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# CANADIAN JOURNAL of URBAN RESEARCH

REVUE CANADIENNE de RECHERCHE URBAINE

## Citizen Participation in the Public Transportation Policy Process: A Comparison of Detroit, Michigan, and Hamilton, Ontario

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### *Abstract*

This article provides a comparative analysis of citizen participatory mechanisms at the regional and local levels. This research focuses on two cities that institutionalized citizen participation in their transit planning processes. In Detroit, Michigan a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was established to assist with the preparation of a regional transit master plan while the City of Hamilton in Ontario formed a Citizens' Jury (CJ) to examine the establishment of light rail transit. The article analyzes these mechanisms' overall representativeness of the general population, their operation and contribution to 'policy learning', and their impact on subsequent transit policies. We find that these participatory mechanisms are generally regarded as important and useful by both the participants and the politicians that established them. In spite of this, the conclusion reached is that neither mechanism had a significant impact on transit policies. In both cases, the policy decisions were affected by a range of factors and particularly the local and regional political contexts. Indeed, it can be argued that both cities are plagued with regional divides that potentially no amount of citizen participation can solve.

*Keywords:* citizen participation, transit planning, municipal government, regionalism

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*Résumé*

Ce papier donne une analyse comparative des mécanismes préparatoires des citoyens aux niveaux régional et local. Cette recherche se concentre sur deux villes qui ont institutionnalisé la participation des citoyens dans le processus de la planification de transport. En Detroit, Michigan un Comité d'Avis des Citoyens (CAC) était établie pour aider avec leur plan directeur tandis que en Hamilton, Ontario un Juré de Citoyens (CJ) était formé pour examiner l'établissement du transport ferroviaire légère. Le papier analyse leur représentativité entière de la population générale, leur opération et niveau d'apprentissage de politique qui arrive dans leur groupe, et leur impact dans des politiques de transit suivantes. On trouve que ces mécanismes participatives sont généralement considérés comme important et utiles par les participants et les politiciens qui les ont établies. Malgré ceci, la conclusion était qu'aucun mécanisme n'avait un impact significatif sur les politiques de transit. Dans les deux cas, les décisions de politique étaient affectes par une gamme de facteurs et particulièrement les contextes politiques régionales et locales. Il peut être discuté que les deux villes sont affligées par les divisions régionales que potentiellement aucune participation des citoyens puisse surmonter.

*Mots clés:* participation des citoyens, planification de transport, gouvernement municipal, politiques régionales et locales

**Introduction**

The idea that the public should directly engage in public policy-making is widely accepted. It is evident in the range of mechanisms to facilitate such engagement put in place across democratic political jurisdictions, particularly at the local government level (Woodford and Preston 2013, Nabatchi and Amsler 2014, Spicer 2016). These procedures range from mechanisms designed mainly to keep the public informed of policy-making (such as public information hearings, websites, and newsletters) to those that seek public input and to have that input reflected in policy outcomes (such as conducting web surveys, holding focus groups, and participatory budgeting). Citizen advisory committees and citizen juries are examples of this latter type of citizen participation mechanism.

This article provides a comparative analysis of participatory mechanisms used within transit planning. The focus is on two cities that institutionalized citizen participation through a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) in Detroit, Michigan, and a Citizens' Jury (CJ) in Hamilton, Ontario. We analyze their overall representativeness of the general population, their operation and level of 'policy learning' that occurs within their group, and their impact on subsequent transit policies. We find that these participatory mechanisms are generally regarded as important and useful by both the participants and the politicians that established them. In spite of this, the conclusion reached is that neither mechanism had a significant impact on transit policies. In both cases, the policy decisions were affected by a range of factors and particularly the local and regional political contexts. Indeed, it can be argued that both cities are plagued with regional divides which potentially no amount of citizen participation can solve.

**Literature Review**

A wide variety of different mechanisms that aim to engage citizens in policy-making are used in many different political systems at different stages in policy cycles (Rowe and Frewer 2005). As Fung identified, it is possible to differentiate mechanisms according to at least three sets of criteria (2006). The first concerns who participates in these mechanisms and how participants are selected. Some citizen engagement mechanisms, such as public hearings, are open to all interested members of the public and the participants are self-selecting. Others have a smaller number of participants selected by random sampling. A second way to differentiate among participatory mechanisms relates to their internal operations. Some mechanisms are meetings that provide only limited opportunities for members of the public to question officials, whereas others revolve around members of the public (usually among a smaller number of participants) engaging in deliberation and discussion. Finally, it is possible to differentiate among participatory mechanisms according to their impact on final policy outcomes (Brody et al. 2003). One of the earliest and perhaps still the most famous study of public engagement in policy-making compares participatory mechanisms largely according to their relevance to decision-making (Arnstein 1969). In this study, Sherry Arnstein developed a ladder of participation that identifies different reasons for and consequences of public participation. At the bottom end of this ladder are mechanisms that do

not allow for genuine public engagement in policy-making but serve only to allow those with power to “educate” citizens. Further up the ladder are mechanisms offering ‘token’ participation, which themselves are distinct from participation that allows for genuine citizen control over decision-making.

Just as there are multiple types of participatory mechanisms, so too have numerous interrelated advantages been touted for such mechanisms. It is, for example, often claimed that engaging citizens directly in policy-making outside of their periodic role in voting for elected representatives compensates for deficiencies in representative democracy. In particular, it is argued that citizen engagement draws on specific citizen expertise that may be missing from the information ordinarily available to elected representatives or bureaucrats when taking decisions (Day 1997). In this view, citizens who use a service or facility (such as a recreational facility) may well be optimally placed to know the type of facility that will serve them best. It is also frequently argued that the process of citizen engagement itself is valuable irrespective of whether it in fact leads to better public policies, as it is “the vehicle through which fair distribution of benefits would be achieved” (Campbell and Fainstein 2012). In this view, citizen engagement exercises, particularly those that involve discussion and deliberation, foster interest in the political system and social capital in general (Barber 1984, Smith and Wales 2000). A related argument is that direct citizen engagement in policy-making increases the perceived legitimacy of public policies and in so doing helps to avoid long-term opposition to policies as well as more general mistrust of political processes that are not felt to be listening to the interests of citizens (Kamenova and Goodman 2015).

Citizen engagement mechanisms are not universally accepted to be always valuable or necessary in policy-making (Fung 2006). Even in cases where it is felt that citizen engagement is potentially advantageous, it is less clear whether the purported advantages actually materialize in practice (Aubin and Bornstein 2012). One frequent criticism is that citizen engagement mechanisms merely fulfil the legal requirement that consultation or citizen participation occurs rather than making a substantive difference to policy-making and policy outcomes (McAndrews and Marcus 2015, Roberts 2004). In this criticism, the conclusions emerging from a participatory exercise may simply be ignored by politicians or only selectively adopted where they support the decisions that politicians were already advancing. In sum critics often argue that it is difficult to determine whether public engagement in policy-making actually makes a difference to policy outcomes.

Other criticisms include that citizen consultation exercises add extra time and expense to decision-making, as well as the fact that the process may not resolve conflicts within a community and may indeed generate conflict as individuals become more invested in decision-making and consequently more displeased if the end result does not match their initial expectations. A related critique questions the ability of citizen consultation mechanisms to generate better and more legitimate policies. One suggested reason is that many citizens lack the information, particularly the technical information, to participate meaningfully in consultation exercises (see Irvin and Stansbury 2004). An associated argument is that these exercises do not increase policy legitimacy because they lack representativeness. It is, for example, frequently asserted that citizen engagement processes advantage those who are already privileged in one or more ways and exclude or marginalize those already socially or economically disadvantaged (Fung 2006). Callahan (2007) details the empirical evidence supporting the claim that underrepresented groups do not participate in the policy process as regularly or as fully as the general population. These groups may find it difficult to engage in the policy process as they may speak different languages, are new immigrants, or do not have property or may lack resources (such as time or money) due to being in vulnerable positions in society. Furthermore, social and economic segregation isolates these groups from wider political and civic networks (Callahan 2007, Verba and Nie 1972). In sum, it may be that public engagement succeeds in bringing a wider number of voices into the policy debate but it is not necessarily the case that participants are representative of the community as a whole.

One issue pertaining to citizen engagement that has received relatively little attention is the extent to which citizen engagement exercises are affected by the political-geographic structure in which they take place (see Pastor et al. 2011). To what extent are these engagement mechanisms constrained by the regional political structure? There is the possibility that engagement exercises replicate regional structures, such as city-suburban divisions, and as a result do not work internally and fail to reach agreement. They may also be constrained by the reality that even if an engagement exercise is capable of reaching agreement any policy recommendations are unlikely to be accepted as a result of divisions within city or regional government structures. Alternatively, it is possible that citizen engagement exercises represent a mechanism for bringing citizens together and in so doing helping to overcome pre-existing regional divisions. Analysis of this element of citizen engagement requires

attention to government and governance at the regional level and particularly the organization of municipal governance at the regional level (see Nelles 2012, Savitch and Vogel 2000, Swanstrom 2001).

It is important therefore to examine and assess the structure and effectiveness of citizen participation mechanisms in practice in different settings. Given the diversity in the way these mechanisms are organized, the participants, and the potential purposes they serve across different policy sectors, it is valuable to narrow the research focus to particular types of mechanism (Nabatchi and Amsler 2014). This article does this by examining and comparing the role of a citizens' jury and a citizen advisory committee in two related policy settings. In conducting this empirical research, the paper addresses three central questions:

- 1) Are these types of participation exercise representative in terms of who participates or are certain social, economic or regional groups underrepresented?
- 2) Does the process of participation encompass learning or lead to citizens feeling more valued because of their participation?
- 3) What is the effect of citizen participation on the outcome of policy decisions within the greater regional context? In short, does their input matter?

The importance of the regional political context is examined within the analysis of all three questions. It is, for example, possible that any regional divisions that exist are replicated within the participatory mechanism, which in turn limits its internal effectiveness and/or its ability to shape policy outcomes. The analysis of effectiveness is contained primarily in addressing the second and third questions. In the case of question two, one measure of effectiveness is whether the mechanisms improved participants' understanding of the issues under examination and thus helped with the development of social capital. In the case of question three, the assessment of whether citizen input made a difference to policy outcomes is based on examination of whether the participants' conclusions were reflected in the final policy decisions and, importantly, whether there is evidence to suggest that this resulted from the citizens' participation and not from other factors.

### Citizens' Juries and Citizen Advisory Committees

Citizens' juries (CJ) and citizen advisory committees (CAC) were selected for the focus of this study. While there are differences between these types of participatory mechanism, and indeed within each type, they were selected for comparison because both are designed to facilitate a high degree of policy learning and deliberation among small groups of citizens who are representative of the wider community.

Citizens' juries are groups of citizens (often between 12 to 24 members) selected through a random sampling procedure to represent as accurately as possible the gender, age, socio-economic, regional and other characteristics of the local community (Kamenova and Goodman 2015). This group of citizens, usually over a relatively short but intense period, is provided with detailed information about the policy issues (Smith and Wales 2000). This information is provided in written form and through testimony from expert witnesses. The group then, with the guidance of a moderator, deliberates and seeks to reach agreement on the question, or charge, that it has been asked to investigate.

Citizen advisory committees are sometimes known by other names including stakeholder advisory committees, community task forces and community advisory committees (Hull 2010). As with CJs, citizen advisory committees are small groups (frequently with approximately 20 members) designed to be representative of the community from which they are drawn with particular efforts made to recruit representatives from groups, such as minorities or low-income groups, who are frequently underrepresented in other types of consultation exercise. Also as is the case with CJs, one of the purposes of CACs is to educate the participants about the policy issue or sector. This education process takes the form of hearing from experts in the field as well as learning from the other participants on the committee and thus perhaps being open to changing opinions on the issue. The educative function extends also to the wider community in the sense that there is an expectation, or hope, that committee members will share information with members of the community they represent. One difference between CJs and CACs is that citizens' juries typically meet intensively over a short timeframe while CACs tend to have shorter meetings over a longer time period.

Citizen engagement exercises are common in the context of public transportation decisions, and indeed are frequently legislatively mandated, especially in the case of major infrastructure spending decisions (Slotterback 2010). It has been noted, however, that these exercises generate their own difficulties, particularly with respect to the inclusion of those who rely most heavily on public transportation (McAndrews and Marcus 2015, Casello et al. 2015). Socioeconomic inequalities underpin the need for public transportation due to the increasing unevenness of income distribution between metropolitan households, shaped by race and geography (Sanchez, Stolz and Ma 2003). Specifically, residential segregation of low-income areas means that transportation becomes a key factor in certain quality of life indicators: health, education, employment, economic development, access to municipal services, residential mobility and environmental quality (Bullard 2003). This is because low-income urban populations are more likely to depend on public transit as their primary mode of transportation and are significantly disadvantaged by the lack of this public service (Sanchez 2003). Therefore, the goal of equitable transit rests primarily on rectifying unequal opportunity structures created by past social and economic processes through urban planning decisions (Garrett and Taylor 1999, Hertel et al. 2015, Sanchez et al. 2007, Karner and Niemeier 2013, Mishra and Welch 2013).

The idea that public transportation is an essential service that should allow the greatest access and mobility across socioeconomic divides is often implicitly contested through funding allocations, planning priorities, and inadequate analyses of equity. Transit discussions that focus on economic efficiency and solving congestion and environmental problems can limit discussions of adequate service for low-income, geographically segregated populations (Martens et al. 2012). This is magnified in regional settings, where higher income suburbs often want to pay for a transit system that meets their needs, rather than contribute to a system that increases mobility for the lower income populations.

Several case studies highlight the importance of citizen participation in decision-making at the neighbourhood and metropolitan levels, showing how citizens can achieve more equitable allocation of infrastructure and use of funds within a metropolitan system (see Cipkar 2015, Onibokun and Curry 1976, Sirianni 2007, Mann 2001, Hutchinson 2000, Grengs 2002, Bailey and Grossardt 2007, Karner and Niemeier 2013, Machell et al. 2010, Wood 2014, Ibeas et al. 2001). In transportation planning, it is posited that an active and engaged citizenry is necessary to achieve equitable public transit systems that improve mobility for disadvantaged populations (Grengs 2002).

### **Case Studies: Detroit Metropolitan Region, Michigan and Hamilton, Ontario**

The case studies selected for examination are two public transit policy decisions revolving around new transit developments, both including a light rail and bus rapid transit options. The participatory mechanisms in each case are representative of their respective type. The first case is in Hamilton, Ontario where a citizens' jury was established to participate in decision-making surrounding the construction of an LRT. The second case is in Detroit, Michigan where a citizen advisory committee has been a part of the decision-making leading to the development of a Regional Transit Master Plan. As noted above, citizens' juries and citizen advisory committees are not identical. In the case studies examined here, this is evident with respect to their size and their mandates. They are, however, worthy of comparison as both sought to provide for public participation in transit policy-making and both operated within a geographic context that generated and exhibited political divisions.

#### *Detroit*

The Detroit metropolitan region is fraught with geographic inequality as it remains highly segregated along racial and income lines (Darden and Kamel 2000). Although there has been an increase in black suburbanization across the region since the 1960s, research shows there are high levels of segregation and isolation correlated with race (Farley, Danziger and Holzer 2000). Additionally, despite the progress of national civil rights legislation, the labour market in Detroit is still rife with discrimination, as black Detroiters continued to be underrepresented in private sector white collar employment (Sugrue 2005). With severe racial segregation, access to public services is a critical necessity for many poor, ghettoized neighbourhoods. Farley et al. postulate that "racial attitudes, the structure of local government financing and political authority, and private economic interests all create barriers that have to be overcome to implement ... an urban revitalization strategy" (2000: 253). Additionally, Detroit has been on a long trajectory of economic decline, stemming from the post-World War II deindustrialization. The elimination of many major manufacturing companies centered on the automotive industry, coupled with

'white flight' and the relocation of higher-income tax base to suburban counties, meant that many low-income, un/under-employed black Detroiters became trapped in the city, unable to keep up with property taxes. This has resulted in the procurement of 30,000 vacant properties, closing half the city's public schools, the declaration of a state of financial emergency and subsequent Chapter 9 bankruptcy, the largest American city to do so (Davey and Williams Walsh 2013).

When it comes to mobility and access to public transit across the region, Detroit's system is not integrated between the city and counties, meaning there is poor accessibility to employment and services for many low-income, inner-city residents. While certain researchers point to the reliance on automobiles and their popularity that favoured funding for highway infrastructure, others point to the residential segregation and regional political fragmentation that have prevented an integrated mass-transit system from emerging (Hyde 2006, Thomas 2013, Nelles 2012). Nelles substantiates the theory of regional fragmentation through looking at past transit proposals across the region. She argues that "[c]ontextual and structural divisions have entrenched conflicts between city and suburban actors, preventing the emergence of a strong and coherent horizontal coalition in support of metropolitan transit" (Nelles 2012: 222). The persistent lack of coordination between Detroit and its surrounding suburbs means that public transportation is not regarded as an important issue of equity for low-income populations. Racial mistrust, the resistance of affluent, white suburban communities to revenue sharing with poor, black, inner-city neighbourhoods has resulted in decades of failed regional governance in the transit sector (Thomas 2013, Binelli 2012). With this political divide, it is not surprising that a regional governance body has always struggled to create an effective transit system. Notably, Grengs argues that the physical structure of Detroit and its history of deindustrialization, means that it is now a 'hollowed-out region' and no amount of investment in public transit would solve the 'equity problem' (Grengs 2010).

After another regional effort failed, in 2012 the South Eastern Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) formed the Regional Transit Authority (RTA), a governing body tasked with creating a regional transit plan to coordinate public transportation between the City of Detroit and the surrounding counties of Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne. The RTA Board considered it important to have residents from across the region involved in transit planning and therefore resolved "to establish a Citizens Advisory Council [also referred to as Citizens Advisory Committee] (the CAC) to advise the RTA board of directors on the development of its regional master transit plan, on coordinating transit service between providers, including plans for specialized services, and on other matters concerning public transportation in the region as requested by the board" (RTA of Southeastern Michigan, Res. No. 5). As a newly formed body, the CAC does not carry institutional baggage of past failed transit proposals (Nelles 2012). Although it is possible and likely that some of the CAC members will remember or have participated in past transit proposals and processes, the CAC has had a unique ability to negotiate a new relationship to the recently formed RTA. For example, if members feel that they do not have adequate representation or ability to express concerns over transit proposals, they are able to ask and advocate for changes, as no legal conventions exist to dictate otherwise.

A central issue for the Regional Transit Authority, and by implication for the CAC, became the establishment of regional bus-rapid transit (BRT) and developing a funding mechanism to pay for it. Debate on this issue eventually centred on the November 2016 state elections where a ballot question asked voters in south-east Michigan to decide on the creation of a millage to fund a Regional Master Transit Plan including BRT. The proposal would have authorized the RTA to levy within Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties a property tax assessment at a rate of 1.2 mills—\$1.20 per \$1000 of taxable value—for 20 years beginning in 2016 and ending in 2035 "for the purpose of construction and operation of a public transportation system [...] including rapid transit bus routes across county lines, specialized service for senior citizens and people with disabilities, commuter rail, airport express service, and other public transportation purposes" (Regional Transit Authority of Southeastern Michigan 2017). In other words, for a home with \$100,000 of taxable value, it is about \$120 per year, which would raise \$3 billion with additional \$1.7 billion in state and federal funds (Lawrence 2016a). The main crux of the plan was that it would add many bus rapid transit (BRT) lines for commuters, which is considered a cheaper and more flexible alternative to LRT. This was contested, as certain opponents of the millage felt that the plan was not innovative, as the BRT lines were considered a blockage to "mass transit innovation" and would anchor the region to a "1980s mass-transit system" (Lawrence 2016b). In addition to that concern, many suburban voters did not want an increase in property taxes for something they would rarely, if ever, use. Naturally, this viewpoint does not take into account the way it would benefit the

greater regional economy, due to the fact that mobility increases one's ability to travel to various employment centres, is attractive for tourists, and benefits many businesses if patrons can more easily access them. With this in mind, there was a long list of supporters in the region, including many prominent companies, such as, Ford, GM, Quicken Loans, and many health care companies and hospitals (Citizens Connecting Our Communities 2017). Ultimately, the millage did not pass, by a slim margin of 18,000 votes, or 2.2%.

### *Hamilton*

The City of Hamilton has a population of 536,917 as of the 2016 census, which is approximately 140,000 less than Detroit. Unlike Detroit, however, Hamilton's population has increased in recent years and grew by 3.3 per cent in the five period between 2011 and 2016. Detroit lost over 3,000 residents (0.46 per cent) between 2015 and 2016 according to the U.S. Census Bureau, which represents a continuation of a long running pattern of population decline. In the 1950s Detroit had a population of over 1.8 million making it the fifth largest city in the United States at the time.

As in other cities across the north east United States, including Detroit, Hamilton has experienced periods of sustained economic contraction in recent decades related to a loss of manufacturing and industrial jobs, including in its steel mills. These economic forces resulted in higher than average levels of poverty in Hamilton as well as growing income inequality (Harris, Dunn and Wakefield 2015, Walks 2013). In the latter part of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first this inequality followed a geographic pattern that, as Harris et al. identified, conformed to the "American urban stereotype of inner-city poverty and suburban affluence" (2015: iii). In short, the downtown city wards were the parts of the city most likely to be losing population, have higher than average unemployment rates with residents on government assistance, and have declining property values and reduced business activity.

This situation has, to some extent, changed since 2010 although not completely. Reports point to an economic revitalization in Hamilton with reduced unemployment, economic diversification and increased commercial development (Mayo 2015). The city's has increasingly moved from its traditional reliance on heavy manufacturing, such as steel and textile production, to a more diversified economy based on technology, education, creative industries and health sciences (Macleod 2015). One feature of this economic revitalisation is a partial regeneration of the city's downtown including evidence of gentrification and increasing property prices (Harris et al. 2015). Nevertheless, as in the earlier period, the new prosperity follows an uneven geographic pattern. Mayo reports that the areas with the highest prevalence of secure, high-paying jobs now include parts of the central city as well as the suburbs on the eastern side of the city such as Dundas and Ancaster. Similarly, Harris et al. identify that there is a growing east-west division in the City of Hamilton with the areas of increased income lying predominantly on the western side of the city, areas that are in easier commuting distance from the rest of the Greater Toronto Area (Harris et al. 2015: 23-24).

The economic divisions in the City of Hamilton are, to some extent, replicated in divisions within the city's current municipal political structure which dates from 2001. In that year, as part of a province-wide process of municipal restructuring, the provincial government legislated the creation of a single-tier municipal government replacing the previous two-tier regional structure (Sancton 2000). The result was a new City of Hamilton created through the amalgamation of Hamilton with the towns of Flamborough, Dundas and Ancaster, the City of Stoney Creek and the township of Glanbrook against the strong opposition of many in the communities surrounding Hamilton (Spicer 2012). As various news reports and academic studies identify, these community divisions carried over into the politics of the new City of Hamilton and were evident in mayoral elections and in voting patterns within the council (Graefe 2014, Spicer 2012, Harris et al. 2015). The first mayoral race for the new council was a contest between the former mayor of Hamilton and the former mayor of one of the amalgamated towns. The 2001 race was won by the former mayor of Ancaster (Bob Wade) who ran on a campaign that emphasized decentralization and which appealed primarily to the suburban areas. Periodically, mayoral and council candidates as well as citizen groups have raised the prospect of de-amalgamation (Warner 2015, Nolan 2015), and although this prospect appears unlikely, divisions along historic community lines remain evident. The ongoing debate over city transit, and particularly the proposed construction of a light rail transit line, is one example of this division within city council and the wider community.

The debate on whether to build a light rail transit system in Hamilton has a lengthy and, at the time of writing, still unsettled history. The construction of some form of rapid transit system for Hamilton has long



been advocated by proponents on city council, within the community and at the provincial level.<sup>1</sup> The issues that have generated particular disagreement relate to the form that this rapid transit should take (whether, for example, it should be bus rapid transit or light rail), the rapid transit routes, and the short and long term financial implications of these decisions. Adding to the complexity of the Hamilton transit debate is that it includes important planning and financial roles for the provincial government and the provincial government's transit authority for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area, Metrolinx, which was established in 2006 "to play a critical role in planning and delivering a seamless, integrated transit network allowing people to use public transit to travel easily from Hamilton to Newmarket to Oshawa" (Metrolinx 2017).

The transit debates map onto pre-existing divisions within the city. Advocates of light rail transit for downtown Hamilton argue that it will act as a catalyst for investment in the central city and thus for its revitalization. The current, and former, mayor of Hamilton, Fred Eisenberger has constantly expressed support for a downtown LRT. In a 2016 newspaper article, for example, he asserted that "the LRT initiative will help grow Hamilton's economy, reduce travel times, connect people to jobs and to the GO line and other transit systems, and bring new people and new investment to our community" (Eisenberger 2016). Opposition to an LRT, on the other hand, has focused on concerns as to whether there is sufficient ridership to support it, about the disruption the project will cause and on whether the money could be better spent on other forms of transit improvements. Much of this opposition comes from councillors and residents located outside of the city core in the suburbs and former autonomous municipalities who question the relevance of a downtown LRT for their constituents (CBC 2017). Councillor Judi Partridge, for example, expressed these concerns in outlining her opposition to the LRT proposal. In a newspaper column, she stated that:

The residents of Hamilton need a functioning transit system that connects all suburban and urban areas of our great city with efficient, affordable, reliable service. I am calling on my council colleagues who share my concerns to come forward and work together to ensure the \$1-billion provincial investment is leveraged wisely to connect all urban and suburban residents (Partridge 2017).

One element of the opposition is the concern that the city's area-rating system used to finance transit will be scrapped in favour of transit being funded out of the general budget. Under the area-rating system, wards pay for transit according to the levels of service they receive, with the result that suburban and rural wards pay less than would be the case under a more traditional funding model.

Hamilton city council has, therefore, long been divided over the issue of light rail transit. Municipal steps taken to advance LRT, such as the instruction to city staff to pursue an LRT, the 2011 environmental assessment for an LRT, and the recommitment to this in the 2013 Rapid Ready report, were all contingent upon receiving complete financial support from Metrolinx and the provincial government. Even then LRT did not always attract unanimous support within the council and the community. This was evident in the 2014 municipal elections. In that year's mayoral race the two leading candidates held differing views on the prospect of an LRT. The winner, Fred Eisenberger was supportive as noted above. One of his main rivals, eventual runner up Brad Clark, expressed support for a Bus Rapid Transit system and, at the very least, a referendum on an LRT. In order to combat criticism about his support for an LRT, Eisenberger proposed the creation of a citizens' jury to debate and assess the need and support for this form of transit (Eisenberger 2014). Before this jury could be formed, however, the Liberal provincial government announced in May 2015 that it would provide \$1 billion to fund all of the capital costs of an LRT in Hamilton thus appearing to obviate the need of a consultative exercise on whether to pursue the LRT option (Morrow 2015). The jury's mandate, as a result, was changed to one of reviewing the city's transit masterplan and the place of an LRT within the transportation infrastructure as well as the area rating system.

The initial provincial commitment was to fund the so-called 11 kilometre B-line running from McMaster University to the Queenston traffic circle as well as a 2 kilometre A-line spur running north-south and connecting to a new GO station.<sup>2</sup> In February 2017 the province announced that, following public consultations, the A-line LRT route would be replaced by a 16 kilometre bus rapid transit route (Ministry of Transportation 2017). The provincial commitment to light rail transit in Hamilton did not end the discussion, however, and there followed two years of acrimonious debates within Hamilton about whether to move forward and to accept provincial

funding for the LRT project. A series of lengthy municipal council meetings were required before council finally voted in April 2017 to send required amendments to the LRT project's environmental assessment back to the provincial government for a period of further public consultation as well as government analysis (Van Dongen 2017a). The vote to move forward with the project followed a suggestion from the provincial government that it was open to extending the B-line LRT by three kilometres, albeit without a commitment of extra funding, in line with the specifications in earlier city proposals (Moore 2017, Van Dongen 2017b).

## Methods

This paper addresses three central questions relating to citizen engagement in the two cities' transportation policy sectors with the overall aim of examining the relevance of these engagement exercises within the geographic and political structures in which each took place: were the citizen advisory committee in Detroit and the citizens' jury in Hamilton representative of the wider regional population?; did they allow policy learning to occur among the participants?; and to what extent did they impact decision-making? In order to examine these questions, our research makes use of five sources of evidence:

- 1) CAC and CJ documents that assess their structure, mandate, operation, and relationship to higher authority;
- 2) Minutes and observation of CAC and CJ meetings;
- 3) Hamilton's City Council and Detroit Region's Regional Transit Authority (RTA) meetings and discussions;
- 4) Newspaper coverage of the CAC and CJ; and
- 5) Surveys (CJ conducted by Tim L. Dobbie Consulting Agency; CAC conducted by Sarah Cipkar).

In Detroit, observations of CAC and RTA meetings occurred between September and December 2014 and were used in conjunction with a survey of CAC members.<sup>3</sup> Meeting minutes were also examined to see what issues continued to be discussed up until the November 2016 ballot vote to approve the Regional Master Transit Plan (RMTP). The CAC's recommendations were compared with both media reports and the final RMTP to draw conclusions about their influence. In Hamilton, we analyzed the "Report on Proceedings and Recommendations from the Citizens' Jury on Transit" prepared for Hamilton City Council on February 12, 2016. This included an exit survey for jury members that posed similar questions to the CAC survey, and also a detailed account of the citizen jury recruitment and process. In addition, we observed several recorded CJ public meetings posted online.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, various Hamilton city council meetings and LRT Subcommittee meetings between 2015 and 2017 were observed in order to assess the extent to which they discussed and adopted recommendations from the citizens' jury.<sup>5</sup> This was combined with analysis of media coverage of the citizens' jury and the wider LRT discussions.

## Analysis

### *Representation*

The Hamilton citizens' jury was a randomly selected group, with 2,400 names generated from the city's tax roll and renters' list. After receiving a letter from the City of Hamilton, those that indicated their interest were selected based on a reflection of "the diversity of [Hamilton's] population in terms of gender, age, education, income, and whether they are born in Canada or elsewhere" (Tim L. Dobbie 2016). An external consulting team ensured that a member was selected from each of the 15 wards, in addition to the upper city, the lower city, former suburb and rural community members, and that each of the final 19 members understood their responsibilities and time commitment. The data is not available to determine if the members of the citizens' jury exactly reflected the demographics of the city as a whole and, as research demonstrates, it is impossible for a citizens' jury to represent all the viewpoints and characteristics of the wider community (Smith and Wales 2000: 57). Nevertheless, the jury selection process followed accepted procedures and asked the correct questions for establishing a representative jury (Tim L. Dobbie 2016: 35, Best nd). Several CJ members gave positive feedback about the diversity of the jury, noting it was a "great cross-section of Hamilton citizens" and they were happy to "meet with others in this large and very diverse city to discuss such an important project" (Tim

L. Dobbie 2016: 22). Even critics did not complain about the representativeness of the citizens' jury in their opposition to the proposed LRT (Citizens' jury on Hamilton LRT 2016).

In Detroit, the Regional Transit Authority called for a "balanced membership" with the citizens advisory committee comprised of "users of public transportation, senior citizens and people with disabilities, business, labor, community and faith-based organizations." In its first year of operation, 2014, there were 50 members on the CAC, each serving a one-year term. At the end of the CAC's first year, the RTA Board discussed its composition, reflecting on its successes and challenges.<sup>6</sup> Many of the CAC members expressed a dislike for the size of the committee and felt that 50 people was slightly unwieldy and that 35 people would allow for representation of different demographics but be small enough to be efficient.

The RTA Board expressed that they wanted to give all interested and qualified individuals the opportunity to apply while balancing the need for regional representation.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, members were sought out by the RTA to represent various local civic organizations, non-profit groups, transit advocacy organizations, as well as the academic community within the region. Importance was placed on engaging the counties' by asking them to encourage individuals with the qualifications and desire to apply, making the process both competitive, yet flexible so that the RTA could ensure the right people who wanted to be there were there.<sup>8</sup> Although this format is efficient in ensuring geographic representation alongside proper qualifications being represented on the committee, it has the potential to bar other citizens who may have valuable input and experiences. Survey responses confirm that this may be the case. While survey participants felt that they had the requisite technical skills to participate in transit decision-making, they were slightly less positive about agreeing that the committee represented the Detroit area at large. The survey results indicate that the CAC is comprised of a majority of white, highly educated population with over 80% having obtained a postgraduate degree. Based on Detroit's history, it is evident that a highly educated, majority white group of people do not represent the low income, racially segregated populations within the region that are typically located in Detroit and who have the least access to affordable and effective public transit. It would naturally follow that the RTA's recruitment process of contacting prominent community members through county policy-makers would produce this non-representative group of people, as they did not reach out beyond formal avenues to achieve their quota. Without a specific legislative requirement to include low-income, racial minorities, there wasn't a deliberate effort to reach out to these populations. The observational data revealed there was slightly more diversity of people in terms of different levels of physical abilities being present and accommodated. Their presence could be correlated with a more active Seniors and ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Committee that produced a comprehensive and highly praised ADA Standards of Practise document on the subject of accessibility that the RTA Board valued and adopted into the policy considerations.

However, despite having the goal of searching for a comprehensive group of individuals, the RTA Board acknowledged that certain groups were underrepresented: regular transit users, youth, and the business community.<sup>9</sup> A seemingly more important focus was capturing voices of people from all of the counties across the region. This was most likely a way to advance the goal of creating a *regionally* connecting transit system between dispersed neighbourhoods and various employment centres. By intentionally including suburban voices, there is the potential to positively impact the previous poorly functioning transit system by regionalizing user input and perhaps even securing funding sources from the counties.

### *Operation and Policy Learning*

The Hamilton citizens' jury met and worked for approximately 40 hours between October 2015 and January 2016. During this time, the jury heard from policy experts from Hamilton, Ontario and across Canada involved in light rail transit. These witnesses included staff members from Kitchener-Waterloo where an LRT is under construction as well as community and businesses representatives. The jury was provided with an extensive amount of education at pre-scheduled meetings, so that each jury member was informed about what questions they were tasked with answering, and also what restrictions were placed on their conversation. A Steering Committee ensured this took place through their "arms' length oversight" of the CJ by having direct input in selection, process design, and implementation with the actual process being facilitated by an outside consultant group. Some of the meetings were only open to jury members, whereas others were public meetings "designed so that both jury and community members could learn from presenters, engage in dialogue to process what they heard and develop ideas of how what they learned would apply to the Hamilton situation" (Tim L. Dobbie 2016: 17).

It is worthy of note that regional divisions were not evident in the CJ's meetings and did not appear to hamper its work. As noted above, the CJ was comprised of representatives from all parts of Hamilton including the city centre and the suburbs. This composition had the potential to recreate the divisions evident in city council within the jury. In spite of this potential, it did not happen. The members of the jury did not refer to the existence of regional divisions. They were able to work cohesively and to develop conclusions that were supported across regional divisions. A substantial majority (78 per cent) of CJ members rated this method of engagement as 'Excellent' in their exit survey. Jury members variously described their experience as: "Very good experience and very educational as well," and that it allowed them to be "informed about the city I live in and about having my opinions heard" (Tim L. Dobbie 2016: 21-2). Advocates of the LRT and the citizens' jury also praised it for the quality of its analysis and conclusions based on its policy learning and the work done during meetings.<sup>10</sup>

However, it is possible to present a more critical perspective. In one view, the CJ was simply used by proponents of LRT as a way to solicit public support for this transit proposal (Citizens' jury on Hamilton LRT 2016). The jury was not provided with a blank slate and given a mandate to decide on whether to build an LRT system and where this LRT should run. Instead the jury was explicitly told that it could not challenge this decision or make proposals on the fundamental questions of the desirability of an LRT or its route but rather was given such tasks as developing mechanisms to inform the community about transit development and minimizing the negative impacts of LRT construction. As a result, the list of witnesses did not include experts (either academics or policy-makers) who were critical of an LRT (Tim L. Dobbie 2016: 17-20). The jury members were not given information to challenge the idea that an LRT was needed or the pros and cons of possible alternative forms of transit infrastructure. The Hamilton citizens' jury process therefore facilitated policy learning within the terms of the mandate it was given. It was considerably more limited with respect to facilitating policy learning about the debate as to whether an LRT is desirable.

During the period of observation, the Citizen Advisory Committee in Detroit was concluding its first year of operation, through which they successfully established and accomplished their broad objectives: establish processes and procedures; meet regularly and keep quorum; meet and set professionalism expectations; and assist the RTA.<sup>11</sup> The CAC's relationship to the RTA is institutionalized as an advisory body. This means that not only does the CAC have legal standing, but also the responsibility and explicit mandate to advise the RTA on matters pertaining to transportation based on the desires of the citizenry. Functionally, the CAC created several sub-committees to divide this work: Policy Committee, Community Engagement Committee, and the Seniors and ADA Committee. As the RTA sought to develop and implement a regional transit master plan, they publicly acknowledged that citizen participation, through the CAC, was necessary to formulate effective plans. The CAC produced several policy recommendations, most notably, the 'Values for Regional Transit' document which was to help the RTA create the RTMP.<sup>12</sup> The scope of their work was broad and could be dictated by the individuals who participated in the committee. In many ways, the CAC was able to determine their structure, how they were going to operate, and the areas of transit policy they wanted to work on.

As with the Hamilton jury, the CAC's composition did not seem to recreate the regional divides that were present in the institutional and policy setting. None of the observed meetings highlighted this dynamic among participants. It is worth noting that as the CAC was composed of people who applied for the role and also demonstrated some level of involvement in the public transportation field, there was likely motivation to work collaboratively in order to assist the RTA in their plans. There was a seemingly collegial relationship between the CAC members and the group was goal oriented. Based on survey responses, every CAC respondent agreed or strongly agreed with the sentiment of "being able to express opinions, ideas, and thoughts freely at CAC meetings" with 82% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the structure of their meetings facilitated active participation and policy learning.

A key difference between the CAC and the CJ was that the former was not exposed to many educational experiences. This is evidenced through the observation of their meetings and their survey responses. CAC meetings were self-led, rather than chaired by a member of the RTA, meaning that they determined the content and direction of the meetings. Many of the CAC members were seemingly experts in the transit planning field, or had community and transit experience that pertained to the issues being discussed, and therefore did not invite outside voices or authorities into these discussions. Even when RTA Board members attended the CAC meetings, including the RTA CEO, they were not given special preference, but rather listed as an item

on the agenda. This was quite different from the Hamilton CJ experience, where committee members were taken on field trips to visit the Kitchener-Waterloo LRT construction site, and then subsequently heard from the local BIAs and other representatives. These sessions were educational in nature, with the conversation being driven by the CJ Steering Committee Chairs, rather than the CJ members themselves. This contrasted with the Detroit CAC experience that was member-driven, meaning the issues discussed and policies pursued were at the discretion of those that were in attendance at these meetings.

### *Policy Recommendations and Impact on Decision-Making Process*

The third question addressed is whether either citizen body actually impacted policy outputs. In Hamilton, while it is certainly the case that members of city council, including the mayor, claim that the citizens' jury was influential, it is more difficult to find evidence to support this claim. A few of the comments from jury members reveal that they were not entirely sure that City Council would actually make use of their final recommendations:

I only hope that the recommendations we present to City Council will help shape the decisions that will be made before, during, and after the planning, construction and completion phases [of] the LRT.

I would like City Counsellors to put real weight on the recommendations. I want them to realize that our opinions were well-informed.

The Jury worked really hard to come up with these recommendations, please implement them. Address issues you are comfortable dealing with. Have the difficult conversations. Advocate for the vulnerable populations who have no voice RE: gentrification (Tim L. Dobbie 2016: 21-2).

These jury concerns regard the importance of their involvement in the process were echoed by critics who asserted that the citizens' jury was "nothing more than political pawns in a public relations exercise" (Citizens' jury on Hamilton LRT 2016). Several letters to the *Hamilton Spectator* made similar comments. One pointed out that the jury "is not being asked to decide anything. They have simply been recruited as cheerleaders for a scheme that will largely profit special interest groups related to the construction of LRT. It's time we put an end to this LRT nonsense" (Berenbaum 2015).

In establishing the jury, the city council placed clear limits on its likely impact. The jury's mandate made it clear that it would have no power to advise on the proposed route; on the fact that it would be built, owned, operated and maintained by Metrolinx; and indeed over whether an LRT was in itself desirable. Even more significantly, the jury's mandate bluntly stated that "City Council is not bound by the recommendations the Citizens' Jury develops" (Tim L. Dobbie 2016: 14).

The CJ's mandate suggests that it was always likely to have a fairly limited impact on the wider policy debate. Examination of the jury's recommendations indicates that this was indeed the case. The citizens' jury final report listed seven guiding principles and 14 main recommendations. Several of these recommendations can be classified as being broad and uncontroversial and as a result difficult to imagine generating disagreement. The conclusions that it is necessary to work "collaboratively with community and other stakeholders," to "put people first," and to act "for the benefit of the whole city" are examples of this type of recommendation (Tim L. Dobbie 2016: 4). Other jury recommendations have been implemented. In these cases, however, it is impossible to state definitively that these recommendations are being implemented as a result of the jury's report. In its conclusions, for example, the jury called for the development of "a community engagement strategy" with "sufficient staff to implement it during construction of LRT" (Tim L. Dobbie 2016: 7). Such a strategy has been implemented by the City of Hamilton and Paul Johnson, Director of LRT for the City of Hamilton, stated that the citizens' jury recommendations "related to community input on design will be incorporated into our consultation process."<sup>13</sup> Mayor Fred Eisenberger, at the same meeting, argued for endorsing the principles of the citizens' jury. One element of this is a Community Connectors initiative that was launched in May 2016 by the city and Metrolinx. This involves a team of individuals attempting to meet with all business and home owners along the proposed LRT route at least twice a year for the duration of the project in order to provide them with information about the project and to solicit feedback.<sup>14</sup> While this

strategy certainly fits with the CJ's calls for "good communication" and the use of "engagement methods that foster dialogue" it is not the case that the program was put in place because of the citizens' jury. The city implemented a range of different community engagement exercises relating to the LRT before and after the citizens' jury report and indeed consultation is mandated under the legislative requirements for a transportation project of this type.

Other proposals made by the citizens' jury were ignored, indicating clear limits to its impact. The jury's call for a pedestrian mall on King Street between Wellington and Walnut has not advanced. Nor has the jury's most controversial proposal. As noted above, the area rating system is a central, and controversial, feature of transit funding in Hamilton whereby rural and suburban areas of the city pay less based on a lower level of transit service. The citizens' jury recommended "consideration of a change" to this system and the introduction of a modified model. Even this qualified recommendation, however, has thus far been ignored by city council including the mayor Fred Eisenberger (Craggs 2016).

Following the adoption by Hamilton's LRT sub-committee at its May 2016 meeting of the seven 'Guiding Principles' formulated by the citizens' jury, the jury received very little attention from either the sub-committee or the full city council. It was not, for example, mentioned once at an almost five hour meeting in July 2016. Overall, although many municipal politicians praised the citizens' jury for its work, there is limited evidence to indicate that it had a lasting impact on the transit debate. A similar conclusion can be reached in the case of Detroit. Although the CAC communicated with the RTA regularly and drafted several policy recommendations, it is difficult to argue that the CAC was influential in other areas of the transit debate, such as the wider regional ideological divisions.

In light of the Detroit area Regional Master Transit Plan coming to completion in 2016, the CAC positioned itself to have a decisive position on how the RTA should employ meaningful participation techniques for the wider public. This was evident through the creation of the 'Community Engagement Committee' and the subsequent "Recommendation Concerning Public Involvement Effectiveness Enhancement," "Values for Regional Transit" and "Vision and Objectives for Regional Transit Planning and Implementation" to assist the RTA Board in the creation of a Public Involvement Plan for the people of Southeast Michigan.<sup>15</sup> There is an important distinction to be made here: the CAC made it clear that they were *not* the public that the RTA needed to be communicating with. Some RTA Board members noted that they felt the CAC was an extension of the public.<sup>16</sup> Therefore the CAC's inherent purpose is seen as representing the public interest, which seemingly would accomplish the Board's due diligence to engage the public through actively communicating with the committee. It was noted that the CAC's role was advisory, while also representative of the broader communities.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the CAC saw it as their role to recommend an effective community engagement policy to the Board. This, in turn, would help the RTA be more effective, as they would be, in theory, crafting policies that are more representative of the public's desires. These discussions revealed that many members felt that it was in their mandate to help the Board better engage with the community, not just simply be the community for the Board to engage with.

Seemingly, the RTA took this to heart and underwent a comprehensive public engagement campaign in 2015. When the Regional Transit Master Plan was announced in 2016, it included a 15 page section on its 'Public Engagement Process' which detailed its multi-faceted approach to engaging the range of diverse communities across the Detroit metropolitan region. This approach included: engaging the Stakeholder Advisory Committee and the Citizen Advisory Committee, hosting region-wide open houses, creating an RTA Meeting Toolkit to allow stakeholders and organizations to host their own meeting on transit, an up-to-date RMTP webpage, hosting listening sessions with RTA CEO Michael Ford, text surveys, a Ridership Satisfaction Survey, a Public Opinion Survey conducted over the phone, ongoing media outreach, regular social media updates, advertisements on local transit, RTA newsletters (both distributed in print and online), branded giveaways to raise the profile of the RTA, in addition to RTA staff attending community events to engage with people face to face.<sup>18</sup> In total, the RTA hosted 130 events, received 1,800 public comments, interviewed 1,200 AAATA, DDOT, DTC and SMART riders and conducted 1,500 phone interviews in the four-county RTA area. These public engagement features took place in three rounds: Building Awareness of the RTA (May 2015), Identifying Our Transit Priorities (October 2015), and Presenting the Draft RMTP (May 2016). This broad-based approach was an attempt to capture diverse public input so that the millage to fund the RMTP would be accepted by voters and pass the November 8, 2016 referendum.

The RTA summarized its public engagement approach as: flexible, multi-faceted (making use of a “wide array of tools”), educational, and inclusive (targeting a “wide array of individuals”).<sup>19</sup> When comparing this to the CAC’s eight recommendations, it seems that the RTA met some of these (Citizens’ Advisory Committee 2014a). The CAC desired “active outreach” and felt that the RTA should take “responsibility ... [for] effective public involvement.” These recommendations were concerned with *process*: was the message being communicated to the public in ways that they would understand and connect with?; what are the goals for number of people reached?; does the public have good access to information prior to meetings so they can be prepared? Although the RTA attempted to create a multi-faceted approach, they did not clearly address these recommendations. For example, the CAC recommended that the RTA “work with groups and organizations which have trusted relationships with and better access to the targeted people” (Citizens’ Advisory Committee 2014a: 2). The RTA lists three groups it facilitated conversations with and that there were 17 requests from other community groups for follow up.<sup>20</sup> Without a specific numeric goal, it is difficult to assess whether this met the requirement. A missing piece of information was surveying the CAC’s sentiments about the public engagement process, as it would have been useful to note whether they felt the process was in fact, in line with their original intentions.

Within the ‘Values for Regional Transit’ document, the CAC listed eight values, compared to the RTA’s final three: Rapid, Reliable, Regional. These three values are encompassed with the CAC’s, with slight word changes; however, one core value was omitted: equity (Citizens’ Advisory Committee 2014b). The CAC addresses this concept through several other listed values (affordability, accessibility, safety) in addition to ‘equity.’ However the RTA does not address this concept even once in their RMTP. This seems to be a major discrepancy in the objectives of the CAC and the RTA. In spite of this, the CAC’s ‘Vision and Objectives for Regional Transit and Implementation’ marks several short and long term goals that match up quite similarly to the RTA’s final RMTP, such as their desire for a BRT and commuter rail to Ann Arbor to be part of a seamless, regional transit system (Citizens’ Advisory Committee 2014c). Again, it is not clear whether these recommendations were as a direct result of the CAC’s proposed policies; however, the similarities point to a bit of symbiosis, even if not directly stated by the RTA.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This comparison of the citizens’ jury in Hamilton and the citizens advisory committee in Detroit highlights important similarities and differences between the two exercises. There were differences in the way participants were selected, in how they operated and with respect to the policy learning process. In both cases, however, the participants felt the experience worthwhile and one that facilitated active participation and engagement with each other and with the issues examined. At one level, then, the citizen engagement mechanisms can be considered effective in helping to develop social capital among the participants and in building cross regional links at the citizen level. In neither case did the participants identify irreconcilable regional differences that prevented them from reaching agreement and developing policy prescriptions.

In spite of this the exercises had a similarly limited impact on the overall policy debates in the two settings. Analysis of the citizens’ jury in Hamilton points to a ‘tokenism’ wherein their input was sought but not substantially included in the final policy outcomes. The issues that dominated the LRT debate were not entirely relevant to the conversation of the CJ. The jury focused on *how* the construction should be carried out to minimize the negative effects for local businesses and emphasized the importance of public engagement in the process. The jury did not speak on the points, such as the placement of the line and whether a line should be built at all, which have been the main sources of contention within the political arena.

In Detroit, a majority of CAC respondents felt that the decision-making power was under the RTA’s purview and that their influence was limited. When asked if “[t]he CAC’s level of involvement in the construction of basic transit plans is sufficient,” the “neutral” response garnered the most responses with 45 per cent; 27 per cent selected “agree,” which tied with those either selecting “disagree”—18 per cent or “strongly disagree”—9 per cent. In many ways, the survey responses and observational data lead to the assessment that the participation tended to be symbolic rather than determinant or formative in nature (see Fainstein 2010). While the CAC had more self-determination and autonomy to discuss topics and make recommendations than was the case in Hamilton, their actions (which were largely advisory via policy recommendations) were relatively symbolic.

Two interrelated factors stand out when explaining these groups’ limited policy impact. The first is the institutional place of the groups within the respective policy architectures. Both the CJ and the CAC were

established as purely advisory groups, rather than groups with higher degrees of self-determination. Therefore, although both processes recruited individuals who genuinely wanted to learn and contribute to the transit debate, in both cases they were limited by their institutional mandate. This was evident in Detroit on several occasions when CAC members desired to move beyond the pre-authorized boundaries (for example, expressing concern over the lack of public comment during RTA Board meetings), but did not have the power to redefine the relationship. In Hamilton, the CJ's mandate was limited from the beginning with the council clearly stating what the jury could and could not examine and also that it was not bound by the jury's conclusions.

The second factor that helps to explain both groups' lack of influence relates to the political context within which they were established and the pre-existing political divisions within the communities in which they operated. In Detroit, the RTA's proposed regional public transportation network and the RMTP millage that was to pay for this network failed in spite of support from the CAC. This failed attempt at finally having a coordinated regional transit system falls in line with the Nelles' analysis of previous abandoned transit proposals (Nelles 2012). The failure stemmed in part from regional political and economic divisions. However, even this depiction of historical transit failures over the last six decades miss another important point: the Detroit area's longstanding history of racism and segregation that manifests itself as regional divides. It is perhaps the case that no amount of robust participation or advocacy could have convinced the general population to vote for the millage in November 2016. L. Brooke Patterson, a long-standing Macomb County Executive publicly and vocally opposed the millage. Notably, the largest opposition came from Macomb County, with only 40% per cent approval (Lawrence 2016b, Lawrence and Witsell 2016). Other opponents of the millage couched their position through the lens of economics, by stating that "voters chose to retain their economic freedom, keeping billions of dollars in the private economy and out of the budgets of bureaucrats" (Lawrence and Witsell 2016). While this may be true, it obscures the disparity between the wealthy suburbs and the poor city (Detroit), which does not have the ability to properly fund a transit system that adequately connects to the suburbs. It is not clear that any amount of citizen participation could have bridged this gap.

Regional divisions are also evident in the Hamilton LRT debate. Many of the debates and divisions in the argument over the construction of the LRT occurred between and among councillors who represented suburban areas and those who represented the downtown, with opposition to the LRT coming largely from the suburban representatives. The members of the citizens' jury were drawn from the whole region and tasked with reaching conclusions that would benefit the entire region. This task, however, occurred within the context of the limited mandate referred to above and thus had no impact on the fundamental divisions that generated acrimonious disputes and lengthy delays in securing approval for the LRT.

Analysis of two transit advisory groups in Detroit and Hamilton reveals that regardless of the type, amount, and quality of participation, the representativeness of the group, or the self-determination of the group itself, transit decision-making can be plagued with historic and contested positions as to how money should be spent to build a regional system. These case studies highlight the way entrenched regional perspectives affect the policy process regardless of the amount of public engagement and advocacy that occurs. While citizen participation plays a necessary role in transit policy-making, the case studies of two institutional groups highlight the way in which their actions may be too narrow in scope to have a substantial effect on the policy process. Follow up research into these and other case studies, and particularly the extent to which these types of citizen groups interact with other citizen engagement and consultation exercises surrounding public transit development in the context of regional political structures, will help analysis of the effectiveness of citizen participation in transit decision-making.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rapid transit for downtown Hamilton was advocated in the city's 2007 Transportation Masterplan and then later in its 2013 Rapid Ready transportation plan. Rapid transit for Hamilton was also advocated by



Metrolinx in its 2008 report, *The Big Move: Transforming Transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area*. Toronto: Metrolinx.

<sup>2</sup> GO Transit is the regional public transit service providing train and bus service for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

<sup>3</sup> 11 members participated in the survey.

<sup>4</sup> These meetings are available on Placespeak.com.

<sup>5</sup> These meetings are available at <https://www.thepublicrecord.ca/?s=council+meeting+LRT>

<sup>6</sup> Notes from Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan Board of Directors Meeting on Wednesday, October 15, 2014, p 2.

<sup>7</sup> Notes from Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan Board of Directors Meeting on Wednesday, December 17, 2014, p 4.

<sup>8</sup> Notes from Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan Board of Directors Meeting on Wednesday, October 15, 2014, p 4.

<sup>9</sup> Notes from Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan Board of Directors Meeting on Wednesday, October 15, 2014, p 5.

<sup>10</sup> See for example comments made by Mayor Fred Eisenberger at the Hamilton Light Rail Committee meeting March 29, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> CAC Presentation at Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan Board of Directors Meeting on Wednesday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014; Powerpoint document.

<sup>12</sup> Notes from Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan Board of Directors Meeting on Wednesday, December 17, 2014: p. 3. Documents are available at: <http://www.rtamichigan.org/organization-committees/citizens-advisory-committee/cac-work-product/>

<sup>13</sup> See Hamilton Light Rail Committee meeting, March 29, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> 663 face-to-face meetings occurred in October 2016 in the second round of visits under the Community Connectors program.

<sup>15</sup> Documents can be found at: <http://www.rtamichigan.org/organization-committees/citizens-advisory-committee/cac-work-product/>

<sup>16</sup> Notes from Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting, University of Michigan Detroit Center, Monday, November 17, 2014: p3.

<sup>17</sup> Notes from Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan Board of Directors Meeting on Wednesday, October 15, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan, "Regional Master Transit Plan," August, 2016, [http://www.rtamichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-PLAN\\_August-2016-for-website.pdf](http://www.rtamichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-PLAN_August-2016-for-website.pdf), p 27.

<sup>19</sup> Regional Master Transit Plan, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan, "BEST: RMTP Public Engagement Monthly Summary," May 2015, [http://www.rtamichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/RMTP\\_PublicEngagementSummary\\_Round-1.pdf](http://www.rtamichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/RMTP_PublicEngagementSummary_Round-1.pdf): 3-4.

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