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## Regional special purpose bodies for transportation and transit in Canada: case studies of Translink and Metrolinx

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Regional special purpose bodies are becoming an increasingly common form of institutional arrangement across many metropolises. This paper examines regional special purpose bodies for transportation and transit provision in Canada, through the case studies of Translink (in Greater Vancouver) and Metrolinx (in Greater Toronto and Hamilton). The adoption of regional special purpose bodies has important implications for the regional political economy, impacting resource allocation, decision-making, accountability, and urban form – and reflecting an important institutional trend in the ongoing politics of metropolitanization.

On remarque que les organismes régionaux spéciaux deviennent une forme de plus en plus courante d'arrangement institutionnel dans de nombreuses métropoles. Ce document passe en revue les différents types d'organismes régionaux spéciaux pour le transport et le transit de la fourniture au Canada, par les études des cas de Translink (le Grand Vancouver) et Metrolinx (le Grand Toronto et Hamilton). L'adoption d'organismes régionaux spéciaux a d'importantes répercussions pour l'économie politique régionale, conséquences sur l'allocation des ressources, la prise de décisions, la responsabilisation et la forme urbaine — qui reflète une tendance institutionnelle importante dans les politiques de métropolisation en cours.

The post-war growth of metropolitan regions—with their new levels of social, economic and political complexity—presents a challenge for effective governance. Simply put: as a city expands outside existing administrative units, how are planning and provision of services to be enabled there? A regional special purpose body (RSPB)—created by local, state/provincial or federal governments and typically structured as an agency, board, commission, Crown Corporation, or network—is one possibility.<sup>1</sup> From one metropolitan region to the next, RSPBs differ substantially in terms of their geographic scale, their institutional composition, and their policy or service delivery focus.

RSPBs have their advocates. Some see RSPBs as flexible institutions that

fill in gaps in local administration without requiring formal reorganization of local government. Some argue that RSPBs are better placed than local government to meet planning or service delivery needs due to their functional specialization.<sup>2</sup> Some like the way that RSPBs have also been structured to address allocative or redistributive concerns across a regional area.<sup>3</sup> Some think that RSPBs move the level of decision making away from local politics towards a platform where the 'regional good' can be given greater priority. In this way RSPBs provide a level of coordination and collaboration that would be otherwise difficult to achieve across metropolitan regions where there are entrenched interests. RSPBs can help shift decision-making away from ward-centric and parochial local politics and

offer a counter-weight to planning decisions dominated by business-led regimes.<sup>4</sup> Still others advocate the adoption of such bodies arguing that cities—as important nodes in an international system—need empowerment to adjust their boundaries and the financial resources to maintain economic competitiveness.<sup>5</sup> In the case of transportation and transit provision and land use considerations, still others advocate RSPBs as a promising institutional mechanism to reduce urban sprawl and traffic congestion – particularly for those RSPBs that are multi-modal in scope.

RSPBs are an emerging form of multilevel governance; one where there are task specific jurisdictions, intersecting memberships, multiple governance levels and flexible institutional design.<sup>6</sup> Regional special purpose bodies add complexity to regional governance. While they arise as a response to complexity, they also increase the complexity of the governance process; more actors are involved, and lines of accountability may become unclear. They require coordination between diverse actors and their constituent political units across the metropolitan region. Their adoption raises issues concerning the allocation of resources in a metropolitan region, the appropriate political and administrative units for the provision of such services and policy development, and the structure of decision-making and accountability.

### Background, aim, and structure

While there is a growing body of literature on the potential benefits and uses of RSPBs in metropolitan regions, few studies analyze how they have in fact been adopted and implemented in different contexts. This is particularly true in the case of Canada where regional special purpose bodies are less common and a newer phenomenon. In this paper, I examine how RSPBs have developed as an institutional strategy for regional governance in the areas of urban transportation and planning. Specifically, I examine adoptions in two of Canada large metropolitan regions: Translink in Greater Vancouver

**Table 1.** Translink and Metrolinx compared

	<i>Translink</i>	<i>Metrolinx</i>
Established:	1998	2006
Geography:	Greater Vancouver Regional District	Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area
Revenue in 2010 (in \$000s):	1,199,678	549,175
Employees:	6,790 (2010 headcount)	2,345 (2011 headcount and vacancies)

and Metrolinx in Greater Toronto and Hamilton. These organizations command large budgets, are responsible for major infrastructure projects, and are expanding their revenues using a variety of novel instruments. They are institutions that impact quality of life for residents, facilitate goods movement and influence urban form and development. The scale, scope and policy concentrations of these entities are relatively new in Canada and can be expected to influence local government reform elsewhere in the country. My purpose here is to examine the prospects and problems of RSPBs as evidenced in these two case studies.

The research is exploratory and inductive. I present a narrative that interprets information collected from the perspective of historical institutionalism. I draw evidence from long-interviews with 33 key stakeholders and content analysis of primary documents (e.g., Government Acts, policy documents, planning documents, public records of board and council meetings, and Hansard debates) and secondary documents such as government and practitioner studies/reports, academic literature, public histories and a review of media content.

In this paper, I present case studies of Translink and Metrolinx, apply historical institutionalism to interpret incremental institutional change, and draw conclusions. Through the application of historical institutionalism we see common trajectories across the two case studies wherein their governance structures are reconceived surrounding similar debates on the merits of political versus corporate

board representation. Herein is a tension as these entities struggle with their public versus private nature. Further, through application of historical institutionalism, I present a common narrative in the two cases studies focused on how these RSPBs position themselves within the regional political economy and navigate multi-level government relations. This research is framed by historical institutionalism and focuses on the historical/political context through which these entities were adopted as a way of understanding institutional evolution and change. The adoption of RSPBs cannot be considered as whole-scale institutional change. Rather their adoption is conceived of as an institutional shift – an opening up of political space at the regional level. The concept of layering (where new rules are attached to existing ones) is used to structure interpretations of incremental institutional change where the institutional structures that are finally adopted are understood in the context of existing political and institutional constraints.<sup>7</sup>

This paper adds to research on the construction of regional political spaces, emerging institutional forms and implications for urban/regional governance. I focus on a specific type of institutional shift in urban/regional governance, its causes and its consequences. Ongoing processes of urbanization make regional coordination a pressing issue – particularly in the area of transportation, which is of great importance to the environmental sustainability, social inclusivity, economic development, and liveability of city regions. The adoptions of RSPBs are symptomatic of the recognition that

aspects of planning are best addressed at a regional scale. They reflect an institutional evolution towards a regional ‘policy need,’ which raises the question of what such coordination at the regional scale means for the structure of politics in the longer term.

### **RSPBs for transportation in Canada: Case studies of Translink and Metrolinx**

Translink and Metrolinx are relatively new institutional phenomena in the Canadian context, just thirteen years and seven years old respectively at the time of this writing. See Table 1. Metrolinx, established in 2006, is a Crown Agency with a corporate board and no local government representation.<sup>8</sup> It is accountable to the Government of Ontario through its Minister of Transportation. Metrolinx partners with local governments, but it retains sole ownership and control of any transit assets throughout their life. In 2009 Metrolinx was merged with Go Transit, the interregional transit provider.<sup>9</sup> Metrolinx is responsible for creating an integrated, multi-modal transportation system, delivering transportation services (e.g., GO Transit and Presto card) and for creating regional planning and infrastructure investment strategies (which must be prepared and approved under the *Places to Grow Act 2005*). Translink, established in 1998 by the Government of British Columbia, is a regional transportation authority but not an agent of government; it has a corporate board and, above that, a council of mayors of the region responsible for budgetary approvals.<sup>10</sup> Translink’s purpose is two-fold: i) to move people and goods and ii) to support the regional growth strategy, and the air quality objectives and economic development of the transportation service region (SCBCTA Act 2007). Prior to the creation of Translink, transit in the GVRD was provided by the provincial crown agency BC Transit.

These two RSPBs have attracted national attention. They are regularly mentioned in the national media. Governments elsewhere in Canada are

looking with interest at how these RSPBs develop and how they might be applied in other contexts. They are treated as distinctive entities by federal departments such as Transport Canada, who meet with them separately on issues of mutual interest.<sup>11</sup> Despite their relative infancy, they are already very influential in the regions in which they operate. They command large resources (through capital contributions, taxes, levies and fares), have multi modal mandates,<sup>12</sup> and have strong supporting legislation and coordination with land use planning. Further, the broadness of their mandates means that they impact upon and influence the direction of economic development, urban form, environmental sustainability, quality of life and, in general, accessibility and affordability of movement across metropolitan regions for both goods and people.

I present case studies of these entities in two sections. The first section outlines their historical development. The second section discusses the impact of these entities on regional governance in terms of propositions drawn from literature on the subject.

#### **Historical development and context**

From the perspective of historical institutionalism, the two RSPBs developed similarly. Leading up to the creation of these entities, in both regions the coordination of regional transportation was raised as an important issue through various reports and recommendations from provincial and local governments, business associations and think tanks. Through these debates, the 'problems' of the present systems were articulated and institutional solutions were proposed.

Here, 'problem definition' in each case had multiple, sometimes overlapping, focuses as evident in content analysis of core documents leading up to their formation. Advocates presented functional arguments based on a need for reduced car congestion, more compact urban form, increased transit services, better infrastructure and transportation links to move goods and people. A second focus—

strong economic rationales—was also prevalent in these debates; here, the need for policy action is centered on the competitive cities thesis and a need for world-class infrastructure to support economic development. A third focus—environmental rationales—put priority on environmental sustainability and its links to quality of life. A fourth focus—on articulation of a social equity perspective to address regional spatial inequalities—was the least prevalent in this discourse. Common to all of these focuses is an understanding that metropolitan regions require mechanisms for coordination across boundaries. The importance of city regions has raised 'regionalism' and the construction of regional institutions to the fore of Canadian urban politics. The importance of city regions has raised "regionalism" and the construction of regional institutions to the fore Canadian urban politics and has increased the scale of policy considerations.

The final institutional structures that were adopted in both case studies were provincial creations and were given strong provincial support and funding in the early years of operation (significant capital contributions and strong operating legislation). In BC, Translink was created under the NDP provincial government of Glen Clark (in 1998); in Ontario, Metrolinx was created under the Liberal provincial government of Dalton McGuinty (in 2006).

Upon creation, both entities were tasked with creating a strategic transportation plan for their respective regions and this was done with locally elected representatives appointed to their board, and in consultation with key stakeholders. This period is important because it set a framework for future developments and, critically, cemented local support for the organization's operations.

Once these strategic plans were created, each case study shifted to a corporate board. This occurred through provincial legislative changes to Translink's Act in 2007, and to Metrolinx's Act in 2009. Amidst the debates that emerged around these

governance shifts, some have expressed that the adoption of a corporate board is necessary for implementation. For others it has been interpreted as a way for provincial and business interests to dominate regional politics in this area. In both cases, the respective provincial governments express that that local politics 'gets in the way' of implementation and that the adoption of a corporate board is deemed more efficient and effective.

Finally, under the corporate boards of the two RSPBs the task have now turned to expanding the existing set of revenue tools away from a reliance on government contributions and basic fare box revenue. This task, to be undertaken in the coming years, will be politically contentious and a true test of the organizations' ability to navigate divisive politics. It will raise the profile of these organizations and may bring into question the legitimacy of non-elected corporate boards for such decision-making.

#### **Impact of RSPBs on regional governance**

Several propositions can be drawn from the relatively limited literature on RSPBs. In support of RSPBs, advocates argue that they will promote regional coordination in specific policy spheres,<sup>13</sup> increase planning capacity,<sup>14</sup> create a platform to consider the 'regional good',<sup>15</sup> create functional specialization,<sup>16</sup> increase resources in their areas of specialization,<sup>17</sup> more equitably allocate or distribute resources across a region,<sup>18</sup> offer a counterweight to planning decisions dominated by business-led regimes,<sup>19</sup> and may insulate regional decision-making from accountability.<sup>20</sup> Through the two case studies of Metrolinx and Translink many of these propositions are exemplified. Each is discussed below.

Translink and Metrolinx have indeed promoted regional coordination, increased planning capacity in their respective areas, created a platform for regional issues, and are functionally specialized in the area of transportation. Regional coordination has been supported by the development of regional transportation plans in both

cases. In Greater Vancouver, the regional transportation plan is meant to be consistent with the broader Livable Regions Plan of the GVRD, while in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), Metrolinx's transportation plan is part of the Province's growth strategy (*Places to Grow Act 2005*). These plans are nested, with local government plans needing to conform to that of the regional transportation strategy and above that, the regional growth strategies. In the case of Toronto, the regional growth strategy and the regional transportation plan both fall under the purview of the province. In Greater Vancouver, the 2007 revisions to the SCBCTA Act removed the direct link to the GVRD in Translink's governance structure and some interviewees have expressed that they feel there is a disconnect now between the two processes. The regional growth strategy is determined by local government consensus through the GVRD where Translink is also treated as a local government stakeholder in the process. The updating of the growth strategy requires consultation among all of the actors and the resulting document is one built on compromise and negotiation. In the case of the GTHA, it provincially-directed (through consultation with municipalities and districts as part of the process). When it comes down to the implementation of specific projects, there remains a great deal of negotiation between the various partners. Both the Richmond-Airport-Vancouver line (or Canada line) in Greater Vancouver and the Airport-Rail-Link in Greater Toronto are examples of how politics of large infrastructure are negotiated in practice (Siemiatycki 2006). Both RSPBs have increased regional coordination on transportation issues, but in different ways, and their organizational structure impacts the connection between various interests.

Related to mechanisms for regional coordination, both entities have increased planning capacity, created a platform for regional issues, and are functionally specialized. These capacities are related to the proposition that RSPBs increase the number of re-

sources dedicated to their policy areas. The creation of these bodies signifies a focus on the importance of regional, multi modal transportation to economic development, quality of life, and environmental sustainability in their respective city regions. It raises the profile of these regional issues. Both entities have expanded their functions, revenue and employment since their creation. Their sheer size and their policy focus give them leverage over other bodies. As expressed in an interview with Transport Canada:

"I think we will see more of these entities in Canada. It will help with transportation. I think they will be more common in growing urban areas – and especially the bigger the cities. If you don't have an entity like this – then the province will do it and they are not good at doing it."<sup>21</sup>

Provincial Ministries of Transportation have a very different focus than that of these RSPBs. It was expressed in interviews with Transport Canada that they tend to be more interested in the expansion of the highway and roads system.<sup>22</sup> RSPBs, because of their functional specialization, are better able to concentrate resources in their policy areas.

Evidence of the proposition that RSPBs more equitably allocate or distribute resources across a region is unclear. Interviewees from suburban municipalities in both case studies felt that their areas were underserved and that the location of resources was inequitable. Large-scale transportation projects are ranked according to priority and many regional areas will not see the benefits of these investments. Further, as Roger Keil points out, these entities are often focused on specific nodal development; in so doing, they overlook parts of the 'in-between' city.<sup>23</sup> Equitability could be interpreted in a number of ways: equity in terms of forwarding the goals of social inclusivity or equity in terms of geographically dispersed services and investments. Neither entity operates in this manner. Their investments are done strategically and social inclusivity is not an overtly expressed goal of either organization.

What about the proposition that RSPBs may offer a counter-weight to planning decisions dominated by business-led regimes?<sup>24</sup> In the two case studies, I see engagement with businesses, but at a regional level. This engagement does not resemble that of a 'business regime'. The inclusion of business interests is important to the mandates of Metrolinx and Translink, particularly through their goods movement strategies. However, this is often project specific – e.g., work with the shipping industries on projects related to the Asia Pacific Gateway in Greater Vancouver. In interviews with Metrolinx and Translink executives, both conceded that engagement with the business community is underdeveloped at present and an area that they would be focusing on much more in the future as they further develop their goods movement strategies.<sup>25</sup> Further, both organizations have transit-oriented mandates and support nodal development. This is a different logic than the business-led regime (urban growth machine paradigm).

Finally, what about the proposition that RSPBs can reduce accountability? This theme was prevalent in both case studies. Frisken explains:

"The special purpose authority tends to be favoured by those who want to ensure the 'businesslike' operation of special services (in other words, to make a service more financially independent of government, or to distance it from direct interference by elected politicians) while retaining some political control through the appointment and budget review process. Because the authority's members are usually appointed rather than elected, however, this approach is often criticized as an undemocratic way of providing city regional services."<sup>26</sup>

This is undoubtedly a major implication of the adoption of these bodies, which can be lessened or heightened depending on their governance composition (e.g., the inclusion of locally-elected and then appointed board members).

Citizens struggle to relate to these entities. Regional institutions are simply that much more distanced from local, neighbourhood and community issues. Further, RSPBs are difficult for citizens to relate to due to their hybrid

structures. They are corporate structures that deliver services to clients, and yet they are much more. They play an important role in growth management and land use and they are in the process of expanding their sets of revenue tools. They are at once beholden to provincial direction, and yet coordinate closely with local governments. When citizen groups attempt to lobby these entities, they often do so at multiple scales. For example, the Clean Train Coalition in Greater Toronto has lobbied local government councillors, Members of Provincial Parliament, as well as the board of Metrolinx on the issue of rail corridor electrification. The collaborative nature of RSPBs means that there is dispersed agency and many actors may influence policy direction. Given this, chains of accountability are also murkier than in a traditional bureaucracy.

In our two case studies, political and bureaucratic accountability is expressed differently. Political accountability in Translink's case is more dispersed between local governments and the provincial government than is the case for Metrolinx. Related to this, local governments contribute to the entity through property taxation and by allocating their portions of the Gas Tax Fund to the entity. Transportation is certainly an important provincial issue. But it is rarely a major focus of electoral campaigns. Opportunities to influence the political direction of RSPBs through provincial elections can be expected to be less than at the local level where transportation is a major focus. Therefore, RSPBs that are highly provincially directed, such as Metrolinx, have less political engagement with citizens through democratic accountability.

Apart from political and bureaucratic forms of accountability, these entities engage with professional, performance related and deliberative forms of accountability. As specialist or expert organizations, both Metrolinx and Translink open themselves up to "professional accountability" through expert scrutiny and peer review.<sup>27</sup> These entities have a great deal of internal expertise and also hire outside consultants. As service delivery

organizations, they are focused on output measurements and are client centered. This forms a large component of their reporting wherein client feedback is solicited and incorporated.

For the adoption of large-scale projects it is deliberative accountability that becomes particularly important. Deliberative accountability refers to public debate, transparency and access to information where the institutional features of such accountability are described as interactive, open and public.<sup>28</sup> Both Metrolinx and Translink have public consultation strategies, with Translink's being the more developed of the two through its "Be Part of the Plan" portal.<sup>29</sup> Metrolinx's quarterly meetings are now public and meeting summaries are available in most cases. Similarly, meeting minutes are made available for Translink's board meetings and the public has the opportunity to present at any of its meetings (of which six are held a year). Key reports, white and green papers are all made available on both organizations' websites. However, the regional level presents an inherent difficulty when it comes to citizen engagement – and this is particularly true as it relates to deliberative accountability. As new institutions, the relationships between these entities and citizens are also new and evolving. The hybridity and complexity of these organizations, with their multiple subsidiary companies, complicates these interactions.

Each of the accountabilities that has been discussed here has a different structure or logic: political accountability operates through the structure of a democratic state; bureaucratic accountability through hierarchical and legal bureaucracies; professional accountability through expert organizations; performance accountability through a market structure; and, deliberative accountability through the public sphere.<sup>30</sup> The various debates that have emerged in the history of these entities evidence the push and pull among these different logics.

### ***Interpreting incremental institutional change: major shifts and drivers***

The adoption of both RSPBs reflects an incremental institutional shift. The creation of these organizations and the related Acts that support their mandates reflect an institutional layering – adding another dimension to regional politics. Thelen and Mahoney interpret the drivers of institutional change as stemming from the characteristics of the political context, the characteristics of institutions, and the types of dominant change agents.<sup>31</sup> These characteristics and change agents influence the type of incremental institutional change that is experienced.

The political and institutional contexts differ significantly in our two case studies. Translink in Greater Vancouver was adopted where there were already well-defined regional institutions such as the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) and the Vancouver Regional Transit System of BC Transit, as well as existing mechanisms to coordinate growth management (through the Livable Regions Strategic Plan). In contrast, the GTHA did not have such strategic regional institutions and its constituent municipalities do not have a history of close cooperation like that seen across the municipalities of Greater Vancouver (which never experienced amalgamation). Because of this, the creation of Metrolinx has, in a sense, been more formative in defining the regional political space. It is only the second such organization to operate across the GTHA. In 1998, the Province had downloaded some regional services and costs to the Greater Toronto Services Board (GTSB). Regional municipalities (Toronto, Durham, Halton, York, and Peel) funded the GTSB and the board itself was made up of mayors and councillors from area municipalities. In 1999, the Toronto Area Transit Operating Agency was created by the Province of Ontario to hold the rolling stock and to operate GO Transit under a subsidy scheme to be set by the GTSB. The GTSB was not successful and the Province reassumed subsidies for GO Transit after 2001.

The dominant agents of change leading to the adoption of these entities come from a variety of sources. For Greater Vancouver a number of influential reports and studies on the need for integrated multi model transportation planning raised the profile of transportation governance in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>32</sup> These reports, combined with a view that the existing system was inadequate and fragmented, opened the dialogue for institutional reform. The NDP government of Premier Clark placed a focus on urban/regional affairs and was amenable to dialogue with the GVRD and its constituent municipalities. At the same time, the funding structure for BC Transit was called into question. It was increasingly thought that transportation investments should be raised closer to the regions where they are being spent, rather than through general revenue contributions of the provincial government. Through the political context of a supportive provincial government and strong advocacy from the GVRD and its municipalities, there was impetus for reform of transportation governance. These actors, along with influential business and industry associations, acted as the dominant change agents for reform. The resulting institution – Translink – was a negotiation between the provincial government, the GVRD and its constituent municipalities, where there was a strong connection within the resulting governance structure among these groups. The scope of their thinking led to Translink to tout themselves as the world’s first multi modal transportation authority (Wales 2008: 9).

For the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), the dominant change agent was very much the Liberal provincial government of Dalton McGuinty. The Province initiated the Central Ontario Smart Growth Panel (2003). From the panel’s reports stemmed a number of recommendations and initiatives known as “Places to Grow.” Metrolinx was created as part of this strategy (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2011). While other actors across the GTHA had raised the need for increased coordination on

transportation and land use, the final Places to Grow Strategy was provincially-derived and provincially-funded. Both the strategy and Metrolinx have been formative in the institutionalization of the GTHA region as a political space.

Through the creation of these two entities, both provincial governments have entered into a period of strong involvement in regional affairs, but in different ways. In Greater Vancouver, British Columbia had been the regional transportation services provider (through BC Transit) prior to the creation of Translink. The creation of Translink was devolution of power to the local level. Local governments took increased financial responsibility for transportation provision and were the controlling board members of the entity. Translink was created as a multi-modal transportation authority by the provincial government but, as stated in its Act, “the authority is not an agent of the government” (SCBCTA Act 1998: 2.3). A report from the Auditor General of BC describes the GVRD as a “controlling shareholder” of Translink (2001: 44). In contrast, Metrolinx was created as a Crown Agency, which makes it an agent of the provincial government. Initially, its governance structure included local representation. However, as an institution it is closely tied into provincial prerogatives through “Places to Grow” and is largely provincially funded. Also, with Metrolinx, it is the Ontario Minister of Transportation who may issue directives to the organization and gives the final approval for yearly business plans. In the case of Translink, it is the Mayor’s Council that fulfills these roles.

Both institutions have added another layer to regional governance in their respective regions and their interactions within the regional political architecture have shifted because of this. Both entities have an expressly multi-modal focus and work with their respective local governments and, in the case of Metrolinx, other transit service providers and stakeholders such as the Toronto Pearson Airport. They also work with the federal government in a way that is not seen with

other entities – by whom they are treated as different and separate.<sup>33</sup>

In the case of Translink, the 2007 revisions to its Act divorced the formal ties it had to the GVRD. Many interpreted the adoption of a corporate board at this time as a way increasing provincial control of the entity. However, Translink’s corporate board does still report to municipally elected representatives on strategic issues through the Mayor’s Council (the Mayor’s Council was created under the 2007 revisions to the SCBCTA Act). For Metrolinx, there were similar criticisms regarding a lack of accountability and openness when a corporate board was adopted in 2009. For example, the City of Vaughan passed a resolution in July of 2010 stating that Metrolinx is “highly streamlined, one-way, and not in any way [open to] meaningful or respectful of community input” and that the agency should become more “open, transparent, and accountable to the public by requiring it to conduct its meetings in public... provide advance public notice of meetings; allow public deputations; and publish all reports, agendas, and minutes” (City of Vaughan 2010).

The issues of transparency and accountability, the adoption of a corporate board and the expansion of new revenue tools into uncharted waters raise questions about how these entities will be evolving in future years. RSPBs can be described on a range of spectrums – from governance to government; decentralized versus centralized; public to private. Both case studies are of relatively new institutions; nevertheless, we see in their short histories shifts along these spectrums. In Greater Vancouver, citizens groups like “Keep Translink Public” have arisen to push back on what they see as a drift towards the privatization and corporatization of the entity.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in the GTHA groups such as the “Clean Train Coalition” have struggled to engage with Metrolinx, and have called on them to be more open and accountable to the public<sup>35</sup>. These actors, along with local governments, regional actors, and business associations have tried to influence the direc-

tion of change in the two RSPBs, to varying degrees of success.

### Conclusions

Historical institutionalism has been used as a frame to: delineate between organisations and institutions; emphasize the importance of context; interpret internal dynamics of institutions and the role of agency; and finally, interpret how change occurs. In both cases, institutional change occurs through layering through the addition of agency and structure to existing institutions (Heijden 2010: 232). In both cases the RSPBs add an additional institutional layer to the regional political space and in doing so bring a new set of rules and practices to the existing institutional architecture, impacting upon both urban politics and multi-level government relations.

The adoption of RSPBs is not benign. They have profound social, environmental, political and economic implications. In the words of Foster, special purpose governance bodies “are not policy neutral substitutes for general purpose governance – [i]nstitutional choices matter” (1999: 22). As urbanization continues and coordination and service delivery across mega regions becomes increasingly important, undoubtedly these types of entities will continue to be adopted.

Though there are differences by institutional type, RSPBs have a tendency to insulate the political and bureaucratic accountability of policy decisions at the regional level. As Smith has surmised, such a disconnect could increasingly undermine the legitimacy of these organizations. He writes:

“In Vancouver, crunch time has come. Metro Vancouver and related regional authorities such as Translink increasingly lack the mandate to make regional decisions without an appropriate accountability base... That leaves the question, “what next”? If not now, then very shortly, the Province of British Columbia and Metro Vancouver will be forced to recognize that accountability concerns may overwhelm the considerable regional successes of this past century in BC’s largest metropolitan district. It will be reactions to new regional charges/services that will tip the balance... Whatever the backbreaking straw, the regional camel in

metropolitan Vancouver will increasingly be under structural pressure and citizen scrutiny over its governance.” Smith (2009: 257)

As both Metrolinx and Translink seek to expand their revenue sources there could be an increasing disconnect between the entities’ governance structures and their powers of taxation with corporate board members as the key decision makers on these issues. These are developments to pay close attention to in the coming years and are issues that will doubt impact upon the robustness of these relative new institutions.

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- <sup>1</sup> Miller (2008), Boddy & Parkinson 2004), Kemp (2003), and Schechter (1996).
- <sup>2</sup> Stephens & Wikstrom (2000).
- <sup>3</sup> Foster (1999, 2000, 2001) and Sandler (1992)
- <sup>4</sup> Stone (1993) and Fainstein 1999)
- <sup>5</sup> See Lefebvre (1998: 22). Regionalism based upon this type of competitive cities thesis is becoming increasingly influential and is grounded in an understanding of a trend towards global economic integration.
- <sup>6</sup> Hooghe & Marks (2003: 236).
- <sup>7</sup> Mahoney & Thelen (2010: 8).
- <sup>8</sup> Metrolinx was formerly named the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority.
- <sup>9</sup> Go Transit, established in 1967 to provide regional rail and bus services for inter-municipal commuters was originally funded and operated by the Province of Ontario.
- <sup>10</sup> Translink was formerly named the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority. Its present legal name is the South Coast British Columbia Transportation Authority.
- <sup>11</sup> Transport Canada, non-attributable personal interview, January 4 2011.
- <sup>12</sup> For Translink, 'multi modal' includes walking, cycling, transit, commuting, good movement and major roads (SCBCTA 2007). For Metrolinx, multi modal refers to "automobiles, walking, cycling, buses, rapid transit, including subways and transitways, rail, including commuter and freight rail, and trucks (Metrolinx 2006, c. 16, s. 5:2).
- <sup>13</sup> Foster (1999, 2000).
- <sup>14</sup> Miller (2008), Boddy & Parkinson (2004), Kemp (2003), and Schechter (1996).
- <sup>15</sup> Katz (2000).
- <sup>16</sup> Stephens & Wikstrom (2000).
- <sup>17</sup> Foster (1999).
- <sup>18</sup> See Foster (2000, 2001) and Sandler (1992).
- <sup>19</sup> Stone (1993).
- <sup>20</sup> See Smith (2009) and Frisken (2007).
- <sup>21</sup> Transport Canada, non-attributable personal interview, January 4 2011.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Keil (2009).
- <sup>24</sup> Stone (1993).
- <sup>25</sup> Robert Paddon, personal interview, May 10 2010. Rob MacIsaac, personal interview, March 12 2010.
- <sup>26</sup> Frisken (2007: 41-42).
- <sup>27</sup> Erkkila (2007).
- <sup>28</sup> Erkkila (2007).
- <sup>29</sup> <http://www.translink.ca/en/Be-Part-of-the-Plan.aspx>
- <sup>30</sup> Erkkila (2007).
- <sup>31</sup> Thelen & Mahoney (2010a: 15).
- <sup>32</sup> E.g., *Freedom to Move - Report of the Greater Vancouver Transportation Task Force* (1988); *Transport 2021: A Long-Range Transportation Plan for Greater Vancouver* (1993); and its follow up report the *South Coast Transportation System Plan* (1994).
- <sup>33</sup> Transport Canada, non-attributable personal interview, January 4 2011.
- <sup>34</sup> [keeptranslinkpublic.ca](http://keeptranslinkpublic.ca)
- <sup>35</sup> [cleantrain.ca](http://cleantrain.ca)