

Xavier Desjardins

# Greater Paris and its lessons for metropolitan strategic planning

A new regional development programme emerged for the Greater Paris region (Ile-de-France), in the decade from 2005 to 2015. Previously, the years from 1965 to 1970 had set guidelines for developments over four decades, including new towns, airports, a new commuter rail system (the RER network) and with a strategy to boost Paris' financial sector and its military-industrial complex in the city's western suburb. In recent years, a new and coherent project has emerged with the creation of large, specialized economic zones, the densification of inner suburbs and the construction of four new Metro lines to double the length of the existing subway network. However, the urban integration of office space and retail properties, together with socio-spatial inequalities, has remained unaddressed. This article proposes a critical reading of the planning process in Greater Paris and examines the new forms of strategic planning at the metropolitan level.

**Keywords:** urban planning, regional planning, Greater Paris region, Ile-de-France, transport, governance

The Greater Paris metropolitan authority (GPMA) was established legally on 1 January 2016, to promote inter-municipal cooperation. It includes (inner) Paris, the 123 communes of the three surrounding *départements* of Hauts-de-Seine, Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-de-Marne, and seven communes from the neighbouring *départements* of Essonne and Val d'Oise. It covers nearly 7.5 million inhabitants. The creation of the authority marks a major break in the administrative history of the Ile-de-France region, previously characterised by indifference or minimal collaboration between Paris and its suburbs (Fourcaut et al., 2007). On 4 June 2016, a ceremony was organised to launch the extension to the Metro network on the site of the future station of Fort Issy-Vanves-Clamart. The participants celebrated the start of construction of lines 15, 16, 17 and 18 of the Paris Metro. The project has been dubbed the 'construction site of the century' by the Société du Grand Paris, which is responsible for the project's management. This designation may be questioned, but it underlines the importance of the construction work to be undertaken: more than 200 kilometres of new metro lines will be added to the 203 kilometres existing in 2015.

The importance of these two dates may, of course, be debated. Yet they do mark a major change in the development of Ile-de-France. After a decade of consideration, deliberation and convolution, the intellectual, administrative and technical foundations have been laid for the transformation of the Parisian metropolis over the next

three decades. In a previous article for *Information géographique* (in 2010), I examined the terms and issues at stake in the lively debates at the time, relating to the planning and management of the Paris region. The issue has been subject to great attention by central government. In 2007, the French president Nicolas Sarkozy favoured the emergence of an urban community around Paris. In 2008, he launched an international consultation of architects for the ‘Grand Pari(s) of the Paris metropolis’ (*pari* in French means bet or wager). The results of this consultation were presented at the Cité internationale de l’architecture, preceded by a grand opening ceremony. The following years were marked by multiple conflicts over the governance of Ile-de-France, its development and the development of its public transport network. This article does not retrace the different stages of these conflicts, nor the issues at stake, which have been extensively chronicled and analysed elsewhere (Subra, 2012; Gilli, 2014). Instead, I explore the hypothesis that just as the deliberations of the 1960s concerning the Regional Express Network (the RER rail network) and the region’s new towns have permanently guided the development of the Ile-de-France region (Beaucire, 2007), the decisions taken between 2005 and 2015 have laid down the strategic orientations which will guide the transformation of the Paris region for a long time to come.

Informed by the context outlined above, this paper considers the experience of Greater Paris and its lessons for strategic metropolitan planning. First, it considers shifts in the conception and practice of how collective action around strategic metropolitan planning is organised. Second, the Greater Paris project for a concentrated and competitive metropolis is introduced. Third, the ambition of centralised management of the metropolis and its illusory character are considered. Fourth, the unanswered questions and blind alleys of the Greater Paris Project are explored. Finally, the conclusion reflects on how far the Greater Paris example can be seen as a reinvention of strategic metropolitan planning.

## **Organising collective action around strategic metropolitan planning**

How can we explain the re-emergence of such a strategic spatial planning for a large metropolitan region as we have witnessed in the Greater Paris area?

It is possible to identify three broad categories of collective-action arrangements (Evers and De Vries, 2013). The first concerns those that centre on hierarchical direction by government that has the authority to oversee the problems in question. The second regards arrangements that rely on market mechanisms. The third category concerns a variety of arrangements in which stakeholders interact and negotiate collectively, thanks to a shared vision of the future. Since the 1990s, many commentators have discussed the shift from the first to the second and, mostly, the third categories.

The notion is that as societies have become more complex, as cities and regions have become more interconnected, as the private sector has become more powerful, so there has emerged a need for more flexible and inclusive mechanisms in decision making. This change has been characterised by the shift from government to governance (John, 2001). Government tends to be hierarchical, with central government in direct control, containing few institutions, using relatively closed procedures to make routinised policy decisions, based upon representative democracy. In contrast, governance tends to be more decentralised and fragmented, based upon many and shifting institutions depending on problems to solve, using extensive networks to learn and make innovative decisions, based on both representative democracy and new forms of engagement, such as community participation.

In the case of Greater Paris, central government has played a key role to foster the re-emergence of strategic planning. Moreover, in local authorities' organisation, the promotion of a new hierarchy has been at the centre of the birth of a new administrative body, the *métropole*. On the other hand, the emergence of the planning strategy is based upon a very large agreement of socio-economic stakeholders on its aims. Our hypothesis is that there is not a shift from government to governance, but a new mode of coordination between hierarchy and a privileged role for governments on the one hand, and a joint decision making between government, the private sector and civil society on the other hand.

## **A project for a concentrated and competitive metropolis**

What is the vision for the metropolitan area of tomorrow? The main features of the project, as reflected in the Ile-de-France Region Master Plan, in the planned investments in public transport and in the economic development policy are quite simple: they are striving to create a concentrated and competitive metropolis, with enhanced public transport.

### **A very large public transport project**

The public transport project has two components. The first phase deals with the modernisation and extension of the existing network, following the €12 billion mobilisation plan agreed between the Ile-de-France region, the state (i.e. France's central government), the *départements* and STIF (Syndicat des transports d'Ile-de-France: the Ile-de-France transport authority): €7 billion are to be committed by 2017. This phase includes especially the extension of the RER E to the west, the extension of the Metro network, the creation of high-performance buses running on dedicated routes and tramways, the modernisation of the RER and the improvement of *transilien* railway lines serving the Greater Paris area. The second phase is based on the creation of new

automatic Metro lines that will make up the Grand Paris Express. Launched under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (Orfeuil and Wiel, 2012), the project was confirmed, after some changes, in 2013, in a speech by Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault. The aim is to meet a cost target of less than €23 billion (expressed in 2012 values).

The Greater Paris Metro will have several lines (see Figure 1):

- Line 15 of the metro will be entirely underground. It will have three sections: (i) to the south, running from Noisy-Champs, via Villejuif to Pont de Sèvres; (ii) to the west, a stretch of track passing through Nanterre, La Défense and on to Saint-Denis Pleyel; and (iii) an eastern section passing through Bobigny, Rosny-Bois Perrier and through to Champigny Center.
- Line 16 will run from Saint-Denis Pleyel to Noisy-Champs via Le Bourget RER, Aulnay-sous-Bois and Clichy-Montfermeil. It will help open up the east of Seine-Saint-Denis.
- Line 17 will run from Saint-Denis Pleyel to Mesnil-Amelot, passing via Le Bourget RER, Gonesse and the Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport. The line will share a stretch of track with Line 16, between Saint-Denis Pleyel and Le Bourget RER.

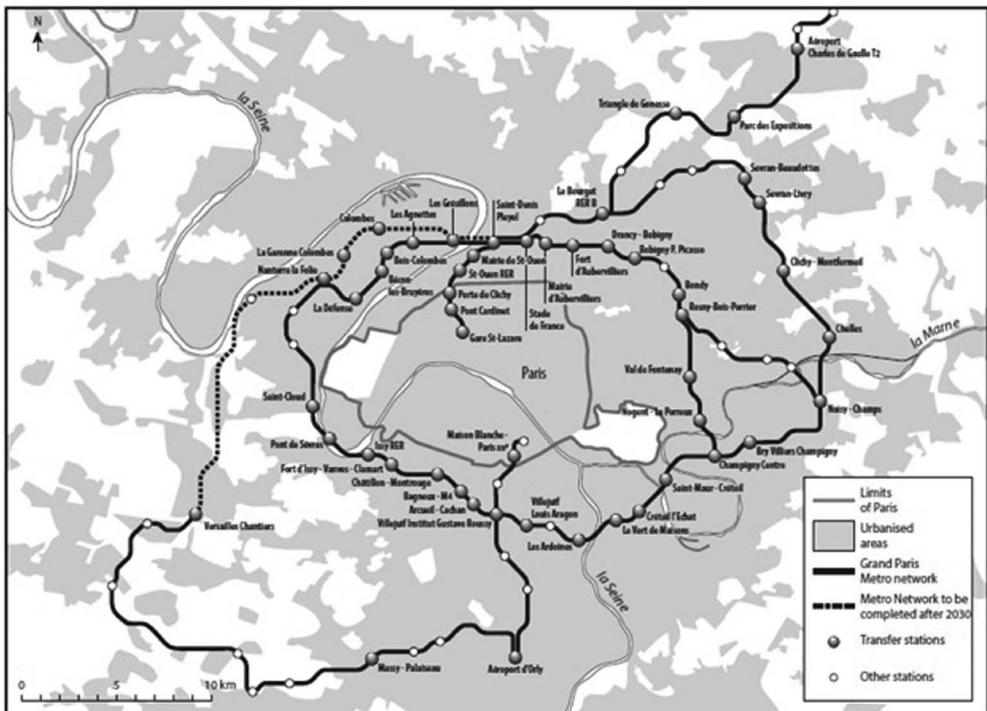


Figure 1 Projects for New Metro Lines in 2017

Source: Société du Grand Paris

It will serve the areas of Le Bourget, Gonesse and Grand Roissy in particular, linking them directly to the Plaine Saint-Denis.

- Line 18 will connect the Orly airport hub with Versailles Chantiers, via Massy-Palaiseau and the Saclay plateau. It may be extended through to Nanterre.

Finally, the Greater Paris Express will also be based on extending existing metro lines:

- Line 14 will be extended from the Saint-Lazare station in Paris to Saint-Denis Pleyel in the north, and from the Olympiades metro stop through to Orly airport in the south. This is fifteen kilometres more compared to the first phase of extension in the north through to City Hall of Saint-Ouen, which was originally decided.
- Line 11 will be extended eastwards (provided this is confirmed), to the City Hall of Les Lilas at Noisy-Champs, via Rosny-Bois-Perrier. This involves an extra extension of ten kilometres compared to the initial extension of the line to Rosny-Bois-Perrier.

This reinforcement of public transport networks is being accompanied, quite logically, by a sharp decrease of investment in roads. Some construction is envisaged (the doubling of shared sections of the A4 and A86 motorways and A4 and A104 motorways to the east of Paris, the extension of the Francilienne (the outer ring road of Greater Paris) to the west. However, much work on roads aims to develop secondary routes in favour of buses or bicycles. 'Proposals for expanding road infrastructure are undoubtedly minimal' (Merlin, 2012, 166).

#### *Box 1: planning Greater Paris in the 1960s*

During the presidency of General de Gaulle (1958–1969), many important aménagement du territoire projects were launched. In the Paris region, the main decisions were contained in the master plan of 1965. This plan has never been officially approved but the strategy announced was pursued, more or less closely, during three or four decades: the creation of new towns between twenty and forty kilometres from the centre of Paris; linking some railways lines whose termini were in Paris to create direct routes, i.e. the RER network; the development of a central business district in the west of Paris. Paul Delouvrier, *président du district de la région parisienne*, was a civil servant who played a major role in implementing this vision. He symbolises the importance of the state and of bureaucrats five decades ago (Bellanger, 2013).

The overall investment is considerable. The 1990s and 2000s were characterised by underinvestment in the public transport network of the Ile-de-France region. Nevertheless, growth in the number of users has been spectacular. Rail passenger

transport has increased considerably. Leaving aside tram travel, passenger kilometres rose from 12 billion in 1968 to 19.5 billion in 2000, reaching 25 billion in 2014. If transport on buses and trams is taken into account, then the number of passenger kilometres per year for all modes of public transport combined rose from 23.3 billion in 2000 to 30.8 billion in 2014. At the same time, the use of cars is decreasing. On average, people living in Greater Paris made 1.47 car journeys per day in 2010, compared to 1.68 in 1997.<sup>1</sup> The decline in car traffic has been particularly marked in Paris since the year 2000, with a 25 per cent fall in traffic according to APUR data. These succinct figures explain the saturation of the public transport network, as well as broad public support for the investments decided in the years from 2010 to 2012. In many respects, the project is as important as the Regional Express Network; Greater Paris's high-speed express suburban rail network, whose contours were gradually defined in the late 1960s (Gérondeau, 2003).

### Densified urbanisation close to public transport routes

The project is accompanied by express efforts to urbanise areas close to stations. Several instruments are being mobilised to achieve this objective. First, local town planning schemes drawn up by municipalities must be compatible with the master plan for Ile-de-France adopted in 2013. The latter strongly constrains urbanisation in rural and peri-urban areas, and encourages the densification of urbanisation in the heart of the conglomeration. In addition, a specific instrument has been created, namely the *Contrat de développement territorial* (CDT, Territorial Development Contract).<sup>2</sup> According to the Explanatory Memorandum of the 2010 Greater Paris Law, 'public investment in transport in these strategic territories must therefore lead, through exchanges and on the basis of adherence by local authorities, to a shared approach to planning and development'. The instrument for achieving this ambition is the territorial development contract. In this way, the 2010 Law has restored the power of the state, in terms of the joint formulation of planning priorities. Such power had been lost with France's regional devolution laws of 1982 and 1983. While the CDTs are not urban planning documents that can be legally enforced by third

1 Data available on the Internet site of the Syndicat des transports d'Ile-de-France (STIF).

2 *Contrats de développement territorial*, or CDTs aim at defining the objectives and priorities in terms of economic development, housing construction and public facilities in areas around the future stations of the Grand Paris Express. Primary contractors are the state's representatives (mainly the Préfecture de la région Ile-de-France) and the municipalities concerned by the stations. The first objective of this new planning tool is to concentrate activities and housing in areas well served by the public transport network, to promote alternatives to the car, in accordance with principles of urban sustainable development. Another is to support the development of selected economic activity zones (called 'clusters'). Furthermore, another main issue for the state is to encourage the building of housing, largely depending on the decision of the municipalities that purchase land from private parties, resell it to private developers and issue the building permits.

parties, they do constitute local development projects that must be taken into account in local town planning schemes. Initially these local ‘contracts’ were able to override municipal *and* regional planning documents (Brouant, 2010). In 2011, twenty-one CDTs were launched, which together cover 38 per cent of Greater Paris’s population. This approach was not based on a negotiation between the local authorities and the state concerning the subsidisation of projects. From the outset, France’s central government had announced that the transport network would be its contribution to urban development. Instead, as far as the state is concerned, negotiations relate to quantitative commitments on housing production. For local authorities, their concern is the use of direct state assets, especially land. By the end of 2015, thirteen contracts had been adopted, signed and submitted to public scrutiny. The others were in progress, though four had not been successfully completed. These contracts have also provided an opportunity to develop inter-municipal projects and aim to bring together the actions of the various local authorities around urbanisation schemes centred on existing and future stations.

The first effects of this policy aimed at boosting and densifying housing construction are already being felt. The Direction régionale et interdépartementale de l’aménagement et de l’environnement (Regional and Interdepartmental Directorate for Planning and Environment, DRIEA), estimates there were 64,190 housing starts in 2015, compared to 56,300 in 2014, and only 48,000 in 2012. So the number of housing units is rising rapidly. This is being facilitated by growing awareness of the lack of housing in the Ile-de-France region, and by the easing of urban planning rules, in particular as a result of the work undertaken by the state to encourage municipalities to build. In addition, various instruments have been mobilised. Major development operations have been strongly revived. Within *zones d’aménagement concerté* (joint development zones), the Regional Land Observatory estimates there will be a transition from building 10,800 units per year between 2010 and 2013 to an average of 17,100 units per year between 2017 and 2020 (ORF, 2016). The development companies have been consolidated to meet to such a revival of production. The land and technical agency of the Paris region, founded by the state in 1962, was transformed into the Grand Paris Aménagement in 2015, following its merger with the public development enterprise of the Plaine de France. The number of housing units which this planning organisation was able to produce was less than three thousand in the 2000s: today, it is about to exceed five thousand per year.

### A competitive metropolis

The Ile-de-France project is aimed at the economic development of France. It marks the abandonment of any attempt to rebalance France’s national economic space in favour of other French regions, which had been a long-term goal of spatial planning

marked by previous concerns about the 'French desert' (Santamaria, 2016). The Greater Paris project aims to strengthen the economic locomotive of the Ile-de-France region. It is about drawing on the strengths of this metropolitan area (Halbert, 2010). From the point of view of regional spatial planning, the ambition to strengthen the Ile-de-France economy is reflected in the improvement of the public transport network. In particular, it favours Paris' airports as gateways to the metropolis, along with the main economic clusters, such as La Défense as an economic hub, and the Saclay plateau for research. In 2010, Christian Blanc, deputy minister for development of the capital region from 2008 to 2010, suggested that between 800,000 and one million jobs would be created over fifteen years, thanks to these investments in infrastructure. This figure is fanciful but illustrates the expected impact of improved travel conditions.

This promotion of the Ile-de-France economy also involves identifying several business clusters within the region. The notion of clusters has been imported from American economic literature (Porter, 2000). It was used by Christian Blanc in order to highlight the economic vocation of half a dozen 'potential territories' which will be served by the future automatic Metro (Blanc, 2010). It encourages the economic specialisation of these territories. Although the use of this term is relatively vague, it has led to the identification of economic specialisations: for example, logistics in Sénart, 'bio-health' in the Val de Bièvre, research and innovation on the Saclay plateau, digital innovation in Grand Paris Seine-Ouest (around Issy-les-Moulineaux) (Figure 2). Nicolas Rio (2014) has shown that the logic of clusters is illusory. There is a strong disconnect between the future projected economic geography (that of clusters) and the existing geography, marked by sectoral diversity. No public actor or authority has sufficient powers to enforce companies' location strategies to such an extent. In addition, specialised clusters do not fit strategies of real-estate operators (investors and developers), which focus more on the creation of multipurpose business centres which can accommodate companies from different economic sectors. The main advantage of this cluster strategy is to highlight the variety of economic roles played by the greater suburbs (whereas inner Paris, with nearly a quarter of the jobs in the Greater Paris region, is no longer a cluster). It seeks to stress an absence of territorial competition by creating specific territorial economic signatures.

Although the details are still being discussed and debated, there is now a wide consensus on the broad outlines of the Greater Paris project presented here (Behar et al., 2013). Ecologists support the project of promoting a denser metropolis to limit urban sprawl. Property developers welcome the revival of construction. The transport operators eye new services to be created, and public works companies can hardly turn their noses up at the construction site of the century. Locally elected representatives see an opportunity to accompany the development of their territories. It is clear that the project will not be carried out on time or within the announced budgets. But

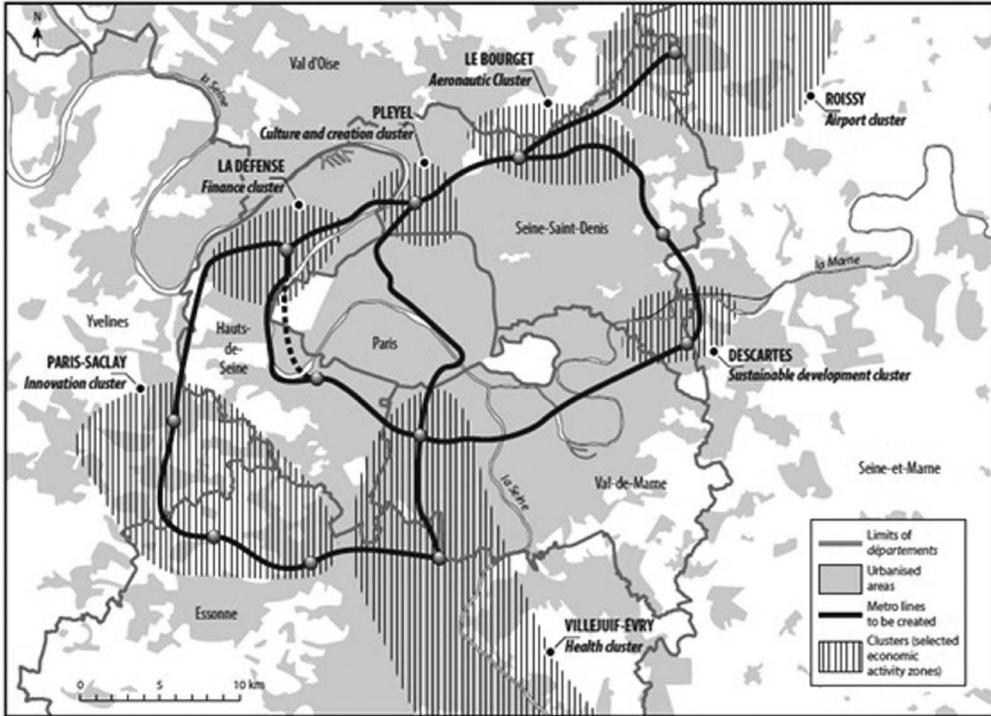


Figure 2 The Clusters. The map shows the Metro lines proposed by the state in 2008 and the economic clusters. We can observe the major transformation between this first plan and the Metro now under construction presented in Figure 1.  
Source: Blanc (2010)

the dynamics of the project seem sufficiently promising for dissent to be rare and largely ignored.

### The illusion of centralised management of the metropolis

In the early 2000s, the administrative fragmentation of the Ile-de-France region was seen as an explanatory or even aggravating factor of many of the region’s problems, in particular social segregation and the lack of coordinated urban development (Estèbe and Le Galès, 2003). Indeed, the region’s administrative system is marked – as everywhere in France – by the entanglement of powers devolved to the region, the *départements* and the communes (i.e. municipalities). The devolution reforms of 1982 and 1983 reinforced the powers of these municipalities, especially concerning urbanisation. Ile-de-France has more than 1,200 communes. However, a particular feature of Paris’s history is that the state has retained specific powers in Paris and

is wary of the emergence of strong local authorities. While solutions tackling the region's problems have scarcely been shared, even as provincial conglomerations have reinforced the power of inter-municipalities, the *status quo ante* in Ile-de-France was almost unanimously criticised at the beginning of the 2000s (see the texts gathered by Offner, 2007). The birth of the Greater Paris metropolitan authority on 1 January 2016 appears to be the culmination of more than a decade marked by a profusion of reports, expert studies and other White Papers concerning desirable institutional developments. However, I will show that this reform is not what it seems to be: far from suggesting the emergence of a single pilot organisation for the conglomeration, it actually institutes the emergence of some thirty powerful inter-communalities.

### The status of the Greater Paris metropolitan authority

The legislative framework that organises the Greater Paris metropolitan authority (GPMA) follows from the Loi portant nouvelle organisation territoriale de la République (NOTRe – the Law on the New Territorial Organisation of the Republic) of August 2015. The Greater Paris metropolitan authority is a public institution for inter-municipal cooperation. The law gives it a special status, and it has its own tax system. The GPMA comprises 123 communes (or municipalities): inner Paris itself; all the communes of Hauts-de-Seine, Val-de-Marne, Seine-Saint-Denis and Argenteuil; and six communes in Essonne. The metropolitan authority is composed of twelve *établissements publics de territoires* (EPTs – ‘territorial public establishments’), which stand at an intermediate level vis-à-vis municipalities. France's national parliament has provided for a gradual increase in the powers devolved to the GPMA. On 1 January 2016, the powers conferred to it concern the drafting of a territorial energy-climate plan. It was also granted responsibility for managing cultural and sports facilities which are of interest to the metropolitan area as a whole. As of 1 January 2017, the GPMA's competencies include the design of a *schéma de cohérence territoriale* (SCOT – ‘territorial coherence scheme’). This scheme frames the municipal development plans, and so, indirectly, the delivery of building permits), a metropolitan housing and accommodation plan, and a metropolitan digital planning scheme. Depending on the definition of metropolitan interest, the GPMA and the territories which make it up may also be entrusted with, mainly, the management and execution of planned development, the constitution of land reserves, the rehabilitation of unsafe housing, and economic development actions. These competencies will be handed to the GPMA, subject to agreement by two-thirds of the metropolitan councillors, by no later than 1 January 2018. The overall Community Council is made up of 209 members, of which sixty-two are from inner Paris (Figure 3).

### The Greater Paris metropolitan authority as window dressing

The emergence of the metropolitan authority is significant, but its real power is limited for political, administrative and financial reasons.

In terms of political representation, the chair of the GPMA is elected by metropolitan councillors appointed by municipal councils. Since 1 January 2016, Patrick Ollier, MP and mayor of Rueil-Malmaison, has chaired the authority. The lack of direct elections based on universal suffrage for this position weakens his recognition and political influence.

Furthermore, the division of competences between metropolitan authority and EPTs has not yet been defined. But it can already be noted that the NOTRe Law is in fact a step back from the previous law modernising and asserting the powers of local government. The latter law was adopted on 27 January 2014, and it aims to modernise territorial government action, while strengthening France’s metropolitan areas. The 2014 law sets out greater competencies for the Greater Paris metropolitan area, in particular in developing local inter-municipal urbanisation plans. Moreover,

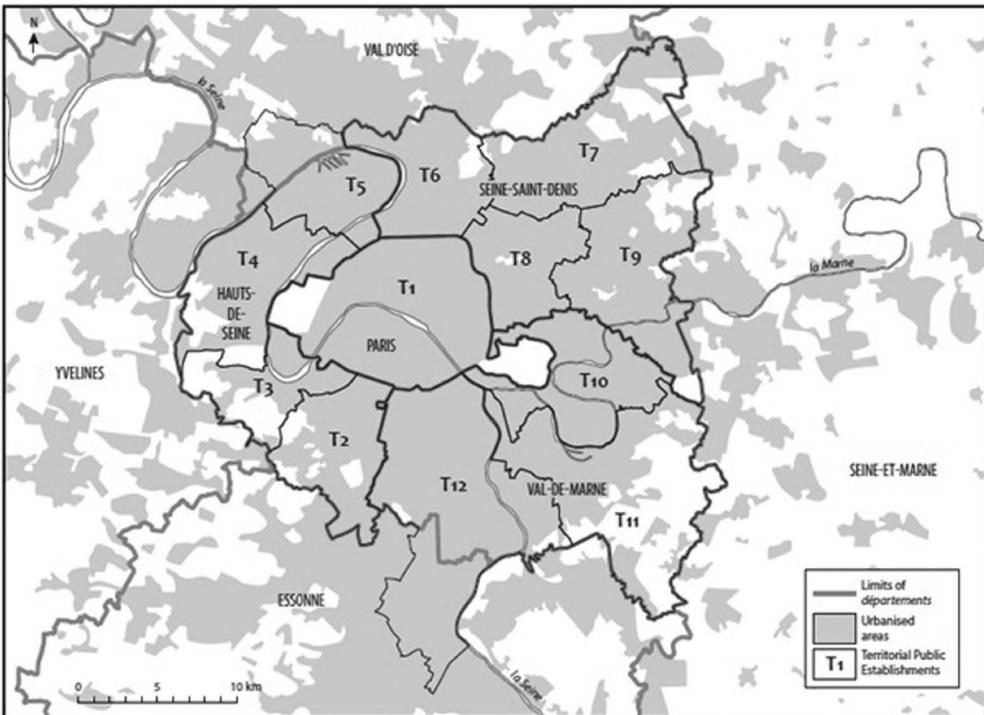


Figure 3 Greater Paris Metropolitan Authority (GPMA) and its territories in 2017  
Source: APUR

the creation of the GPMA does not entail any change in the role of the *départements*: their absorption had been envisaged by numerous reports, in particular that by Senator Dallier (2008). This had actually occurred in Lyon, when the metropolitan authority was established. Finally, the powers of the GPMA are limited in many areas, especially urban planning. The territorial coherence plan of the metropolitan area must be compatible with the master plan of the Ile-de-France region, which is very precise. Nor should the former encroach on the prerogatives of the territories which are responsible for making the *plan local d'urbanisme intercommunal* (PLUI, 'inter-municipal development plan'). Also, in designing its development project, the metropolitan authority has virtually no leverage in terms of transport: it is the STIF, whose competencies draw on the region, the *départements* and the state, which is the organising authority for transport.

The Greater Paris metropolitan authority is thus mainly a tax redistribution scheme whose equalisation effects are long-term. In fact, the authority, rather than the communes and groupings of communes, receives all local business taxes, except companies' property tax. These payments amounted to €1.1 billion in 2016, mainly from companies' contributions (CVAE, *contribution sur la valeur ajoutée des entreprises*), whose rate is fixed by the state. The GPMA also receives a share of the total operating grant, allocated by the state to municipalities and their groupings: i.e. €1.5 billion. Beginning in 2021, the GPMA will further receive companies' property tax payments, estimated at more than €1 billion, and will undertake a gradual smoothing of rates over twelve years. These tax and financial measures uphold the principle of financial neutrality: other things being equal, the creation of the GPMA and the EPTs is meant to be neutral in terms of the overall finances of municipalities and the former inter-municipalities. This means that municipalities and territories are reassigned resources by the GPMA which they had received previously. The investment capacities of the GPMA are limited only by the share of increased revenues from the CVAE, and as of 2021 onwards from the CFE (the *cotisation foncière des entreprises* or companies' property tax). Accordingly, in 2016, the authority's budget was only €65 million out of a total €3.5 billion, with the balance being transferred directly to the municipalities and territories. The reduction of differences in local public investment between the various municipalities can therefore only be extremely progressive. With regard to the local taxation of companies, the gradual smoothing of rates will lead to equalisation of CFE rates applied to all municipalities of mainland France, over the long term (i.e. by 2033).

These simple factors indicate that the GPMA was almost an empty shell in 2016. From the loi de Modernisation de l'Action Publique Territoriale de d'Affirmation des Métropoles (MAPTAM) of January 2014 to the NOTRe Law of August 2015, the unfavourable results recorded by the left in the municipal elections of March 2014 almost certainly prompted the Socialist parliamentary majority to trim the powers of

an institution whose presidency seems to be held by the right. It is also possible that the emergence of an ‘administrative behemoth’ around the authority, as sketched out in the Law of 2014, may have frightened even the most tenacious reformers.

### Territories and inter-municipalities: a powerful intermediate level

The territories of Greater Paris make up the metropolitan area. The territorial public establishments (EPTs) must cover areas that are contiguous, without any enclaves, and that have at least 300,000 inhabitants. Paris is an EPT. From 1 January 2016 onwards, these territories have the competence to draw up a local inter-municipal urbanisation plan, and to undertake water management, sanitation work and waste processing. By the end of 2017, they will have the responsibility for municipal or inter-municipal public housing agencies. By 2017, territorial councils must define the dividing lines between competences that are the responsibility of municipalities or EPTs for the management of cultural, sports or socio-educational facilities. They may also take back the competences exercised by the existing EPCIs (*établissements public de coopération intercommunale* – public establishments of inter-communal cooperation). The territories are financed by a share of the taxes paid by households (property taxes and residential taxes), as well as property taxes paid by companies. As a transitional measure between 2016 and 2020, they will obtain the property taxes from companies and vote for a single rate among themselves. The territories are thus powerful actors which consolidate the dynamics of the constitution of the inter-municipalities that have existed since the early 2000s, within the inner ring (*petite couronne*) of municipalities around inner Paris (Desjardins, 2010).

Around the metropolitan area, the inter-municipalities of the outer ring (*grande couronne*) have been strongly restructured and strengthened. The NOTRe Law set a minimum number of 15,000 inhabitants for EPCIs to operate in 2017. The *schémas départementaux de coopération intercommunale* (SDCI – departmental schemes for inter-municipal cooperation) drawn up at the end of March 2016 are indeed preparing large-scale changes. If these are actually implemented, Ile-de-France will be covered by sixty-five such institutions in 2017. They will have an average population of nearly 35,000 inhabitants. Fourteen inter-municipal areas on the boundaries of the Greater Paris metropolitan authority have more than 100,000 inhabitants.

Finally, the geopolitical situation of Ile-de-France is quite surprising. In terms of the local powers governing town planning, housing and economic development, the metropolitan area seems to be characterised by a form of confederation of about fifteen major inter-municipalities and twelve territories. This level of ‘large inter-municipalities’ seems to be the most stable. The GPMA is only a coordination body with limited powers. It could potentially acquire a lot of power, but there are centres of opposition to its development. The Ile-de-France Regional Council is sceptical

about the emergence of a metropolitan authority which brings together more than half of the inhabitants of the region, and which could eventually lead the Regional Council to concentrate only on the outer ring of municipalities. The three councils of the inner ring of *départements* (Hauts-de-Seine, Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-de-Marne) may fear an administrative merger with the GPMA. Attempts to unravel the GPMA will undoubtedly be numerous, in particular as a result of the desire by the Hauts-de-Seine *département* to unite with that of the Yvelines *département*, in order to make up a bloc that cannot be absorbed within the present borders of the GPMA. Yet, for territorial planning purposes, it is surely essential to go beyond the municipal level in order to favour the emergence of a powerful intermediate level capable of linking up the very local concerns with regional strategies.

### The unanswered questions and blind alleys of the Greater Paris project

The regional development project is characterised by strong internal consistency. However, it creates some dead ends which over time could limit its scope and jeopardise its implementation.

#### *Expert analysis has been renewed little, but much debated*

If planning has been transformed in its goal and its method, the Greater Paris project has not been an opportunity to renew expertise profoundly. In 2008, when the international consultation for the 'Grand Pari(s) of the Paris metropolitan area' was launched, there was a wish to dust off the institutions in charge of development. In particular, the approach of the Regional Council was qualified as 'outdated', as being too wise and prudent in the drawing up of its master plan. This especially referred to the Council using the expertise of its own Institut d'aménagement et d'urbanisme (IAU – Institute of Planning and Urbanisation), and its broad and diversified practice of consulting with local authorities and various associations. Following the international consultation and its attendant exhibition, an Atelier international du Grand Paris (AIGP – Greater Paris International Workshop) was set up, alongside the urban planning agencies, such as the IAU and the Atelier parisien d'urbanisme (APUR – Parisian Urban Planning Workshop), as well as the various offices of the state and its devolved units. The aim of the workshop was to stimulate the ongoing debate on regional planning. This objective was only partially met and the 'outdated' experts proved to be very resistant. There were several reasons for the ensuing limited renewal of expertise. First, the AIGP gave a disproportionate place to one of the disciplines of spatial planning in relation to others, namely architecture. This choice proved to be wise when it came to constructing new representations of the metropolitan area and producing attractive supports. But it was less valid when some architects began working on institutional, economic, infrastructural or social issues. Second, for a number of

technical but fundamental issues, such as transport, ‘traditional’ organisations with expertise took up all the ‘space’ available. This was especially so for the consulting firms operating for the SNCF and the RATP. Finally, as Alain Bourdin remarked at the Greater Paris International Workshop,<sup>3</sup> the problem was one of obtaining coherence in production across different teams: ‘contributions to future planning draw on one set of knowledge; precise sectoral expertise and specific project issues in turn have their own visions or intuitions, so the links between them are sometimes very loose’. This follows from the organisation of work in particular: ‘integrating numerous and diverse sources of expertise takes time, which the organisers did not pay attention to’ (Bourdin, 2013, 624).

While expertise was not greatly renewed, there was increased opening up to the public of debate about the metropolitan area. This was facilitated by devolution. Formal consultation procedures played an important role, especially the public debates held in 2011 to discuss the Metro project. Discussions, media forums, blogs and other subject-related websites did indeed spark a wide-ranging debate, even though socio-political biases meant that older, more educated, more affluent persons participated most in this type of debate (Beaucire, 2009).

### *The urban integration of economic spaces*

The establishment of economic activities is partly dependent on regional planning. The Greater Paris Express network is an important element in companies’ location strategies. Moreover, different local authorities are all seeking to attract businesses. The various territorial development contracts referred to above thus provide for an enormous expansion of office space throughout Ile-de-France. While present office space runs to 50 million square metres, the CDTs (territorial development contracts) provide for an extra 11 million square metres of office space by 2030 (DRIEA, 2013). However, only developments in the immediate periphery of inner Paris seem to generate a strong interest from investors. Under these conditions, more peripheral areas, in particular the former ‘new towns’, as well as certain communes in the north and the east, will face difficulties in attracting office jobs. On the other hand, while normal business activities are relatively widespread across the region, office spaces used in services are fairly standardised and so constitute multifunctional business centres. The financialisation of corporate real estate has led to the creation of investment products that are easy to sell, and relatively undifferentiated. For these operations, their size (at least 300,000 square metres) is an asset because it reinforces the visibility of an office district. All these factors contribute in particular to pushing housing out of these office districts.

There are also uncertainties relating to the balance of the development of retail outlets. Although the developmentalist and political discourse largely favours the

3 Professor Alain Bourdin is a sociologist from a team led by Christian Devillers, one of the Greater Paris team.

spread of such activities in order to strengthen proximity retailing, the reality is much more nuanced. The Ile-de-France region, as other French regions, is characterised by a speculative bubble in retail real estate. Locally elected officials, who are mesmerised by potential jobs, contribute to such speculation through their benevolent granting of permits for the setting up of outlets (Madry, 2011). The EuropaCity project is emblematic of such process. The EuropaCity project was initiated by the Auchan group (a chain of large supermarkets). It consists of urbanising eighty hectares of rich agricultural land in the 'Gonesse triangle', located between Le Bourget and Roissy and bordered by the A1 motorway, just to the north of inner Paris. The project involves constructing 470,000 square metres of buildings, of which 235,000 square metres will be for commercial, cultural and leisure use, while a further 100,000 square metres will be for public use. There is no provision for housing because the site is under the air corridor to Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport. There is much opposition to the project, because the northern part of the Greater Paris conglomeration already has many shopping centres, and because a station of the Greater Paris Express will be almost entirely dedicated to serving this large shopping centre. Finally, the shopping centre risks being built 'in isolation', with little connection to the surrounding cities, and its implementation may impede the success of urban renewal projects in Aulnay-sous-Bois or Le Bourget (see Bonnet et al., 2016).

Finally, this organisation of economic space shows how difficult it is to build a compact metropolis. The term 'urban compactness' is often misunderstood: it refers not only to the search for density but also to the search for the diversity and proximity of urban functions. Compactness involves looking for both 'diversity' and 'density'. In the case of Ile-de-France, achieving functional, close-by diversity seems relatively illusory, in as far as the geographical distribution of offices and retail outlets produces large mono-functional centres – at least in some places (Behar et al., 2013).

### Overlooking social issues

It may also be asked whether the Greater Paris project has not forgotten social issues. Since the 1960s, the rebalancing of the region eastwards has involved a spatial representation of a more egalitarian metropolis (Béhar, 2009). This is still going on. Apart from connecting the town of Clichy-sous-Bois, which has symbolised France's run-down suburban housing estates since the riots in 2005, the Greater Paris Metro project aims to reduce inequalities in public transport between the north and east with the rest of the Paris region, similar to projects in previous decades (Desjardins and Drevelle, 2014). However, this desire to rebalance services does not respond to the many social issues at stake. Moreover, no new image exists at present to replace this desire and so embody a social project.

The Ile-de-France region is France's main immigration destination. In 2013,

Ile-de-France had 2.2 million immigrants (i.e. foreigners or naturalised French citizens), according to INSEE (France's National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies). This was nearly 40 per cent of the 5.8 million immigrants living in France. Foreigners with a valid residence permit are highly concentrated in the region. State medical aid provides care for immigrants whose status is not fully legal. Of the 300,000 people who benefited from such care in 2013, 40 per cent come from the two *départements* (Paris and Seine-Saint-Denis) and two-thirds from Ile-de-France (Goasguen and Sirugue, 2015). The future of this ethnic, social and religious diversity is not mentioned anywhere in metropolitan narratives.

Another aspect that is singularly absent concerns the place of the middle classes. The move to the provinces of a large number of employees (nurses, teachers, secretaries, police officers, craftsmen) due especially to the high cost of housing in the Ile-de-France region, and the deterioration of certain schools and transport conditions, is leading to major sociological change. The policy response is insufficient. To be sure, there has been a modest effort to revive 'intermediate' housing intended for the middle classes. However, the reduction of space devoted to individual housing in peri-urban or more distant outskirts has contributed to reducing accommodation which is particularly appreciated by middle-class families with children. The scenario of social dualisation put forward by Saskia Sassen (2004), in which global cities are dividing into a privileged minority and an 'urban proletariat', often of immigrant origin, is becoming more credible.

In short, the discourse of 'territorial rebalancing' is now exhausted, not because it is no longer relevant but because it is no longer able to meet most of the social problems at stake in Ile-de-France.

### Moving beyond the Paris basin

The fact that the Greater Paris project involves shifting to a larger scale than the 'small Paris', based on the Paris basin, is largely ignored by public actors.

To be sure, the Seine valley waterway has returned to grace (Frémont, 2013). Some projects have been implemented, in response to the successful staging of the 'Greater Paris by the Sea' narrative by the architect Antoine Grumbach, the need to coordinate and develop better the activity of the ports along the Seine (Paris, Rouen and Le Havre), and the repeated failures of rail connections between Paris and Normandy. However, apart from this relationship between Paris and the sea, relations between Paris and the rest of the Paris basin have almost disappeared. This contrasts with London – the competing metropolis – which draws on a rich and dense hinterland of South East England, a comparison that highlights this oversight in the development of Ile de France (Hall, 2014).

Why this forgetfulness? In the 1990s, the Paris basin showed some economic

integration. At the time, Philippe Thiard showed that the Paris basin was organised in a centre–periphery manner, with high value-added design activities and highly skilled labour at the heart of the basin and more general design activities in peripheral regions. This geography was explained by the inheritance of spatial-planning policies from the 1960s to the 1980s, which sought to relocate industrial activities outside the region. These manufacturing activities have since declined significantly, with many factories being offshored. Economic integration between sectors is today less strong. These changes led Pierre Veltz (2012) to ask whether a Paris–provinces relationship, based on high-speed trains, is not actually replacing the Paris basin.

In fact there are many issues at stake. Numerous cities within an hour by train from Paris are marked by long-term social difficulties, especially following the decline of the industries that settled there in the 1960s: Dreux, Evreux, Montereau. Rail links to these towns, which are often historical rail lines out of Paris, are particularly bad. This is especially so for lines towards Normandy (via Mantes), to Champagne (via Château-Thierry) or to Orleans. The university system of the Paris basin was once strongly interconnected, and this is no longer the case (Cattan et al., 2007). Local agriculture supplying Paris can only be envisaged at the level of the Paris basin. Finally, the development of the relay cities within the Paris basin remains a credible solution to relaying and diffusing the growth of the metropolitan area.

## **Conclusion: strategic planning reinvented**

Planning has often been criticised for being inappropriate. It has been said that managing the future of large urban areas can no longer be built on the basis of overall visions. Instead, it has been argued that it is better to follow a succession of well-thought-out projects for metropolitan areas which have become too complex and too diverse. This idea was developed abundantly in the scientific literature in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, the Parisian example illustrates, following many others, the revival of spatial strategic planning in Europe (Zepf and Andres, 2010). Yet today's planning is very different from that of the past. Regional planning strategy is being attempted by using flow management (linkage capacities, switching capacities at nodes), not instead of, but in addition to, spatial management tools (urban growth boundary lines, development zones) (Hall and Pain, 2006).

First, there has been no central actor in the emergence of the Greater Paris project. Any discussion of the development of the Paris region in the 1960s quickly leads to the name of Paul Delouvrier, and references to one document: the master plan of 1965. To be sure, Delouvrier and the master plan do not summarise everything, but they indicate the centrality of the state – France's central government – in the process. Acting through the president of the Paris regional district, the state clearly showed its capacity to set out a strategic project at that time. There is nothing like this

today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. While some names stand out, no single person summarises the project. The Greater Paris Metro project is not the one wished for by Christian Blanc. The 2013 Ile-de-France region master plan was not the dream of Jean-Paul Huchon, president of the Regional Council from 1998 to 2015, nor that of former prime minister Edouard Balladur (2009), nor that of the senator of Seine-Saint-Denis, Philippe Dallier (2008). No architect or team of architects or town planners can truly claim to have had a monopoly of ideas or caused a major change in the process. The project for Greater Paris is unnamed and its coherence does not flow from any programming texts. Why?

This situation can be explained by the congruence of three factors. First, in the context of France's administrative devolution which occurred in the early 1980s, and competition between territorial levels, the project could only have resulted from arbitrations and successive agreements. The routing of the Greater Paris Express is a good example of this, as it resulted from laborious compromises between the ambitions of the state and the region.

The second factor relates to a kind of 'technical sieving' for selecting projects, once policy objectives had been declared. In a speech in Roissy in 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy promised to develop an urban community government for Greater Paris: very quickly, however, some studies revealed such an administrative behemoth to be unrealistic. In 2008, Christian Blanc promised the construction of a 130-kilometre subway line with ten stations to be built by 2018: the realism of this project was then 'filtered' by specialist studies indicating that construction would take at least twenty years, and that many more stations needed to be constructed. This way of working was perhaps deemed useful by politicians who feared the timidity of 'experts' and government administrations. The fact remains that it led to the emergence of projects which, while realistic, no longer resemble the original ideas put forward, to the point that it is difficult to attribute authorship to the persons who initially proposed the projects.

The third factor is that the Greater Paris project is based both on continuity and on contemporary circumstances. Its overall outline follows five decades of planning in the Paris region which have aimed to limit urban sprawl, to ensure a unified labour market at the regional level, and to give a central place to railway traffic in linking homes and jobs (Desjardins et al., 2011). The development of the railway system is driven by a 'path dependency': the choice of mass transit to serve business districts many decades ago leads to improvements in the railway system to accompany the densification of jobs in the agglomeration. Many of the project's innovations follow present fashions: it aims to remove any obstacles to the development of the Ile-de-France region, to go beyond the municipal level, and even to promote a denser metropolis. All these objectives were already present 'in people's minds', and many had already been implemented in the other major French cities. They already formed a consensus on urban planning before being proposed for Ile-de-France. Many studies have shown

the variety of institutional arrangements at metropolitan scale and the fact that ‘good practices are highly differentiated; there are different ways to success’ (Salet et al., 389). If there is no good ‘procedural’ method of planning, there is the necessity for very broad agreement on the substantive content of the planning strategy.

Many architects and town planners believe in the myth of the enlightened and powerful decision maker, ideally an authoritarian. But the Greater Paris project shows that open and ‘collaborative’ planning can be productive: it is an amazing lesson for a process initiated by ‘the Prince’.

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Grand Paris aménagement

Institut d'aménagement et d'urbanisme d'Ile-de-France (IAU-IDF)

Institut national des statistiques et des études économiques (INSEE)

Observatoire régional du foncier d'Ile-de-France (ORF)

Société du Grand Paris (SGP)