial funds to human services agencies other than area municipalities (Recommendations 16.1 and 16.3). The Commission takes pains to stress that this human services planning will be done "in co-operation with the area municipalities and other service providers" and "does not involve an expansion of the powers of the Metropolitan Council in the delivery of human services at the expense of the area municipalities or of the voluntary sector". However, if implemented, these proposals will constitute a major new role for Metro in the field which has clearly emerged as the major consumer of municipal dollars.

-Metro's role in parking will be expanded by the proposal to give that council the power to establish an overall parking policy, essentially as it relates to the transit system and the regulation of rates for all public and commercial parking facilities. (Recommendations 13.3 and 13.4)

-Metro will assume responsibility and possible direct control (if it so decides) over both transit and police as a result of the recommendations for the transfer of the functions of special purpose bodies (except for school boards) to the relevant elected council. While this will not contribute to a net shift in the balance of power between the two tiers, it will expand Metro's authority.

At the same time, the Commission is emphatic in its intention to provide as much local autonomy to the area municipalities as possible and to preserve the strength of the local councils.

-It recommends retaining the present exclusive responsibilities at the area municipal level--including fire protection, recreation and public health.

-As well, Metro's power to pass zoning by-laws within 150 feet of metropolitan roads is to be eliminated, leaving zoning an exclusive local power. (Recommendation 11.4)

-Just as Metro will gain authority for special purpose bodies by virtue of the proposals, area municipal councils will gain power over such services as public libraries, public health and planning.

Thus the Report is proposing a continuation of the existing system, with some modifications which enlarge Metro's policy-making, co-ordinating and equalizing role.

More important than this co-ordinating role for Metro, is the concomitant change in the electoral system. The Commission argues, correctly in our view, that given this important role that Metro Council will play, direct election of Metro councillors becomes imperative; continued indirect election would constitute an unacceptable violation of the democratic principle of accountability. While the electoral process is discussed in the next section of this Topic, it must be understood that direct election will enhance the status and prestige of Metro councillors, thereby further adding to Metro's power relative to the lower tier.

This shift in the balance of power in favour of Metro causes us some concern. Our concern is a dual one. The first is that local government in Metro may become increasingly centralized so that the benefits which we usually associate with the area municipal level--greater citizen access to and more control over the politicians and bureaucrats, a more important voice in decisions in which one has a stake--will be jeopardized. The second is that suburban interests may dominate those of the City of Toronto. (This issue is discussed in the next section of this Topic.)

Before assessing the proposed electoral system, it is vital that we come to grips with the key issue of Metro's place within the federation. Is the role proposed for Metro by the Commission too powerful? *Would the alternative of a decentralized federation be a more satisfactory model upon which to base the distribution of local government powers?*

We found the concept of a decentralized federation appealing at first glance. Certainly it would eliminate the concerns mentioned above. Under this system the area municipal tier would be dominant and Metro's role would be residual, with its responsibilities limited to only those functions which could not logically be assigned to the local level because of their spillover nature, such as transit, policing and some social services. All other services, including land use planning, housing and most human services would be the exclusive responsibilities of the area municipalities. A decentralized federation with a reduced role for Metro would be consistent with indirect election of Metro councillors by and from the local councils. This system would help to ensure that local interests as reflected in the area municipal councils were protected at the Metro level.

However, we found that there were three convincing arguments against recommending this alternative of a decentralized federation with a residual role for Metro:

-first, as the Commission stressed, despite the differences that exist between neighbourhoods and area municipalities, Metro Toronto does function as a single integrated urban area. In terms of the pattern of travel between home and work, social and family networks, ethnic and cultural ties, shopping and entertainment patterns, the use of hospitals, etc., area municipal boundaries have little meaning.¹ Metro council should therefore be capable of expressing the genuine regional interests which exist in the

1. The outcry against the boundary proposals indicates that the public does care about boundaries, but this sense of identity is not based on activity patterns.

Metro area and of developing urban policy to deal with area-wide issues. This is underlined by the fact that the issues facing local government in Metro have changed, with the challenge no longer being one of coping with rapid physical growth. The planning and human service issues which are emerging as the most important ones in the community obviously affect the entire Metro area.

-second, *Metro does have a valid co-ordinating and equalizing role to play within the federation.* There is a precedent for a Metropolitan role in ensuring equity in service provision. Historically, one of Metro's primary purposes was to redistribute and equalize access to assessment for the financing of hard services and schools. In the human services field this co-ordinating and equalizing role is equally vital. There is a clear need to protect vulnerable social minorities and to provide certain public goods such as assisted housing or group homes which are not now being provided equitably across Metro. Metro also has a legitimate role to play in encouraging minimum standards of service--in health, education, social, recreation, cultural and library services.

-third, *the decentralized federation option would be far less likely to lead to increased autonomy for local government in Metro Toronto.* Practically speaking, we doubt that the Province will consider giving the municipal councils of Metro a degree of sovereignty or devolving some of its power, in human services, protective and transit services for example, unless there is a single strong regional government to receive it. Certainly, the chances of augmenting local government's financial resources and authority are far greater if the upper tier regional government has significant powers and is directly elected.

To sum up, the Bureau approves of the general approach toward the division of responsibilities taken by the Commission. This is not to say that we endorse all of the specific recommendations for each of the different functions. Other agencies and public officials are better equipped to predict the positive and negative impacts which these may have.

While there appear to be certain inconsistencies (in the area of human services, for instance¹), these result from the Commission's attempt to create a two-tier system in which both tiers are strong. To achieve perfect consistency, the jurisdictional division would have to reduce the area of shared powers, assigning responsibilities to one tier or the other. Bearing in mind the rationale for a significant upper tier role, stated above, this would presumably leave Metro with most of the important functions.

The anxiety on the part of municipal public officials about potential conflict and inconsistencies stems, we suspect, from an uncertainty as to how Metro's general mandate to co-ordinate and plan for human services will affect the local delivery level. They are uncertain as to how this co-ordinating power will be exercised. The Bureau recognizes that the sharing of responsibilities in the area of human services--with Metro responsible for "helping to co-ordinate the policies and services of the area administrations"--may result in some overlapping or inconsistency. However, because we do not find the alternative of a clear-cut division of authority to be appropriate, the Bureau agrees with the solution proposed by the Report.

Planning: A Contentious Issue

The planning proposals of the Commission are creating considerable anxiety at the area municipal level. Local public officials see a conflict between Recommendation 11.1, which gives area municipalities the primary responsibility for land use planning, and 11.11 which requires Metro to pass an official plan. It is important to recognize that there is a very real fear on the part of local politicians and their staff of a centralized planning function at Metro.

This fear, which is connected to the question of densities as well as to the provision of public goods like assisted housing, group homes and day care centres, is that the Robarts planning proposals will spell the end to local planning autonomy.²

The Bureau recognizes that there are two sets of legitimate public interests which must be respected in planning decisions: local neighbourhood concerns about the preservation of the quality of life in their communities and the broad social interests. Both are important and, ideally, the political system should adequately represent both sets of interests.

1. The assignment of public health to area municipal councils (Recommendation 18.4) seems to conflict somewhat with the designation of Metro Council as a District Health Council (Recommendation 18.5).
2. See for example, Etobicoke's response to Concept and Objectives (August 1977) and North York Planning Commissioner's response to the Robarts Report (September 14, 1977).

We do find merit in the first two arguments. We agree with the Commission that the present state of affairs violates the principle of accountability. We understand, too, that Metro politicians tend to be overworked with area duties under the present system. This could allow the Metro Chairman and Metro civil servants to wield excessive influence.

If we accept the division of responsibilities proposed by the Commission, with Metro being assigned many of the most important responsibilities, direct election of Metro councillors is a logical and necessary corollary.

One potential disadvantage of direct election of Metro councillors, cited in our 1974 Comment, is that it could permit the Metro representatives to become too remote from local matters. The Commission's recommendation that directly elected Metro councillors be full members of their area municipal councils, except that they be precluded from membership on all committees (Recommendation 5.17), is intended to ensure linkage and coordination between the two tiers. Such a proposal could have negative results; Metro councillors could find themselves in an awkward position, treated as half-members of their local council by their colleagues due to their absence from local committee work. Yet, the need to ensure that they are connected to local attitudes and issues as reflected at the area municipal level convinces us that this recommendation should be accepted as part of the direct election process.

A second potential drawback to direct election is that it will generate conflict between the two tiers to such an extent that the decision-making process will be stalemated.

In the last decade we have witnessed a pattern of conflict between the area municipalities and Metro, notably in the area of planning. The reluctance of the politicians to deal with Metroplan over the past year, and even to debate such reports as Concept and Objectives and Goals and Principles, can be cited as one example of Metro's apparent inability to make policy decisions on sensitive planning issues. Another example, which highlights the emotions underlying the structural issue, is housing. To date only the City has initiated housing action to provide affordable family housing. Metro has adopted two interim housing statements (1975 and 1976) affirming that it should become involved in the provision of assisted housing with the boroughs; but Metro has not forced the issue, largely because of the anticipation of borough opposition.

The Commission is optimistic that by giving Metro Council its own constituency and a clear mandate to deal with area-wide issues--in planning, transportation, human services--the decision-making system will be better able to cope with political conflicts. The critical question is whether the proposed system will create "the appropriate balance of authority" as hoped for in the Report. The answer will not be known until the system is tried. We are in sufficient accord with the proposals to advocate that the experiment be undertaken.

(ii) The Status of the City

A second question arising out of the proposed electoral system is, *will the interests of the City of Toronto be unprotected if the Robarts plan is adopted?*

The Robarts Report does give ample consideration to the position of the City of Toronto within Metro. It acknowledges that the City plays a pivotal role as the core area of the metropolis and is accordingly entitled to special treatment. It seems to recognize, too, that the planning concerns and goals of the central city are different from those of the suburban boroughs.¹ Yet the solution proposed by the Commission is a symbolic one: namely that only the City of Toronto be called a "city" to distinguish it from the boroughs, and that the City's greater population strength be retained, leaving it the largest of the six area municipalities. The latter provision is appropriate, explains the Commission, because

"a single strong local government for the core area is necessary for the healthy political balance of the entire area" (Volume 1, p. 51).²

In real terms, however, the structure recommended in the Report does not preserve the political strength of the City relative to the boroughs on Metro Council.

At present, the City has twelve seats on a 38-member Metro Council (31.6%) and four out of fourteen seats on Metro Executive (28.6%). Under the proposed scheme, the City's representation on Metro Council will be diminished, with only nine out of thirty-three seats or 27% of the seats, despite the fact that the City will have 31% of Metro's population. Since the composition of Metro Executive Committee is left unspecified, it is possible that the City could be totally unrepresented on that body.

The significance of this reduced state of representation will depend on a number of variables. If Metro Council chose to give Metro Executive strong powers, and if few or no City politicians were selected by Council to sit on it, then the proposed scheme could leave the City very vulnerable, allowing its needs to be subordinated to the various local interests of the boroughs. Since the Robarts plan also calls for a somewhat enhanced policy role for Metro, Metro's ability to negatively affect the City's interests could also increase.³

1. This is true of all metropolitan areas.

2. Also see, Volume 2, p. 135.

3. Major road projects probably represent the greatest source of fear the City has of suburban domination. Another example is in the area of parking, where a suburban-dominated Metro Council could set policies which ignored the City's objectives of discouraging the use of the automobile on City streets, or conversely prevent City Council from introducing its own deterrent parking policies.

Another more subtle factor highlights the potentially increased vulnerability of the City of Toronto under the Robarts scheme. The change in boundaries to enlarge both York and East York by adding large portions of North York and part of Scarborough would tend to suburbanize these boroughs and leave the City even more isolated in its nature and character. This would mean that the City as a unit of Metro would stand more alone in the kinds of social and planning concerns it voiced. While members of Metro Council would vote as representatives of their own wards and not necessarily as part of a borough block, a sense of isolation and beleaguement could grow within the City ranks and create an unsatisfactory political climate.

There are three ways that the position of the City at Metro can be safeguarded. One is to reject the Robarts proposal that Metro be made up of six area municipalities and opt instead for a four-city plan which would consolidate the boroughs of York and East York with the City of Toronto. This approach is discussed in the next section of this Topic. Within the framework of a Metro based on six area municipalities, two other methods which have merit are: (a) modifying the ward size and Metro representation as it affects the City of Toronto, and (b) guaranteeing the City a minimum representation on Metro Executive.

(a) Ward Size and Representation of the City on Metro Council

As explained above, the Commission's electoral scheme would give the City of Toronto, with 31% of Metro's population, only 27% of the seats on Metro Council. This deviation from the principle of representation by population results from the proposed composition of Metro Council, with members to be elected directly from districts made up of three adjacent local wards. One of the main purposes is to achieve greater equality in the representativeness across Metro by creating roughly equal electoral districts. Since the six mayors would also sit on Metro Council, the representation ratio is weighted against the largest municipality.

We propose instead that, if six municipalities are retained, two City wards be combined to create a Metro district. This will create twenty local wards in the City, not twenty-four, and ten Metro aldermen. Together with the Mayor, the City will have eleven of thirty-three Metro seats or one-third of the seats. It will also reduce the size of the local council slightly to thirty-one instead of the thirty-three envisaged by the Robarts plan.

While this scheme contradicts the Commission's objective of "greater equality of representativeness", we believe that the greater population densities in the City warrant larger local wards without too serious a compromise. The ward size would average 33,600 people, compared with 26,200 proposed by Robarts. In our view, the principle of representation by population on Metro Council overrides the aim of creating ward sizes of roughly equal size across Metro. Two more seats will not eliminate the problem of the City's vulnerability at Metro, but to a limited extent it will enhance the City's political presence there.

(b) Guaranteed Minimum Representation on Metro Executive

In an effort to further protect the interests of the City at Metro, if the six-municipality plan is retained, the City should be guaranteed a minimum representation on Metro Executive. We suggest that an appropriate percentage would be roughly the equivalent of its population ratio within Metro (31%).

4. The Number and Size of the Units

Early reaction to the Robarts Report focussed not unexpectedly on the proposed boundary changes. While some observers have dismissed boundary adjustments as a minor issue, the recommendations if implemented will affect twelve areas of Metro and over 300,000 people, well over one-seventh of Metro Toronto's total population. The overall picture shows an enlarged York and East York, and a reduced North York and Scarborough, with North York as "the big loser".

Three questions deserve to be asked about the proposed boundary changes:

- (i) Was the Commission's basic rationale for the changes valid?
- (ii) Would another set of internal boundary lines be better?
- (iii) Were the criteria and method used to draw the boundary lines adequate?

(i) Was the Commission's basic rationale for the boundary recommendations valid?

The Commission hoped to achieve two general objectives by its boundary proposals: the creation of a more evenly balanced population distribution among Metro's six area municipalities, while at the same time ensuring that York and East York attained the minimum population base of 200,000 needed to carry out area municipal responsibilities. We support these overall objectives, given the retention of six municipalities.

Obviously, if the Province decided to expand Metro's external boundaries at the expense of the recently created regional governments surrounding Metro, the entire canvas would be different. The case for such an expansion of external boundaries is not without logic. In terms of housing, jobs and transportation, the three main concerns of regional planning, Metro Toronto's boundaries are artificial.

However, the reasons given in Chapter One of the Robarts Report for accepting Metro's external boundaries seem valid. To alter them would undermine the fledgling regional municipalities of Peel, York and Durham. And as a stabilizing urban area in which the physical development is nearing completion, Metro has planning coherence. Above all, we feel that there has to be a limit to the argument that the problem of co-ordinating land use planning to achieve an overview in planning, transportation and population distribution in a continuously spreading metropolitan area can be forever solved by pushing out the boundaries.

Determining the number and size of the area municipalities within Metro is difficult. The retention of the six area municipalities, as modified by the proposed boundary adjustments, is consistent with known criteria for the democratic and efficient provision of local government services. The truth is there is little hard economic proof of what the optimum size should be. The Royal Commission on Local Government in England (known as the Maud Report), published in 1969, is a widely respected and oft-cited source. It concluded that the minimum appropriate size for local government is around 250,000 and the maximum appropriate size is not much more than 1,000,000. The Robarts Commission has modified the Maud Report's minimum figure slightly in using the 200,000 minimum population size as its criterion for achieving effectiveness and economies of scale.

Applying these figures to Metro, we can see that four, five or six cities would, in fact, work. Given the Commission's overall objectives, we are faced with two choices:

either York and East York must be enlarged to an appropriate size or they need to be consolidated into four, or possibly five municipalities. In practical terms, we see the choice as being between six municipalities with revised boundaries as proposed by the Robarts Report and a four-city plan, akin to that proposed by the Goldenberg Report in 1965.¹

1. Two of Commissioner Carl Goldenberg's main recommendations were that the metropolitan system of government in Metro be retained and that the thirteen municipalities be consolidated into four cities. The Province decided to have five boroughs and one city instead.

(ii) Would a four-city plan be better?

Pros

The arguments in favour of adding East York and York to the City of Toronto have substance. First, the prominence of the City would be satisfactorily maintained, which is one of the Commission's objectives. Second, a federation based on four strong municipalities would be more likely to achieve a better internal balance of power between the two levels; if we choose to have a strengthened, directly elected Metro tier, we also should create a countervailing balance at the local level. As discussed earlier in this Topic, the proposed system calls for a sharing of power with both levels involved in many of the functions. Four strong units, including a prominent central city, could create the appropriate balance, permitting both levels to negotiate and resolve differences as equal partners. Third, the four-city plan might cause less disruption. The whole series of boundary adjustments required by the Robarts scheme would be avoided, so that existing communities as well as existing service areas would remain intact. The transfer of York and East York as units into the City would, therefore, presumably be less costly. Fourth, York and East York are compatible in character with the City of Toronto, with comparable densities and population mixes. They, therefore, share similar concerns.

Cons

The chief disadvantage to some is that the consolidation of six area municipalities into four would tend towards eliminating the "community level" of the two tier system, that the units would be getting too big to fulfill the "participation" and "responsiveness" goals of local government. The second major disadvantage is the political opposition that such a proposal might generate from York and East York. Since the Goldenberg four-city plan was rejected, the vested interests against such a change have become more entrenched.

A good case can be made, therefore, for four municipalities, with York and East York being added to the City. While this would give the City a total population of roughly 900,000, this is still well within the acceptable maximum suggested by the Maud Commission. Nor is the population of these three municipalities likely to increase according to past and present demographic patterns.¹ Also, we do not believe that effectiveness, responsiveness and participation will be significantly less

1. The latest census counts for 1976 show that the City has declined in population by 11.1% since 1971, from 712,786 to 633,318. The City, East York and York populations combined totalled just over 880,000 in 1976.

in a unit of 900,000 than of close to 700,000. The reduction in ward size, improved ratio of political representation and the commitment to citizen participation on the part of public officials will ultimately mean more for the enhancement of these goals than the specific size factor. Indeed, there is no evidence that these democratic goals have suffered in the municipalities of Swansea or Forest Hill, since they were annexed by the City ten years ago.

The crucial question is, does the case for change --based on the need to have a single strong government for the central area of Metro and on the desire to create a workable balance of authority between the two tiers--outweigh the loyalties inherent in the present pattern?

The final decision, of course, is up to the Province. In view of the minority government situation and the political touchiness of the boundary issue, the Province may decide to retain six municipalities. Therefore, although the four-city approach has the advantages cited above, we feel obliged to comment upon the boundary revisions proposed in the Report.

(iii) Were the criteria and the method used to draw the boundary lines adequate?

In drawing the new boundaries, the Commission kept four criteria in mind. They were:

- new boundaries should follow natural topographic features;
- existing communities should be allowed to remain intact;
- transfers of population should be accompanied by a corresponding transfer of assessment;
- new boundaries should respect the viability of service areas of fixed physical facilities.

In general, the Bureau has no quarrel with the criteria applied in choosing the boundaries. There are specific instances where one might argue that a traditional demarcation line, such as the crest of a hill, works just as well as a major topographic divider. However, the criteria do make sense.

A more challenging question is whether or not the Commission's method of mapping local communities was adequate. The primary method used consisted of mapping communities according to how community, resident and ratepayer associations delineated their own boundaries. While this approach is a good one, some have argued that ethno-cultural or class definitions of community should have been stressed. For example, the boundary changes would fragment the North York Jewish community¹ as well as the Greek community in the area north of Danforth Avenue. Yet our existing boundary lines divide ethnic groups, one obvious example being St. Clair, between Bathurst and Dufferin, which is overlapped by the Italian community. And, of course, ethnic communities do not remain fixed in one location. To base boundary adjustments on ethnic or class lines alone is fraught with difficulty and no better than the method used.

We have not evaluated the boundary change proposals in detail. Yet, we can see certain obvious discrepancies between some proposed adjustments and the stated internal boundary criteria. Two illustrations are offered:

(a) While acknowledging that North York "contributes most" to the achievement of their objectives for boundary revision, the Commission argues that this loss of population "though not insignificant, is nevertheless temporary". It points to the potential of the Downsview airport site as "an unparalleled development opportunity". Under the Robarts scheme, North York loses 140,000 people and over \$3 billion in taxable assessments. Using the present assessment value, North York will lose 31% of its combined commercial and residential assessments, significantly more than the 25% population loss. Given this loss, we find the Commission's reliance on the development potential of the Downsview site unconvincing. As we explain in a previous study², the federal government will need to phase out and relocate the existing uses on the site so that, at best, it could involve an enormous time lag, of probably ten to fifteen years, before significant development could begin here. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that *the proposed revisions respecting North York do not respect the Commission's guideline that transfers of population be matched by transfers of assessment.*

On the other hand, North York's contention that new facilities will be required because of the revisions needs to be questioned closely. For example, the claim that two new fire stations will be needed should be read in context of the Bureau's own

1. This could weaken the Metro Toronto Jewish community's battle for tax support for non-Judaic studies in Jewish parochial schools, which is being waged with the help of North York. See articles by J. Salzburg in the Canadian Jewish News (July 15 and 22, 1977).

2. "Is Metroplan a Gamble Worth Taking?", BMR Comment #164 (February 1977).

study, *Fire Protection Services in Metro* (November 1975), which found North York to be underserved two years ago. As to the need to replace parkland, community centres, soft-ball diamonds, arenas and such, it must be remembered that losses in facilities will be accompanied by population losses and reduced service costs.

To compute the precise losses--in assessment and facilities--against the gains from reduced service costs and fewer people will take detailed study. Efforts are now underway to compute the financial impact of the proposed adjustments.¹

(b) *The proposal to shift the northwestern section of Forest Hill, north of Eglinton between Bathurst and the W.R. Allen Expressway, from Toronto to York seems to conflict with two of the stated criteria. This area, containing some 5,000 people, is historically connected with the rest of Forest Hill, which is a discrete community and was a municipality of its own until ten years ago. The sense of attachment to and common interest with the rest of Forest Hill and the City is very strong. The road connections to the north and west from this section are limited to two local streets. The W.R. Allen Expressway, which in part follows the current boundary, would seem to be a more natural dividing line than Bathurst Street, though in this case it would have to be modified at the southern part so as not to isolate two blocks of this community. Finally, in both ethnic and socio-economic terms, this area is far less compatible with the York community adjacent to it.*

There are other anomalies. The triangular area bounded by Highway 401, the Don Valley and Wilson Avenue would seem to fit better into the City than as part of North York. The transfer of the whole of Don Mills area to East York does not break up small communities, but the attempt to amalgamate two visibly distinct communities seems artificial; the present division by the Don River system seems more appropriate.

On the basis of these examples, we suggest that the case for the boundary revisions made by the Commission is not convincing. While we appreciate and agree with the underlying rationale for enlarging York and East York, if six municipalities are retained, it is evident that more study is needed before a new set of internal boundaries is imposed.

1. Both North York and York councils have hired consulting firms to study the impact of the proposed boundary changes on their boroughs in detail.

5. Financial Resources

It must be noted at the outset that our response in this section addresses the issue of *revenue sources* of the Metro system, not expenditures. While the background report prepared on public finance does some expenditure analysis, the final Report does not deal with expenditure in Metro in detail.

Despite the Commission's assurances that "local government spending in Metropolitan Toronto has not been increasing at a rate greater than the ability of its citizens to sustain it" (V. 2, p. 172), the Bureau is concerned about the financial health of the Metro system. Because the Commission's research on expenditures was limited to gross spending patterns related to property tax, we question their conclusion.

In fact, Metro was only able to hold the property tax rate to a reasonable level because of provincial grants. Since 1974 this support by the Province has been reduced and Metro's financial picture has changed. Very strict spending controls have been required. In light of this changing context, the Bureau, along with many others, will be examining government expenditures and exploring means by which municipalities can improve the cost effectiveness of their services.

The Commission's recommendations for financing local government in Metro Toronto have elicited strong criticism. The keystone of the financial proposals is contained in recommendation 10.4, which calls for replacing the existing grant system with "three-year cost-sharing arrangements".

In making this recommendation, the Commission acknowledges that Metro Toronto, like most local governments in Canada, suffers from a "fiscal imbalance". This means simply that there is a shortfall between Metro's "own" source revenues and Metro's expenditures. This shortfall is currently covered by conditional and/or unconditional grants from the provincial government.

The main issue addressed by the Report is whether the present system of financing local government in Metro, namely a reliance on the property tax as the main revenue source, supplemented by provincial grants to meet the shortfall, should continue. And if reform is needed, what solution to the problem of fiscal imbalance should be adopted. The two broad alternatives examined are:

- (a) expanding Metro's tax base with additional revenue sources and
- (b) a reform of the provincial grants system.¹

1. The third possible solution to the general problem of municipal fiscal imbalance is a provincial assumption of responsibility for local services. This option is, of course, not relevant here.

To appreciate fully the difficulty and complexity of the issue of financing local government we must be aware of the constitutional, historical and political realities:

- local governments lack a constitutional base of their own, and are forbidden by the Province from levying direct taxes other than the property tax; therefore, they are left with property taxes and user charges (such as water and sewage levies) as their two main "own" source revenues;
- municipalities have been seeking additional revenue sources for at least four decades¹; this quest culminated in efforts by municipalities to institute a system of tri-level negotiation, the main purpose of which was to obtain a redistribution of tax resources among the three levels of government. Despite the fact that a Task Force on Public Finance was created to develop a common data base, despite the release of the Deutsch Report (April 1976) and despite the aggressive response of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the tri-level process seems to be an abortive one;
- the current political and economic climate is dominated by the provincial determination to reduce spending and balance Ontario's budget. In light of the recent announcement by the Treasurer of Ontario to the PMLC in September, the possibility of the Province's agreeing to an expansion of the municipal tax base for Metro seems remote. At the same time, Mr. McKeough's latest reinterpretation of the "Edmonton Commitment" has increased municipal suspicion of provincial financial support and added fuel to the demand for tax sharing.²

1. In a recent study of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities the Bureau reviewed newspaper reports of CFMM conferences since 1937 and found that the quest for revenues has dominated the agenda year after year. See *"The Federation of Canadian Municipalities: In Search of Credibility"*, BMR Comment #161 (October 1976).

2. The Edmonton Commitment was a promise made at a 1974 tri-level conference that the provincial government of Ontario would increase the transfer of funds to local government at the rate of growth in the total provincial revenue. Since then, the "commitment" has suffered two reinterpretations, the latest occurring on September 16. At that time, Mr. McKeough redefined the formula to show that Ontario had over-paid the municipalities. The result was a limiting of the increase in this year's grants to 6.3%.

The fact that a basic reform of the municipal tax system has not been achieved indicates the extent of the challenge. Some positive steps toward reform have been taken. These include the introduction of the property tax credit system in 1973, aimed at reducing the regressivity of the property tax, and the growth in provincial aid for certain services, notably education. The Province claims that the proposed market value reassessment, if implemented, will be a significant reform of the property tax system.¹

However, the Commission states that regardless of how the property tax is reformed, Metro Toronto will need additional sources of revenue to meet its needs, beyond increases in the property tax. In opting for a reform of the grant system, the Commission has rejected the alternative course of giving Metro access to the major tax fields.²

Before rejecting this alternative, the Commission examined several possible sources of additional municipal revenue, with particular attention to the two most potentially important sources: a municipal income tax and a municipal sales tax. It found that the disadvantages associated with such taxes outweighed the merits. It concluded further that the property tax, the traditional source of municipal revenue, has been unjustly maligned, that its regressivity has been exaggerated, that it does have growth potential if market value assessment is put into effect on a regular basis, and that it has not been fully exploited in Metro. We would add that as a very visible tax and one which is politically costly to raise, the property tax does serve to restrain municipal spending. The Commission's recommendation that the property tax be retained as the mainstay of the revenue system is in line with the latest opinion on local finance. But we would point out that there are practical and political difficulties in keeping reassessment up to date.³ In our opinion this modifies the Commission's portrayal of the property tax as a growth tax.

The proponents of additional independent municipal revenue sources do not base their case solely on the alleged regressive effect of the property tax. They emphasize two basic principles: that the level of government which finally spends the funds ought to be responsible for raising them; and that the property tax, which was originally intended to finance services related to property, should not be called upon to finance the so-called human services such as education, health, libraries and welfare.

1. Note that the Board of Education for the City of Toronto questions this provincial claim. In its brief to the Province (Oct. 21, 1976), the Board argues that the property tax will remain regressive for citizens in the core area of the City, notwithstanding the cushioning effects of the property tax credit program (p. 7).

2. The concept of user charges was not fully explored by the Commission. The Bureau feels that they offer considerable potential as an alternative revenue source.

3. Witness the political and practical problems associated with the current effort to implement reassessment.

The present system, of course, violates both of these principles.

By its recommendation to eliminate most conditional grants (10.3), the Report seeks to overcome one of the main objections to provincial grants, namely that they distort local spending priorities. However, as a recent report from Metro's Deputy Planning Commissioner to Metro's Special Committee on the Robarts Report points out, the deconditionalization of grants would be both difficult to achieve in practice and create a problem of fiscal equity for municipalities across the province. Above all, "the unconditional grant route does nothing to achieve accountability at the local level".¹

How can one really evaluate the case put forward by the Commission against the tax-sharing solution and in favour of continued revenue-sharing accompanied by grant reform? Although the literature on the subject of municipal financing is vast, the experts themselves do not agree as to the appropriate solution, beyond the fact that urban municipalities need some additional source of revenue.

We have three main observations:

*The revenue-sharing option as proposed, that is based on negotiated three-year agreements, seems to leave Metro as dependent as ever on provincial handouts; while deconditionalizing grants would allow greater discretion and flexibility, it would not increase local autonomy. *This proposal, therefore, seems inconsistent with the guiding principle in the Report that Metro should be assured of "access to stable sources of revenue commensurate with its responsibilities".*² For this reason a revenue-sharing plan akin to that adopted in Manitoba in 1975, involving the direct transfer of an agreed upon portion of provincial income tax revenues to local governments, has some appeal.

*The idea of three-year negotiated agreements presents practical and political difficulties from both the municipal and provincial standpoints. From the municipal side, the Province would appear to have an overwhelming advantage in the negotiation process. "Negotiation" usually involves bargaining between two parties, each of whom has something to offer the other; but in this case the "negotiations" would be largely one-sided with Metro asking, cap-in-hand, for provincial concurrence with Metro and area municipal estimates. The only bargaining lever which governments of Metro would hold would be to raise the property tax and lay the blame at the provincial doorstep.

1. Memo dated September 1, 1977.

2. We understand that absolute local autonomy in the fiscal sense is an ideal. Even the government of Ontario depends in part on transfers of revenue from Ottawa. However, the proposed solution seems to leave Metro more vulnerable than the principle would tolerate.

On the other hand, one wonders why the Province, for its part, would want to give up conditional grants in favour of a three-year commitment. Such a move would have the advantage of reducing the annual friction with Metro. But it would eliminate the control which the Province now has over how, where and when the funds are spent. It could also create problems of equity and disparity of service since Metro alone would be free to determine the level of general services, including human services.

*The case presented in the Report against some form of tax-sharing is not convincing. Indeed, the Commission's own background report is quite positive on the idea of a municipal income tax, in conjunction with greater use of the property tax. The background study concluded that of all alternative revenue sources studied,

"a municipal income tax, in the form of a surtax on the existing income tax base, would provide the greatest amount of equity, create the fewest number of distortions and certainly be no more expensive to administer than the other alternatives considered" (p. 167).¹

The Commission's rejection of tax-sharing using the municipal income tax alternative rests on three main points.

The first is that the need to use federal tax collection machinery would reduce the fiscal accountability benefit of such a tax because the tax would not be apparent to the public. We do not agree that Metro taxpayers would be unable to perceive that part of their income tax was being levied by the municipality. After all, they currently cope with being taxed by two jurisdictions on one form, just as at the local level they cope with school board and local government levies on one form.

The second is that a municipal income tax would pose severe administrative and equity problems.² Yet, neither the Report nor the background study on which it is based demonstrate that the costs and difficulties are insurmountable. And because of the inevitable time lag involved in regular re-assessment of the property tax, a municipal income tax seems to be a more equitable and more practical means of providing access to a growth tax.

1. Harry M. Kitchen, Public Finance in Metropolitan Toronto (Royal Commission on Metropolitan Toronto, July 1977).

2. By "equity" the Report is referring to equity between citizens living in local jurisdictions within and outside of Metro.

Certainly, the contention that a municipal income tax would encourage people and businesses to locate outside Metro's boundaries is not proved.

The third point is that unless fairly high rates of taxation were set, the new taxing sources would not yield enough money to overcome the fiscal imbalance problem. Yet, if we use the charts in the background report¹, we can see that a 1% income tax (which is not exceedingly high) would generate a substantial amount of revenue. In 1974 it would have yielded \$122 million (excluding an income tax on corporations) and eliminated 40% of the total shortfall including education as stated by the Commission (p. 181, V. 2). If one were to exclude education costs the 1% income tax would have covered 87% of the shortfall. We question, therefore, whether a municipal income tax based on a 1% rate² would produce alarming out-migration effects.

To sum up, the financing scheme proposed by Roberts to supplement the property tax seems like an interesting idea which should be explored, rather than a carefully studied solution to the problems of financing the new system of government. Since the revenue structure is a critical component of the system, especially in light of the proposed Metro takeover of important provincial responsibilities, we find this to be a shortcoming of the Report. Moreover, the arguments put forward against some form of tax-sharing and, specifically, the idea of a municipal income tax, are not persuasive.

The Bureau has not done sufficient study to be able to make a final recommendation on whether Metro should enter the direct taxation field rather than seek an improved system of revenue-sharing. We appreciate that such a step would constitute a revolutionary change in provincial-municipal fiscal arrangements. We agree with the Commission that provincial financial support of local government functions is consistent with the Province's obligation to help equalize the financial resources of Ontario municipalities. If a tax-sharing approach were adopted for Metro Toronto, the idea of a municipal income tax as a surtax on the federal income tax appears to be the most viable alternative.

1. Harry M. Kitchen, *op. cit.* (pp. 124 and 173).

2. One or one and one-half per cent (1% or 1½%) has been the typical rate applied in American cities.

If we consider the central themes of the Roberts Report--the uniqueness of Metro Toronto as an urban government, the coming of age of Metro Toronto's councils as governments in their own right, Metro's increased responsibilities for services of benefit to people, rather than property, the concomitant need for access to revenue sources that will grow with service demands and the expansion of the economy--tax-sharing¹ seems the most logical, consistent and practical solution.

However, if revenue-sharing is the route chosen, the arrangement must be designed to offer security to Metro Toronto. It should be based on a formula which is long-term and guaranteed, not subject to the kind of repeated reinterpretation which has characterized the Edmonton Commitment.

Summary

The Roberts Report aims at strengthening municipal autonomy for local government in Metro Toronto and at improving accountability by focussing decision-making power in elected councils. To achieve these two key objectives, the Commission proposes a continuation of the two-tier federated system, with some changes which are expected to create a healthy balance of power between the two levels.

The Commission's proposals with respect to increasing autonomy are commendable, namely the general powers to legislate, to delegate responsibility, and control over all special purpose bodies except for school boards. They offer significant potential for improving the capacity of Metro's municipal councils to govern. They should be granted by the Province. Indeed, they give the provincial government the opportunity to demonstrate that its avowed commitment to greater local autonomy--a chief justification for the introduction of regional government in Ontario--is more than a rhetorical one.

At the same time municipal politicians and civil servants must be willing to shoulder the responsibilities inherent in these powers if they are to shed their traditionally limited role. These new powers will involve extensive municipal reorganization if the new tools of government are to be used fully and effectively.

1. This alternative is tax sharing in the sense that the senior levels of government would have to agree to the rate.

The main discordant element in the proposed system is the approach to financing it. The finance recommendations are the least satisfactory in the Report, since they seem to be at odds with the Commission's own precept that:

"no system of government can be considered healthy if it does not have ready access to stable sources of revenue commensurate with its responsibilities" (V. 2, p. 163).

A tax-sharing approach would seem to be a more logical and consistent solution in the context of the Report. If some form of revenue-sharing is decided upon, the arrangement should be based on a formula which is long-term and guaranteed, not subject to continual reinterpretation designed to reduce the amount of funds transferred.

The Commission's proposals affecting the Metro/area municipal relationship raise some concerns. The Bureau supports the recommendations for the proposed division of powers and for the direct election of Metro councillors, with two important modifications:

i) that the potential strength of the City of Toronto relative to the boroughs on Metro Council be better protected. This can be accomplished by modifying the ward size and representation to Metro, as suggested, together with guaranteeing the City minimum representation on Metro Executive (equivalent to its population ratio within Metro). Another solution, but one that appears politically difficult, would be to increase the size of the City beyond what is proposed, to a maximum of 900,000 people, by adding York and East York to the City.

ii) that Metropolitan Toronto not be required to adopt an "official plan", but depend on planning policy statements, as proposed by the Planning Act Review, to influence local land use planning and accommodate area-wide objectives.

With respect to the proposed internal boundaries, although sympathetic to the Report's underlying rationale, the Bureau does not find the Commission's proposed revisions satisfactory. Further study is needed before a new set of internal boundaries is imposed.

How will the proposed system work if implemented? Will it achieve the desired "appropriate balance of authority"?

The proposed system of decision-making and power-sharing for local government in Metro Toronto has risks. The essential area-wide interests --in providing for the common needs of the citizens of Metro and for co-ordinated overall planning, in ensuring some equality of services and protecting vulnerable minorities, and in allowing for more municipal autonomy for Metro's local governments--dictate a somewhat strengthened role for Metro. The legitimate and vital local community interests must also be respected. The Commission is hopeful that their plan will be workable, conducive to the expression of political conflict and its healthy resolution. Since the political dynamic of the system is yet untried, only time will provide the answer.

Still we are satisfied, in general, that the approach recommended by the Commission is suited to the emerging needs of Metro's citizens and would be a positive step in the evolution of metropolitan government in Toronto.

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