

On Local Representation in MMP

All the elements of an electoral system work in unison to provide political representation. This means that it is difficult to consider any one element in isolation of others. Nonetheless, it is often informative to consider the system as a whole by focussing in on one of its parts. This document focuses on single-member districts and considers the nature of local representation under the Assembly's MMP working model.

The Assembly's MMP working model balances local representation with proportionality. This means that in order to get good proportionality the Assembly has adopted an MMP model with 90 single-member districts. This represents a reduction of 17 single-member districts from the 107 that will be used for the 2007 election.

Many people want to know what a reduction in the number of single-member districts would mean in terms of local representation and the size of their local electoral district. This document addresses this issue. The first section outlines some basic facts and features of the Assembly's MMP working model. The second section discusses the role of the Boundaries Commission and the criteria employed in the process of drawing new electoral districts. The third section presents 3 different ways to understand how a reduction in the number of single-member seats would affect the nature of political representation in different areas of the province.

Section 1: Basic Facts

- There would be 129 Members of the Provincial Parliament (MPPs) in the legislature. This is an increase of 22 MPPs, up from the current number of 107. This represents a 20.5% increase in the size of the legislature.
- This means voters would have more MPPs to represent them. Under the current system there is, on average, approximately 1 MPP for every 114,000 people. Under the new system there would be, on average, approximately 1 MPP for every 94,000 people.
- There would be 2 types of MPPs to maintain local representation and ensure proportionality:
 1. 90 MPPs would be elected, as now, in single-member districts—17 fewer than in the 2007 Election. These members would represent their local area and address concerns that are of particular importance to people in their part of the province.
 2. 39 MPPs would be elected from party lists to help achieve proportionality and to provide broader representation that reflects the diversity of the province. These members would represent the province as a whole but may also speak on behalf of a particular region of the province.

Section 2: Boundaries Commission

New electoral boundaries would be drawn by an independent Boundaries Commission. This is a non-partisan body made up of a chairperson and a small number of experts.

The Commission would give interested members of the public an opportunity to provide input into how the districts should be drawn. Each district would be considered independently, even though a change in the boundaries of one district necessarily affects the boundaries of the adjacent districts.

The boundary lines are drawn based on representation by population. In order to do this the Boundaries Commission establishes a 'provincial quotient'. This number is equal to the total population of the province divided by the number of electoral districts.

The provincial quotient for the Assembly's MMP working model would be 12,160,000 (i.e. the current population of Ontario) divided by 90 single-member districts. This is equal to 135,100. This means that each single-member district should have approximately 135,100 people.

The Commission must try to keep the range within 25% of the quotient, in either direction, except in circumstances that are judged to be exceptional.

In our example, this means that the electoral districts could be as large as 168,875 or as small as 101,325. This range could be larger if the Boundaries Commission decides there are exceptional circumstances that warrant additional flexibility.

According to the most recent *Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Ontario Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*, the Commission has the right to depart from the provincial quotient when it is desirable and/or necessary to do so in order to:

1. *“Respect the community of interest or community of identity in or the historical pattern of an electoral district in the province, or*
2. *Ensure a manageable geographic size for electoral districts in sparsely populated, rural or northern regions of the province.”*

The Boundaries Commission also tries, where possible, to recognize and maintain distinctions between rural and urban areas.

If you want to see a Boundaries Commission in operation you can follow this link to the British Columbia Boundaries Commission website: <http://www.bc-ebc.ca/>

Section 3: Single-Member Seats

For the purposes of this document we have divided the province into 5 areas: Toronto, the Golden Horseshoe, the North, the East, and the West. These areas have been defined, arbitrarily, only for the purposes of illustration. The Boundaries Commission would not divide the province into areas but would reduce the total number of single-member districts over the province as a whole.

We have assumed that the province would maintain the current balance of representation by population. This means the North, and other rural areas of the province, would retain a level of representation that falls within previously identified allowable variations in representation by population.

1. Where would single-member district reductions be made?

The number of single-member seats would be reduced in all areas of the province.

It is possible to estimate the number of expected reductions in each part of the province if we assume each area would continue to make up approximately the same percentage of seats in the legislature.

For example, there are currently 11 single-member districts in the Northern part of Ontario. These 11 seats make up approximately 10% of the total number of seats in the legislature. This means that in a new system with 90 single-member seats the North would have approximately 9 electoral districts—2 fewer than in the 2007 Election.

The following is a list of reductions for each area of the province.

Toronto

This area includes the Etobicoke, York and Scarborough districts and all those in between.

Current number of single-member seats: 23
Number of single-member seats under MMP: 19
Reduction: 4

Golden Horseshoe

This area is comprised of the heavily populated districts that surround Toronto from Oshawa to Niagara Falls. It does not include the cities of Waterloo, Guelph or Cambridge.

Current number of single-member seats: 27
Number of single-member seats under MMP: 23
Reduction: 4

West

This area includes the Simcoe districts and all areas west.

Current number of single-member seats: 27

Number of single-member seats under MMP: 23

Reduction: 4

East

This area includes the district of Durham and all areas east.

Current number of single-member seats: 19

Number of single-member seats under MMP: 16

Reduction: 3

North

This area includes the district Parry Sound-Muskoka and all areas north.

Current number of single-member seats: 11

Number of single-member seats under MMP: 9

Reduction: 2

2. How would your area change?

It is not possible to identify where the new boundaries would be. It is also difficult to say how much larger each single-member district would become in terms of geographic size because each area of the province is a little bit different.

To give you a more concrete sense of what the changes would be like in your area you can imagine 6 electoral districts near the district you live in. In general, under the new model, every 6 single-member districts would become 5.

Take, for example, 6 districts in the South-West part of the province: Windsor West, Windsor-Tecumseh, Essex, Chatham-Kent-Essex, Sarnia-Lambton, and Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. These 6 local districts would become 5 under the new MMP model. Each one would be made a little bit larger geographically but, on the whole, the changes would not be dramatic.

Geographic increases would, of course, be smaller in more densely populated areas and larger in more sparsely populated areas of the province. Take the Ottawa region as an example of the former: Ottawa-Vanier, Ottawa Centre, Ottawa South, Ottawa West-Nepean, Carleton-Mississippi Mills, and Nepean-Carleton. Under the Assembly's MMP working model these 6 electoral districts would become 5.

Now consider 6 electoral districts in the North: Kenora-Rainy River, Thunder Bay Superior North, Thunder Bay-Atikokan, Timmins-James Bay, Algoma-Manitoulin. Again,

these 6 districts would become 5 but it is not possible to identify beforehand exactly where the new boundaries would be drawn.

Look at a map of Ontario and select any 6 electoral districts. Now imagine that geographic area covered by 5 districts instead of 6. This will give you some sense of how the geographic size of the districts would change under the Assembly's MMP 'working model'.

3. How big would the changes be?

Another way to look at changes in the size of single-member districts is to estimate average increases in terms of population.

For example, there are 23 electoral districts in Toronto that represent a total population of approximately 2,564,000. This means there is an average of approximately 111,500 people in each electoral district. If the number of single-member districts in Toronto is reduced to 19 there would be an average of approximately 134,900 people in each one. This would be an increase of 23,400 people in each electoral district.

It is, however, worth remembering that although this is an increase, it is only part of the story. Each resident of Ontario would actually gain representation because they would be represented by list members *and* their local MPP. For the province as a whole, under the current system there is, on average, approximately 1 MPP for every 114,000 people. Under the new system there would be, on average, approximately 1 MPP for every 94,000 people. This would be an overall decrease of approximately 20,000 people per MPP.

Toronto

This area includes the Etobicoke, York and Scarborough districts and all those in between.

Total Population: 2,564,100

Current average population per district: 111,500

Average population per single-member district under MMP: 134,900

Increase: 23,400

Golden Horseshoe

This area is comprised of the heavily populated districts that surround Toronto from Oshawa to Niagara Falls. It does not include the cities of Waterloo, Guelph or Cambridge.

Total Population: 3,493,200

Current average population per district: 129,400

Average population per single-member district under MMP: 151,900

Increase: 22,500

West

This area includes the Simcoe districts and all areas west.

Total Population: 2,988,200

Current average population per district: 110,700

Average population per single-member district under MMP: 129,900

Increase: 19,220

East

This area includes the district of Durham and all areas east.

Total Population: 2,162,700

Current average population per district: 113,800

Average population per single-member district under MMP: 135,200

Increase: 21,400

North

This area includes the district Parry Sound-Muskoka and all areas north.

Total Population: 842,600

Current average population per district: 76,600

Average population per single-member district under MMP: 93,600

Increase: 17,000