



TORONTO: LOS ANGELES OF THE NORTH

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	4,700,000	Madrid, Milan, Dallas-Fort Worth, Guangzhou
Urbanized Area* Population	4,370,000	
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	638	Cleveland, Montreal, Sao Paulo, Brisbane
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	1,650	
Population per Square Mile	6,800	Nagoya, Curitiba, Los Angeles, Oslo
Population per Square Kilometer	2,600	
*Continuously built up area		

17 January 2004

Flying into Toronto's Pearson International Airport one could easily get confused. It just plain looks like Los Angeles. There is an impressive downtown area, with towers similar to those found in downtown Los Angeles, but the Los Angeles towers are 20 years newer. It is true that Los Angeles has nothing to rival the CN Tower, nor is there a lake like Ontario, but it is similar nonetheless.

There is Yonge Street in North York, with its towers spread along a strip development that is what downtowns might look like if they had been developed after the car. It is, of course, an open question whether they would have developed at all. Yonge Street looks like Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, only 40 years younger.

Then there are the slices of suburban Orange County to be found throughout the suburban area, with their five, ten and fifteen story buildings arranged in the fashion of a campus. There are the hundreds of square miles of single-family dwellings, set out on relatively small lots, for as far as the eye can see. Indeed, Toronto suburban densities are lower than those of Los Angeles. It might be better to think of it as suburban Phoenix with snow.

Finally, there is the Goteborg-Copenhagen-Phoenix sprawl of one-story commercial, industrial and warehouse buildings, so densely packed that it appears one could walk for miles on their roofs without having to descend to ground level.

Once on the ground, a drive on the MacDonald-Cartier Freeway could well lead to the impression that freeways were invented in Toronto. Here, the world's first 12 to 14 lane freeway, a width only recently equaled or exceeded in Atlanta or Buenos Aires. The MacDonald-Cartier and the San Diego Freeway in Los Angeles both carry nearly 400,000 vehicles a day at their busiest point. There may be busier freeways somewhere in the world, but not many.

This is Toronto. American urban planners and transit officials think about it as the ultimate transit city --- an ultimate form of urbanization and perhaps even a small slice of Europe on the North American continent. But, like Portland, European-ness is limited to the most dense suburbs, which resemble the suburbs of Paris and Copenhagen that U.S. urban planners can never see from their sidewalk cafes and metros.

As for transit, there is no disputing that Toronto is the most transit dependent urban area in North America. Approximately 13 percent of travel (person miles) is on transit, nearly 1.5 times the market share of New York and a couple of percentage points above Montreal. But there is perhaps no metropolitan area that typifies more the downtown and core orientation of transit.

Toronto's vertical downtown is so impressive as to lead to the impression that it contains most of the employment. It does not and by a long shot. Nearly 95 percent of employment in the Toronto area is outside downtown. Toronto's six percent downtown market share is one of the lowest among the world's largest urban areas, and not that much more than the three percent of Los Angeles. But the share of the urban geography it occupies is even less. By the most liberal definition, downtown Toronto is no more than 0.5 percent of the urbanized fabric. The two downtowns both have approximately 200,000 jobs.

Virtually all of the transit system keys on downtown and the core. The suburban rail system (Go Transit) feeds downtown's Union Station, which is either the start or end of 95 percent of trips on the system. The subway serves downtown with three lines, two of which converge on --- you guessed it --- Union Station.

Not far outside downtown, transit's market share drops off significantly. And, suburban transit ridership in Toronto is approximately the same as in Los Angeles. Indeed, there are few metropolitan areas in North America with a skimpier suburban transit system. This, of course, makes no difference in traffic, since suburban transit market shares in North America, Australasia and Western Europe are so slight as to make no perceivable difference in traffic volumes. But for the comparatively few who are truly transit dependent, getting from one suburb to another by transit in Toronto is generally more difficult than in, God forbid, American urban areas.

On the other hand, intense rail and bus systems that key on downtown's three square miles doubtless make a difference. Why any city needs to have so many people working in so little space seems an anachronism. But it is here that Toronto is much different than Los Angeles. In August of 2003, the power went off in a major portion of the northeast United States and Ontario. Canadians blamed Americans and Americans blamed Canadians. In the end, the Americans seem to have been the guilty parties, or at least Americans from Ohio.

Two North American urban areas were hit particularly hard. New York and Toronto, both of which rely on electrified rail systems to move unnatural numbers of people to small patches of urbanization were filled that Thursday afternoon with commuters stuck with no way to get home. According to the *National Post*, even Toronto's dieselized suburban rail (GO Transit) system closed because of signaling difficulties. In both large urban areas, people slept wherever they could, but large numbers did not get home that night. Of course, driving was not a pleasurable experience either, but at least, with considerable delay, the commute home could be made, assuming one had the foresight to have enough petrol to avoid having to refuel at the stations that were also out of service. Signals, of course, are important on highways, but operating without them is considerably more safe and practical than on a suburban rail system.

Canadian and American networks were filled with images of people sleeping on sidewalks and on the steps of public buildings. What was not so obvious was the other large urban areas where there was no such problem. In Ottawa, Cleveland and Buffalo, people managed to get home, because there they rely on cars and buses.

But imagine if the blackout had occurred during the coldest time of winter. It is not inconceivable that a Thursday afternoon blackout in January or February could correspond with a temperature of 15 to 20 degrees below zero (Fahrenheit), with a wind chill index of 40 to 50 degrees colder. Many would have spent a very uncomfortable cold night in dark buildings. Others simply would have died. In this respect, Toronto is different than Los Angeles, where the more agreeable climate would not permit such a disaster to occur.

Land use in Toronto also looks very much like Los Angeles. Like Los Angeles, Toronto is the nation's most densely populated contiguous developed area (urbanized area). But, between the two, Los Angeles is more dense --- by nearly five percent. Comparing a density profile between the two urban areas reveals little difference. The most dense areas of Toronto are approximately the same density as the most dense in Los Angeles, and the percentage of the area at similar densities is, to repeat, similar.

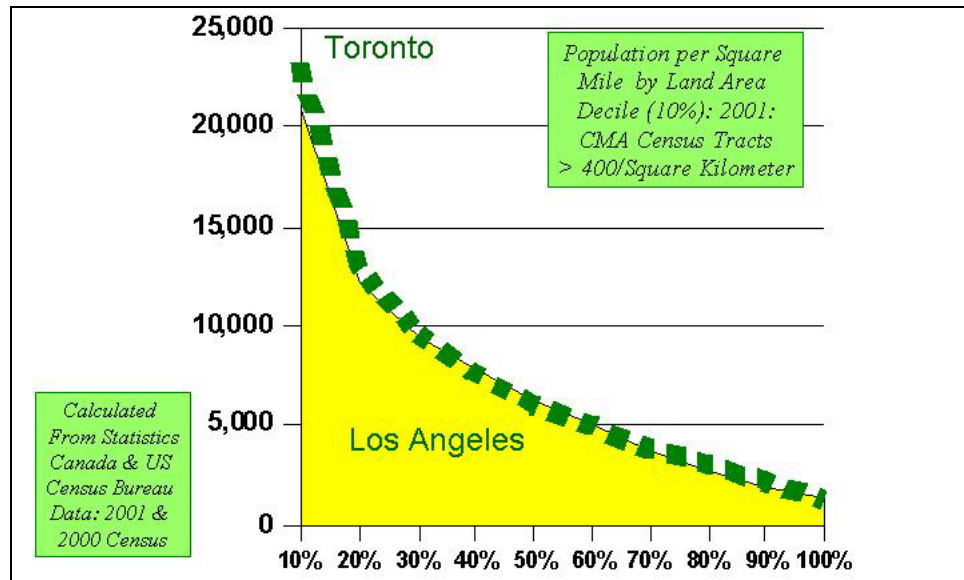
Toronto and Province of Ontario officials are concerned about urban sprawl and are considering ways to combat it. Yet, the sprawling suburbs of Toronto are more dense than any other urban area in Canada, and more dense than the entire Portland urbanized area.

Some local planners are naïve enough to believe that they can materially densify the existing urban area. Aspiring politicians mentally counting future votes will however note that the only place that forced densification has occurred produced an overwhelming electoral revolt in little more than five years, putting an end to the "monkey. In 1997, Metro, Portland's land use agency, adopted a goal to increase the density of the urban area nearly 55 percent. This was to be achieved by accommodating a 65 percent increase in population with a less than a 10 percent expansion of land area. Surely this would create a greater sense of togetherness and community. Journal articles, fawning newspaper reports and urban planning advocates around the world trumpeted the wisdom of these policies, which would still leave Portland at least one-third less dense than Los Angeles.

The reviews at home, however, were not as positive and the people seemed not to be in a "community way." A strong anti-densification movement arose out of detached housing neighborhoods where multi-unit dwellings were as out of place as the Guggenheim in the otherwise tasteful designs of Bilbao. A referendum outlawed further densification, and as a result, little more of it will occur. Nor will significant densification occur in Toronto, so long as the consent of the governed is required. The planners and politicians would be best served to skip over the interim and disruptive phase of mimicking Portland's rubbery urban growth boundary and set about providing the infrastructure that responds to the way people want to live, rather than the way the planners would like them to live.

And they need to start with highways. As the urban area continues to grow, both in land area and population, it will become important for necessary transport infrastructure to be built. There is no point in expecting transit to do what it can't --- substitute for the automobile except for the niche downtown market and to a lesser degree, mobility in the core of the core. All of the projections indicate that virtually all travel growth will be highway travel growth, and failure to provide for

it will render this urban area, for the past 50 years the second fastest growing metropolitan area in North America (after Dallas-Fort Worth and *ahead* of Los Angeles), less competitive or even uncompetitive. There are any number of urban areas within the boundaries of the North American Free Trade Agreement that will be happy to provide locations for businesses seeking to avoid environments where planners and politicians have abdicated their responsibility to provide for growth, deluded by their empty ideological slogans.



14-Lane MacDonald Cartier Freeway



Suburban Office Park



Suburban Office Parks



Upper Middle Income Suburbs: Newmarket



Toronto or Los Angeles (snow gives away the answer)



Commercial Sprawl



“As Far as the Eye Can See:” The Sprawl of Toronto
North York Commercial Strip in Distance

By Wendell Cox

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