

Estimating suburban population growth: A study of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA, 1996-2016

Emily Goldney, March 2018

Executive Summary

Research Objective

The purpose of this project was to determine the proportion of Ottawa-Gatineau Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) residents living in less sustainable forms of suburban development and to determine how this proportion has changed geographically and temporally, and to determine if Ottawa's suburban growth management policies are achieving their targets.

Method

This report applied the classification model and suburban definitions established by the Canadian Suburbs research program (Gordon & Janzen, 2013) to data from the 2016 Statistics Canada Census, to classify each of Ottawa-Gatineau's census tract (CT)s as an active core, exurban area, transit suburb, or automobile suburb (See Map 1) . This was accomplished using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping techniques, and results were verified using satellite imagery. The results of the analysis of 2016 data were then compared against the results of previously-completed analyses of 1996 and 2006 Statistics Canada data, to determine geographic and temporal trends in suburban growth.

Findings

This report found that most Ottawa-Gatineau residents lived in less sustainable forms of development; 76% of the CMA population, over 1 million people, lived in automobile suburbs or exurbs. The good news is that temporal trend analysis found that the share of CMA population growth of the automobile suburbs decreased from 1996-2016, while that of the active cores increased over the same time period. However, the share of CMA growth of the transit suburbs decreased from 1996-2006, while that of the exurbs increased over the same time period. Geographic trend analysis found that most of Ottawa's

population growth was focused outside of the Greenbelt, and mainly in the Western area of Ottawa.

Due to boundary and definition issues, direct comparison of study results with Official Plan quantitative growth targets was not possible. However, it is clear that most population growth is still occurring in the less sustainable automobile suburbs and exurban areas.

Recommendations and Conclusions

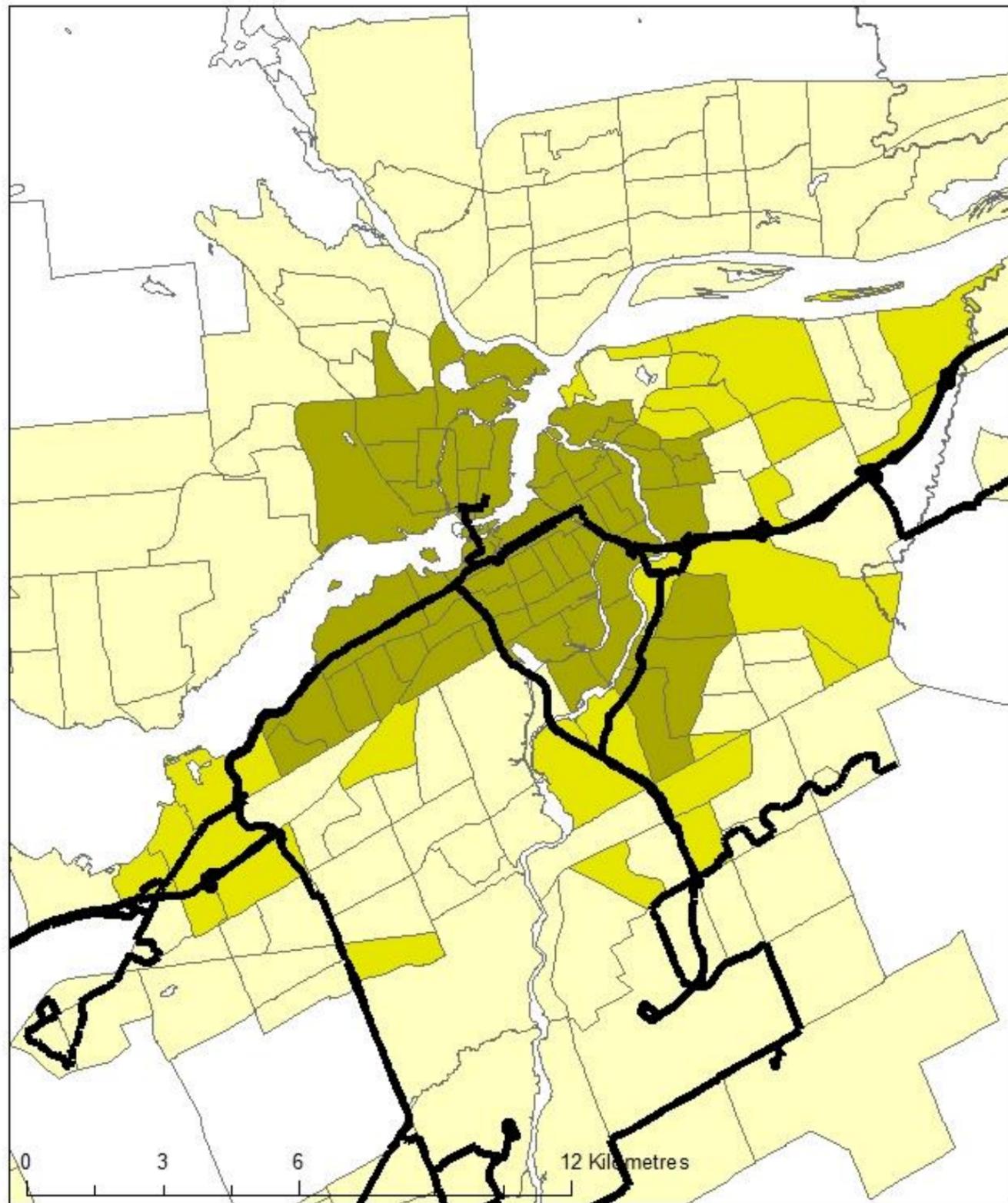
Firstly, Ottawa is and will remain a suburban city for decades to come. Given the large volume of existing automobile suburbs and exurbs, and the large percentage of growth which remains in these less sustainable suburbs, Ottawa-Gatineau planners must accelerate their efforts to promote the conversion of existing areas to active core areas or transit suburbs, and slow future development in automobile suburbs. The LRT may catalyze significant growth in the number and population of transit suburbs; these effects remain to be verified.

To assist in the conversion of existing automobile suburbs and exurbs, Ottawa and Gatineau should also work to build walkable, bikeable, and transit-supportive 'satellite downtowns' around existing employment centres in the suburbs. The creation of these suburban town centres would allow current residents to walk, bike, or take transit to meet their daily needs and commute to work. Ottawa-Gatineau should also aim to direct future growth to infill and intensification of existing built areas, and avoid future automobile-dependent greenfield development like that located outside of the Greenbelt.

Lastly, planners should be cautious when defining targets in terms of dwelling units, rather than population: This study found that in Ottawa-Gatineau, the many dwelling units which are being built in active core, and transit suburb areas are being occupied by less people per unit compared to automobile suburbs and exurbs, and the number of people per dwelling unit is generally decreasing over time.

Therefore, achievement of intensification targets defined in terms of dwelling units instead of population could still result in overall population decline in areas where the decline in household size is

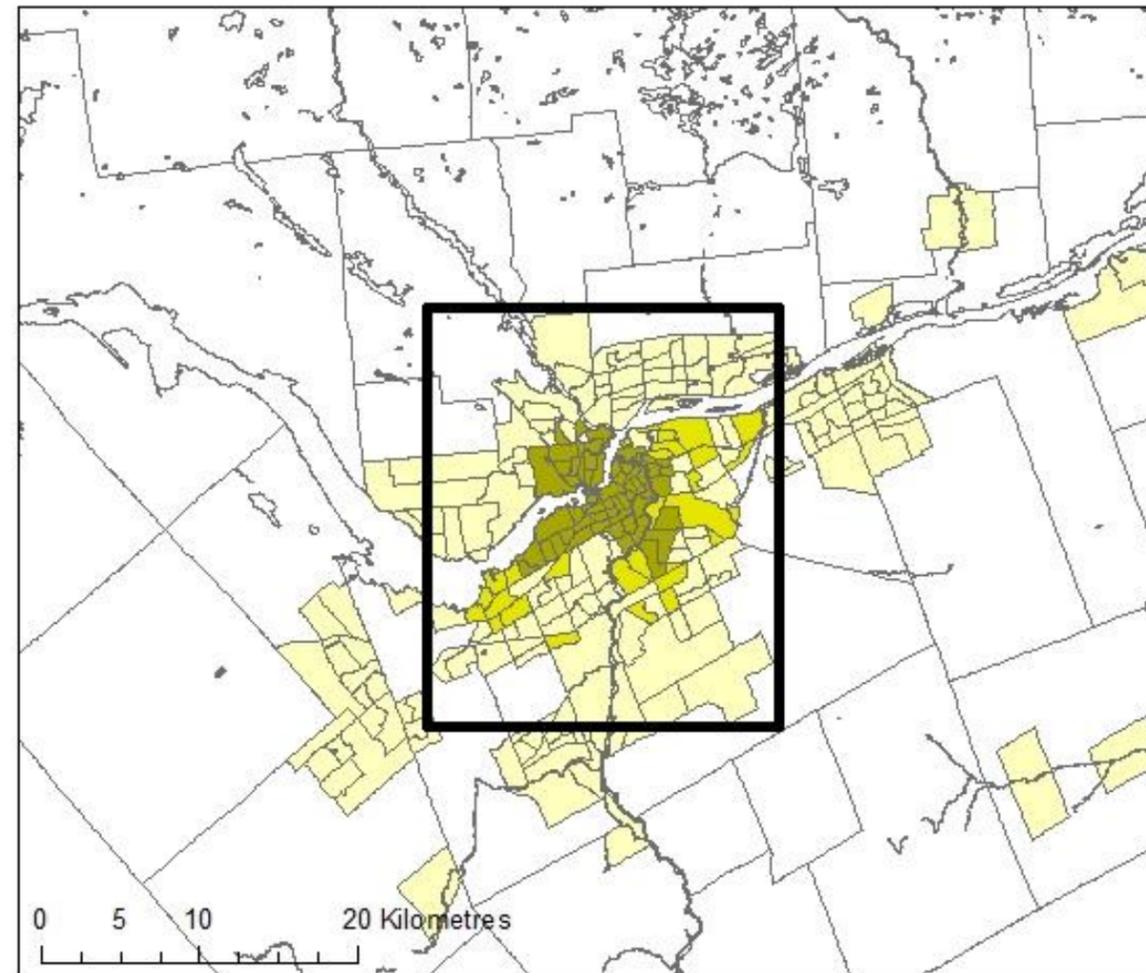
Map 1- 2016 CT Classification



Legend

-  Rapid Transit Network
-  Active Core
-  Transit Suburb
-  Auto Suburb
-  Exurban

Ottawa-Gatineau
Active Core 15%, Auto Suburb 62%,
Transit Suburb 9%, Exurban 14%
Statistics Canada 2016 Census



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not offset by construction of new units, and continuing population increases in less sustainable exurban and automobile-dependent suburbs.

Primary Limitations and Future Considerations

The trends outlined in this report are based on two 10-year time intervals only: Caution should therefore be used in interpreting the temporal trends revealed through this study, as due to the limited data points the trends could simply represent temporal anomalies.

Further research should be done to extend the analysis of census data further into the past, and this study should be repeated in the future. This will allow for verification of the existence of trends, and will allow for the analysis of the effects of major investments like Ottawa's Light Rail Transit (LRT). Future projects may also wish to conduct an additional level of analysis by compare results to those of Canadian CMAs

The definition of suburbs used for this report is meant to be a working definition only. Care must be taken when interpreting the results of this study to be aware of how suburb was defined for the purposes of this project, as the term 'suburb' carries many different meanings. This will avoid misinterpretation of results based on a different perception of what constitutes a suburb.