

Urban Geography  
Developing Toronto Through Transit Oriented  
Development in Eastern Candada

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# 1 Introduction & Summary

The need to move around the city is constant and ever-changing. As cities grow and grapple with the impacts of climate change, they are turning to new options for moving their citizens. This paper explores the proposed implementation of transit-oriented development in Ontario through the concept of Ordinary Cities concerning Critical Geography. Transit-Oriented Development—with the aid of precedents from other cities in Canada—is the path to catalyze the development of Complete Communities, which leads to opportunities for growth and revitalization in Toronto and the surrounding area.

As Canadian cities continue to grow and the effects of climate change become ever more present in our daily lives, the way we travel within our cities has been reconsidered in recent years. Transit-oriented development is a new urban paradigm that has become popular in the past decade, although the concept has existed since the advent of mass transit within cities. Toronto recently commissioned a report on transit-oriented development; this report outlined how Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area could implement concepts within transit-oriented development in order to create stronger local economies and increase mobility within communities and the wider region.[4]

These decisions were made taking into consideration the results of transit-oriented and mass transit developments around Eastern Canada. The REM project in Montreal is a prime example; it exemplifies the inter-governmental cooperation needed to create projects where building a stronger community is at its centre. Additionally, the case study in Markham demonstrated how an implementation of all day GO Transit regional rail service could increase social mobility and foster economic growth. Furthermore, the report gives a prime example of sub-urban transit in Eastern Canada is the Hurontario Light Rail system which has provided a catalyst for densification within the satellite region. These examples exemplify the ways in which Toronto can use the experience and initiatives in ordinary cities in order to educate the decisions made by the city government to foster complete communities, and through these, economic growth.[4]

## 2 Ordinary Cities Framework

The Ordinary cities framework states that the divide between cities seen as world class and those which are not should not be considered in different spaces and instead be observed as case studies for each other in order to better understand the problems in both and implement solutions found in either city.[1] The approach is a post-colonial critique of the unfounded centralization on western cities within urban studies. The framework takes into account previously separate literature—drawing on the previous cosmopolitan approach to the city as well as case studies from cities including Rio De Janeiro, Kuala Lumpur, and Johannesburg. [1]

The Ordinary Approach is Applicable to this issue as it relates to how the city has decided to inform themselves as they continue to develop their urban community. The framework is especially suited to this region as there are many budding urban areas in the Greater Golden Horseshoe and thus there are numerous examples of unique transit solutions suited for the Ontario region[4]. The news story shines a light on the strides small communities in Canada are taking in terms of transit and how larger metropolitan areas can learn lessons from the successes—and failures.

## 3 Interpretation through the Framework

The Article I that is to be analyzed is by Daily Commercial News: 'Panel highlights the tools necessary to improve transit-oriented communities'. This text highlights the plans being made for improving the Toronto region transportation.[2]

The article starts out by outlining a plan that has recently been published outlining the incentives for investing in Transit Oriented Development. The objective of the plan titled: *Getting to Transit Oriented Communities*, is to foster catalysts for community and economic growth within many areas in the Greater Toronto Area. This can be seen as a unique application of the Ordinary Cities framework as it seeks to not only apply the lessons learned from other cities to Toronto, but also smaller urban areas within the GTA as a platform for the future growth of Toronto through transit oriented development.[2]

The article then goes on to emphasise the impact that investment in transit oriented development has on surrounding communities and how it can often be the impetus for the strengthening of communities as well as their economies. These claims are backed up within the Ordinary Cities framework by multiple case studies in the aforementioned report. Highlighting the lessons learned with regards to intra- governmental communication in particular. This attempts to resolve Jennifer Robinson's critique of urban studies in her book, *Ordinary Cities*, which articulates that traditional urban scholars were too quick to segregate services, infrastructure, and planning of different areas within a metropolitan region based on perceived economic stature or way of life.[3] The report does this by allowing the lessons learned through the planning of smaller projects in less populous cities in Canada and even the Toronto Region in order to better inform the decisions made with data from the specific climate and region proposed infrastructure would be operating in.

The article then outlined the key learning from this report, which was the importance of cities, governments, and communities to have a shared vision for the results they want to see from their planned transit oriented development. They based these findings on 4 major case studies on Transit Oriented Development from Eastern Canada. These Infrastructure projects were the Science Centre Station as part of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT; the Markham Centre development which is now served by the GO Stouffville line; the Hurontario Light rail project spurring Brampton Uptown Hurontario-Steeles corridor; and the REM regional rail system being built in Montréal.[4] Out of these case studies the REM in particular stood out as an exemplar of the level of engagement needed for intra-community work that will result in efficient and useful transit oriented development. In contrast, the article also outlines an example from Brampton where there was a lack of intra-department communication as 8-foot side walks to improve the pedestrian space were designed from Downtown Brampton without the input of the operations department, which lacks an 8-foot wide snow plow for such a road surface.[2] This not only gives an example of how intra-government cooperation is important but also gives an indication of how easy it is for oversight like lack of communication to lead to wider dissonance in cities around Ontario and Canada; where this interpretation is a prime example of how important a Ordinary Cities is to understanding urban issues.

## 4 Discussion & Conclusion

Thus, there is clearly work to be done and solutions to the problems facing many Canadian cities within the ideas of Transit Oriented Development. This can be seen in the lessons learned in the REM Project and the concerns brought up in many case studies including the Markham GO line and Brampton Downtown Revitalization spurred on by Transit Oriented Development. These examples give firm precedence for the argument that transit oriented development is a catalyst for development in areas that it is built and also shows one how using many frameworks, like the Ordinary Cities approach, allows for a better and deeper understanding of problems facing a city; like how the disjoint between government bodies related to the city can lead to mismanagement and corruption, which only hurts the people of the city.[2]

The Ordinary Cities Framework allowed me to look beyond the monetary and political aspects of the infrastructure improvement project and focus on the implications it has for the people living in the city and in particular, how actions taken by other cities in the past could affect the city in the future. For example, Toronto could avoid problems between train lines by taking note of what happened in Markham between the GO tracks and Freight Tracks by creating pre-emptive grade separations, as is with what is happening in the current GO expansion in Toronto.[4]



# Bibliography

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