

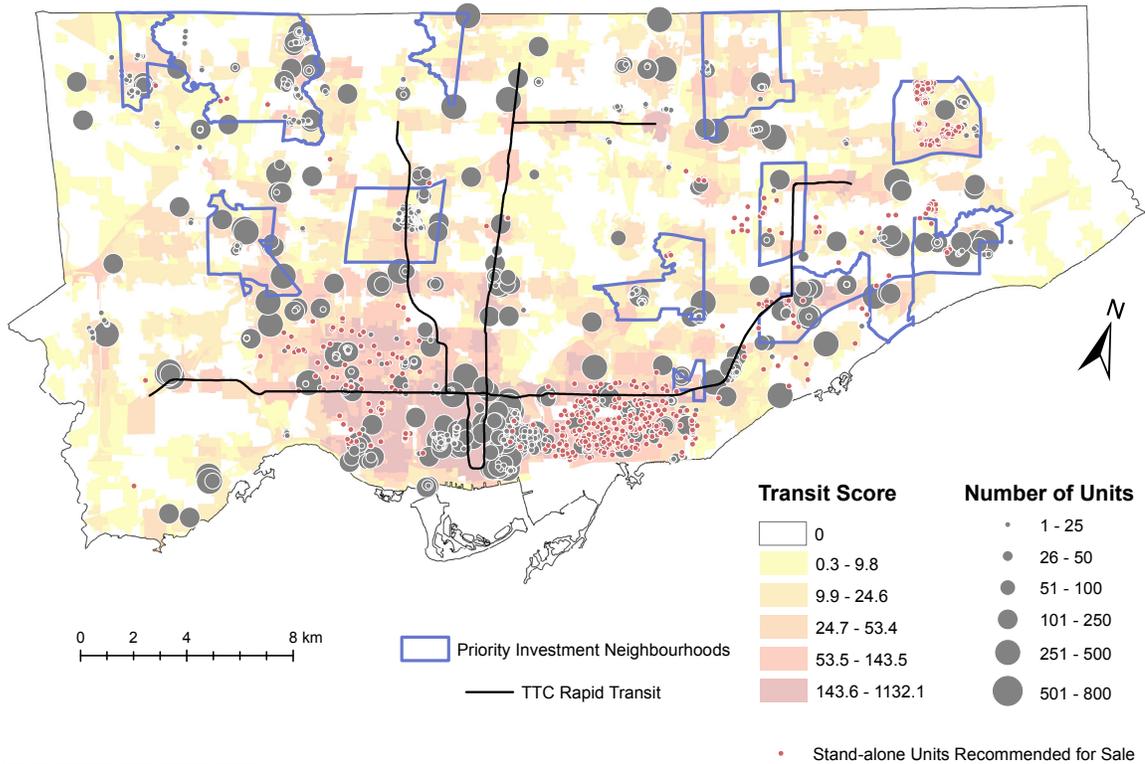
\$400 Million? \$220 Million? But at What Cost?

Toronto Community Housing is one of the largest social housing providers in North America. The organization rents to a wide variety of tenants along a spectrum of low, mid and high rise housing units. After a contentious meeting, the TCHC Board approved putting 706 community housing units up for private sale. Up to 2,600 residents could be displaced as the proposed units are sold. According to provincial legislation, the TCHC is responsible for relocating the displaced tenants to other available community housing. The selling of the homes still requires provincial approval. The Martin Prosperity Institute wanted to take a look at some of the characteristics of the neighbourhoods where the units being sold are located.

The houses proposed for sale are situated in several Toronto communities. (See **Exhibit 1**). There are housing units in the Malvern and West Hill/Galloway communities of East Scarborough. There is also a larger contingent of housing proposed for sale throughout the St. Clair West, Bloor St. West and Dundas St. West areas. The greatest number of community housing units proposed for sale, are located in south eastern communities such as East York, Danforth, Greenwood and The Beaches. According to Toronto Community Housing, most of these units are single family dwellings and 650 of the units to be sold are single houses. TCHC points out that the selling of these houses would generate one-time profits that could pay for part of the company's large capital repair backlog. The units range in value from \$200,250 to over 1 million dollars, with the average estimated value being \$315,000. While TCHC had originally estimated the total market value of the houses amounting to just under \$400 million, recent estimates are \$220 million dollars, plus millions saved in repairs that would not have to be done by TCHC on those sold units. These profits could improve the living situations of residents of other TCHC community dwellings as they would fund much needed repairs in many housing units across Toronto. Rob Ford, mayor of Toronto, has publicly endorsed the plan as a way to fund next year's budget.

The map below shows the MPI-developed transit scores across the city of Toronto. The darker the colour, the better served a neighbourhood is by public transit. Regions in white have little to no transit service available within a short walk. Highlighted with the red dots are the houses that the TCHC is proposing to sell. The grey dots are existing community housing buildings not to be sold. They are displayed by size according to the number of units. Toronto's Priority Neighbourhoods are outlined in blue.

As discussed in our January 6, 2011 insight (<http://martinprosperity.org/insights/insight/transit-deserts-hulchanskis-three-cities>), the transit score is based on data from the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC). It combines the number of stops within 500m of the center point of a Census block and how often a bus, subway, or streetcar stops there per hour (based on the average number of timed stops between 7am and 8pm on a weekday). This data does not reflect any proposed TTC service cuts. Areas with high transit scores are indicated by darker shades of pink. Likewise, low transit scores are illustrated by lighter shades of yellow. Those areas which are white have a score of zero, indicating that the area is poorly serviced by public transit. For the most part, downtown Toronto has the highest transit scores and the outer edges of the city have the lowest



Source: Toronto Community Housing, City of Toronto Open Data
 (Contains public sector Datasets made available under the City of Toronto's Open Data License v2.0)
 Map by Zara Matheson, Martin Prosperity Institute

transit scores. This is due to the fact that the densely populated core benefits from — greater access to a large number of subway stations and connecting streetcars within a short distance. The edges of the city suffer from little to no subway stations within a short distance, and many rely on long distance bus rides to connect to stations. On average, the downtown core is 15 times more connected than the city overall, due to the higher presence of subway stations and streetcars.

The map shows the relationship between proximity to transit access to the housing units proposed for sale. A small contingent of housing is in the far eastern communities of Malvern, Dorset Park and West Hill/Galloway, which currently have low transit scores. The housing units for sale in these communities have some of the lowest transit scores in the city and in some cases are assigned a score of zero. Overall though, most of the neighbourhoods where sales are proposed, have some of the highest transit scores in the city. When looking at and around the St. Clair West and Bloor St. West areas on the map, there is a dispersed grouping of housing proposed for sale in areas shaded with dark and medium pink. These are units currently well serviced by public transportation. The largest grouping of units proposed for sale is in the Danforth, Beaches and surrounding South Eastern Communities of Toronto. These units are close to subway stations and are well serviced by street cars and buses that quickly connect to a number of subway stations. The residents of the units in these communities are the beneficiary of above par transit accessibility compared to the rest of the city. Access to public transit can be an advantage to a family with lower income who can forgo expenses from cars or taxis. This large collection of units has a much higher transit score than the Toronto average. Overall when looking at all of the units proposed for sale, the average transit score of census blocks that intersect a building recommended for sale was substantially higher than the city average.

Our map also sheds light on the great disparity in transit accessibility between various locations of social housing in Toronto. A large cluster of community housing is very well serviced by transit downtown, but there are many large units of housing in very poor transit areas. When looking at the community housing units around the edges of the city (Etobicoke, along Jane St. from Woolner Ave. to Finch Ave. and Scarborough), these are all areas that are shaded by light orange, light yellow or white. These communities have some of the lowest access to public transit in the city. There are many large community housing complexes dispersed throughout the edges of Toronto with little or no access to public transit. The downtown communities have an average transit score almost four times greater than the outer edge communities. When focusing on a core boundary south of Bloor St., east of Dundas St. and west of Main St., once again the bulk of the housing for sale falls within these boundaries. Amongst the available units not proposed for sale, only 30.2% of the units fall in this “core” boundary. The average score inside this boundary is an exceptional 246.2, but the average outside of this area is only 33.2. The highest percentage of housing units proposed for sale fall within boundaries with very high average transit accessibility. With proposed cuts to TTC bus service, the transit score for outer areas that rely on bus service could get worse as major connecting bus routes such as the Jane 35 and Morningside 116 would have cuts in service. The social housing residents that live in these areas experience reduced transit service, and many are highly reliant on the available service which is crucial to their livelihood and lifestyle.

Another interesting item seen on the map is the neighbourhood types for the community housing proposed for sale. Other than the red dots in Malvern and West Hill, overwhelmingly the units for sale are not in City of Toronto Priority Neighbourhoods. Priority Neighbourhoods are those which have been identified by the city as areas with issues such as extensive poverty and crime. Most of the housing for sale falls in neighbourhoods which are not only highly transit accessible but also mixed use neighbourhoods with lower crime and poverty rates. If we look at existing community housing, once again other than the large clusters downtown, many of the large unit housing complexes are in or adjacent to City of Toronto Priority Neighbourhoods, many of which are also in transit desert areas.

It is prudent and responsible for the TCHC to use all of the assets under their control in such a way as to benefit the majority of their residents. The needs of the many can out-weigh the needs of the few. It is equally prudent and responsible for the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario to also consider broader social aims, goals, and responsibilities when making their decisions even in a time of fiscal constraint. The potential transit accessibility challenges shown here could just as readily be resolved with increased public transit service and funding while some of the other issues are more complex. Knowing more about the potential impacts of a decision on families, communities, and the city doesn't make the decision any easier but should help to make it well-informed.

The Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management is the world's leading think-tank on the role of sub-national factors—location, place and city-regions—in global economic prosperity. We take an integrated view of prosperity, looking beyond economic measures to include the importance of quality of place and the development of people's creative potential.