

LET'S WORRY ABOUT STAGNATION, NOT SPRAWL

Winnipeg And The 2001 Census

By Wendell Cox

Executive Summary

- Winnipeg's ranking in size among Canadian cities has declined from fourth in 1951 to eighth in 2001.
- Winnipeg's rate of population growth is far below the other top ten cities, except for Sudbury, and the disparity is increasing over time.
- Despite this lack of growth there is a view in the community that Winnipeg suffers from "urban sprawl."
- Concerns about the negative effects of urban sprawl - absorption of farmland, traffic congestion, reduced density - do not have much validity in Winnipeg.
- The City of Portland, Oregon, employs stringent anti-sprawl policies, but Winnipeg is denser than Portland.
- Urban sprawl is not a problem for Winnipeg, but anemic growth is. The Province and the City should reject trendy anti-sprawl policies that have been introduced in U.S. centres with fast growth known as "smart growth" policies, because they will throttle what little growth there is.
- Manitoba needs to focus on a pro-growth policy direction that can revive economic and population growth in Winnipeg. An aggressive agenda to promote urban expansion - competitive taxes, deregulation of planning, the revamping of building and zoning codes, the removal of rent control to build residential density in the core, transit reform, an aggressive immigration policy - should receive priority, not more regional planning.

Introduction

The 2001 census data confirms what many have known for some time. Winnipeg's ranking in size has fallen far behind its peers among the nation's metropolitan areas. Back in 1951, Winnipeg was the nation's fourth largest urban area, smaller than only Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. As late as the 1976 census, Winnipeg ranked fifth and had been passed only by Ottawa-Hull. But 25 years later, Winnipeg has fallen to number eight, having been passed by Calgary, Edmonton and even comparatively slow-growing Québec (see Figure 1). From 1951 to 2001, Winnipeg had by far the lowest rate of population growth in the ten top metropolitan areas, more than one-quarter below ninth-ranking Montreal - Winnipeg gained 88 percent, while Montreal gained 122 percent.

And worse, Winnipeg's growth has deteriorated in the last 25 years (Table 1).

- From 1951 to 1976, Winnipeg grew by 61.9 percent, 59 percent of the average of the top ten metropolitan areas (105 percent). Only one of the top ten, London, grew slightly slower than Winnipeg.

- From 1976 to 2001, Winnipeg's growth dropped to 16.1 percent, only 32 percent of the average for the top ten metropolitan areas (53.1 percent). Slow-

Metropolitan Population: 1951-2001

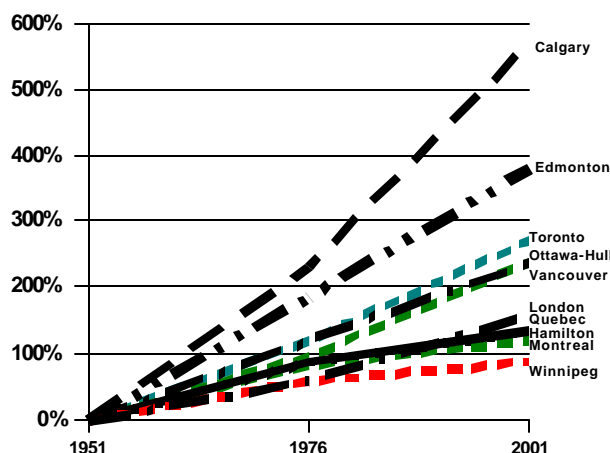


Figure 1

growing Montréal and Québec grew faster than Winnipeg. Halifax and St. John's, in the economically depressed Maritimes and Newfoundland, also grew faster. Even Saskatoon and Regina grew faster. Indeed, among the nation's top 20 metropolitan areas, only Sudbury grew slower (it actually declined).

If the growth rates of the last ten years continue, Hamilton will force Winnipeg into ninth place well before the 2006 census begins.

Table 1 Census Metropolitan Area Population: 1951-2001 Population in 1,000s					
Metropolitan Area	1951	1976	2001	% Change	
				1951-1976	1976-2001
Toronto	1,262	2,803	4,683	122.1%	67.1%
Montreal	1,539	2,802	3,426	82.1%	22.3%
Vancouver	586	1,166	1,987	99.0%	70.4%
Ottawa – Hull	312	693	1,064	122.5%	53.4%
Calgary	142	468	951	228.8%	103.3%
Edmonton	194	554	938	186.3%	69.2%
Quebec	289	542	683	87.4%	25.9%
Winnipeg	357	578	671	61.9%	16.1%
Hamilton	282	529	662	87.8%	25.1%
London	168	270	432	61.2%	59.9%
Kitchener	108	272	414	153.2%	52.2%
St. Catharines - Niagara	189	302	377	59.7%	24.9%
Halifax	138	268	359	93.6%	34.0%
Victoria	115	218	312	89.9%	42.9%
Windsor	183	248	308	35.6%	24.4%
Oshawa	NA	135	296		119.2%
Saskatoon	56	136	226	143.7%	66.4%
Regina	73	151	193	108.0%	27.5%
St. John's	81	143	173	77.2%	20.6%
Greater Sudbury	81	157	156	95.1%	-0.9%

Source: Statistics Canada

The data indicate that Winnipeg faces a significant competitive challenge to its relative importance in the national economy. Given that, further regulation of what scant growth exists in Canada's most anemic metropolitan area might seem counter-productive.

The Province of Manitoba's Capital Region Committee is working on a regional planning framework for the capital region area: Winnipeg and surrounding municipalities. One of its objectives is "to promote a healthy and equitable growth pattern in the Capital Region"¹

A recent trend in regional planning has been to aggressively control and regulate growth along the edges of major urban centres in the United States. Best known as "smart growth" or compact city measures, these policies place strict growth controls on urban development, for example, urban growth boundaries, to prohibit residential and commercial developments beyond a certain

point. These policies are controversial and are being pushed in fast growing urban areas where the urban form is seen to be "sprawling" over greater areas beyond city limits.

Exploding the Arguments Against Urban Sprawl in Winnipeg

There is no strong case at all for such regional planning policies in Winnipeg and the capital region, especially since this area is the slowest growing major urban area in Canada. Proponents of "smart growth" and the compact city would strengthen the already too restrictive requirements on development, hastening the day when London and Kitchener will make the top ten but a memory for Winnipeg.

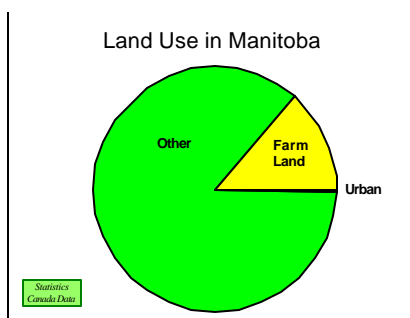


Figure 2

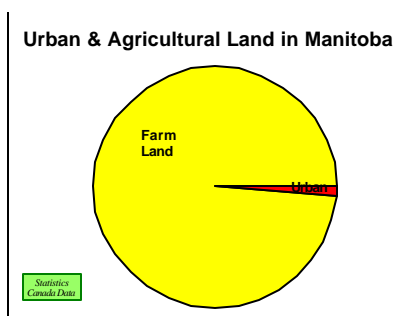


Figure 3

No Threat to Agriculture - To some, any urban sprawl is an evil in itself. Never mind that humanity has been sprawling for as long as it has become more prosperous, or that some European urban areas are sprawling even as they lose population. Concerns about the urban threat to agriculture are groundless. After nearly 150 years of development in Manitoba, less than 900

¹ *Strengthening Manitoba's Capital Region- General Principles and Policy Direction*, from Province of Manitoba website, http://www.gov.mb.ca/ia/capreg/reports_docs/reports/recent/2002strengthening/2.html

square kilometers of the province is urban, only 0.14 percent of the province's area (see Figure 2)². From 1951 to 2001, Manitoba added 4.5 times as much farmland as it did city territory. In 2001, farmland in Manitoba occupied 85 times more space than to urban land (see Figure 3).

Traffic Congestion Less a Problem in Canada - Opponents of urban sprawl use arguments about the quality of life to support their position, for instance that the more compact, less sprawling urban area will have shorter travel times and less traffic congestion. Yet, average travel speeds in the denser urban areas of Western Europe and Asia are slower than in Canada, while the intensity of traffic, measured in urban vehicle kilometers per square kilometer, is greater. Europeans spend 1.6 times as much time in traffic per square mile as Canadians, and Asians 2.6 times as much (see Table 2).³

Table 2 Traffic Intensity				
	Vehicle KM/Square KM	Average Speed	Vehicle Hours/ Square Mile	Compared to Canada
Canada	57,165	15.5	3,693	1.0
Western Europe	72,449	12.3	5,879	1.6
Asia	91,513	9.7	9,478	2.6
Source: Calculated from data in Kenworthy & Laube				

Winnipeg Denser than Many Cities - Further, Winnipeg is not sprawling as extensively as some have suggested. Among the nation's top 10 urban areas,⁴ Winnipeg ranks in the middle, at sixth. Not surprisingly, much larger Toronto is nearly twice as dense, but the gap compared to others is much smaller. Montreal is 1.3 times as dense as Winnipeg, while Vancouver, Ottawa-Hull and Hamilton are 1.2 times as dense. On the other hand, Calgary is only 0.9 times as dense as Winnipeg, while Edmonton and Quebec are 0.7 times as dense (Table 3).

Table 3 10 Largest Urban Areas					
Urban Area	Population	Land Area: KM2	Population /KM2	Rank	Compared to Winnipeg
Toronto	4,366,508	1,654.56	2,639.1	1	1.9
Montreal	3,215,665	1,740.17	1,847.9	2	1.3
Vancouver	1,829,854	1,119.96	1,633.9	5	1.2
Calgary	879,277	702.06	1,252.4	7	0.9
Ottawa - Hull	827,854	490.32	1,688.4	4	1.2
Edmonton	782,101	849.92	920.2	10	0.7
Quebec	635,184	669.36	948.9	9	0.7
Winnipeg	626,685	445.75	1,405.9	6	1.0
Hamilton	618,820	362.40	1,707.6	3	1.2
Kitchener	387,319	313.77	1,234.4	8	0.9
Source: Statistics Canada					

When compared to the City of Portland, Oregon, Winnipeg sprawls less (see Figure 4). This fact is both surprising and significant because Portland is the self-acclaimed anti-sprawl leader of the world. Its restrictive planning policies, including a strong urban growth boundary, densification requirements that can prohibit rebuilding a fire-lost single family house in an area where planners prefer apartments and an expensive light rail line, have received considerable attention in professional urban planning journals. Overall, **Winnipeg is 1.14 times as dense as Portland and densities in the core area of Winnipeg are considerably higher than in Portland.** The densest one percent of Winnipeg is 1.9 times more compacted than Portland's, while the densest 10 percent is 1.6 times that in Portland (see Table 4). Portland's defenders have faced embarrassment before - the 2000 US Census indicates that Los Angeles,

² Manitoba's land area is 554000 square kilometres.

³ Calculated from data in Jeffrey R. Kenworthy, Felix B. Laube and others, *An International Sourcebook of Automobile Dependence in Cities: 1960-1990* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado), 1999.

⁴ Unlike census metropolitan areas, urban areas include only developed areas and exclude rural areas. They are thus the best census geographical unit for measuring the extent of urban sprawl

with its reputation for sprawl, is more than twice as dense as Portland. Meanwhile, with its higher densities, especially in the core, and without light rail, Winnipeg's transit ridership per capita is approximately the same as in Portland.

Table 4 Winnipeg & Portland Core & Overall Densities				
Urban Area	Most Dense			Entire Urban Area
	1%	10%	25%	
Winnipeg	9,242	5,007	3,937	1,405
Portland	4,842	3,126	2,553	1,228
Winnipeg Compared to Portland	1.91	1.60	1.54	1.14
Calculated from Statistics Canada and US Census Bureau data for 2001 and 2000				

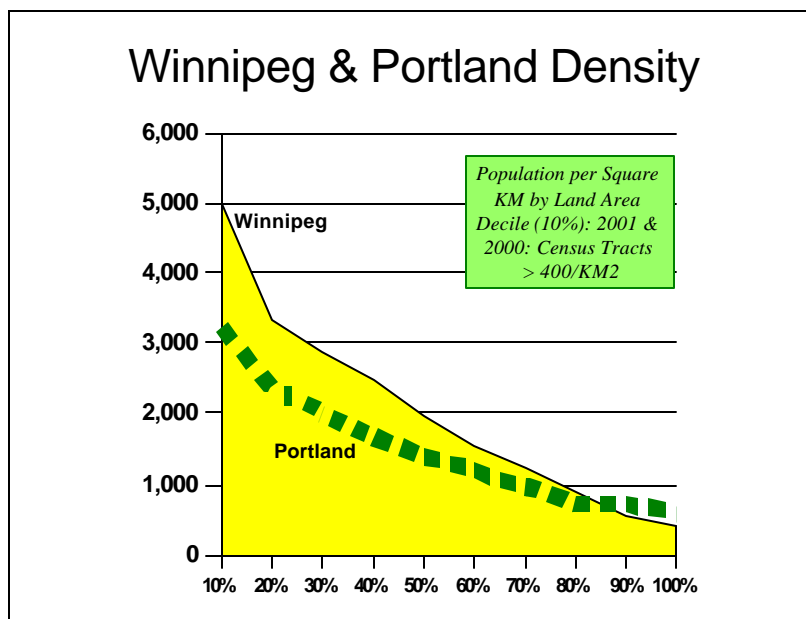


Figure 5

Conclusion

The evidence of Winnipeg's relative decline in size over the last half century indicates a policy direction that discourages, not encourages economic growth. The interest urban policy makers have in models that restrict urban sprawl miss the point. "Smart growth" and "compact city" measures are an unnecessary prescription for a problem that doesn't exist in Winnipeg. Even more restrictive land use regulations will further stunt its growth. An aggressive agenda to promote urban expansion - competitive taxes, deregulation of planning, the revamping of building and zoning codes, the removal of rent control to build residential density in the core, transit reform, an aggressive immigration policy - holds more potential for the reversal of Winnipeg's obvious relative decline. These issues are addressed in other Frontier Centre work, and together represent a pro-growth policy direction that can revive economic and population growth in Winnipeg. The burden of existing anti-sprawl measures in Plan Winnipeg should certainly not be increased by expanding their reach or intensifying their regulatory power. We've been there, and done that. It doesn't work.

What all of this suggests is that smart growth and "compact city" measures are an unnecessary prescription for a problem that doesn't exist. Winnipeg hardly needs even more restrictive land use regulations to further stunt its growth. It's doing bad enough already.

About the Author:

Wendell Cox is an independent demographic and transport consultant and principal of Wendell Cox Consultancy in the St. Louis area. He is a visiting professor at le Conservatoire National des Arts et Metiers in Paris (a French national university) and has served on the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission and the US Congressional Amtrak Reform Council.

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