

## HONG KONG IS THE MODEL FOR HIGH DENSITY

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What do Canadian cities need to do to become more sustainable? One simple answer is for them to become more like Hong Kong. Hong Kong's seven million residents have a higher GDP per person than Canadian urban residents, but it has the lowest per capita energy use of any affluent urban region.

The secret behind this low energy use is not frugality but the smart growth principle of efficient urban design.

What makes the difference is Hong Kong's high settlement density—it is more than ten times higher than the major urban regions in Canada, and more than five times higher than most urban regions in Europe.

This density is a result of a strict public policy regime. Hong Kong's territory is surprisingly extensive, totaling about 1100 square kilometres, or about twice the size of Prince Edward Island. Development is restricted with extraordinary severity, so that more than 80 per cent of the territory is maintained as parkland or wilderness. Hong Kong residents have easier access to open space than residents of most other cities.

There is also less reliance on cars. Private automobile ownership is not directly restrained in Hong Kong, but there are only about 50 cars per 1000 residents, one-tenth the ownership rate in Canada. Almost all journeys within Hong Kong are by public transit or cab. Transit is inexpensive, efficient and profitable for its operators.

Even on the food front, Hong Kong is a low energy user. A large share of its food comes from just a few dozen kilometres away in Guangdong province.

These remarkable land use and transportation arrangements have both positive and negative sides.

On the one hand, they result in high levels of mobility and business efficiency. Little time is wasted in moving around. Everybody and everything you need is close at hand

On the other hand, housing is expensive and living conditions are cramped. Local pollution levels can be high even though emission rates are low, because of the concentration of activity.

Notwithstanding these factors—and the recent SARS problem—Hong Kong residents are among the healthiest in the world. If Hong Kong were a country it would have the second-lowest infant mortality rate (behind Sweden) and the second-highest life expectancy (behind Japan).

Hong Kong has thus managed to maintain a high standard of living and to minimize its environmental impact, making it one of the world's most sustainable cities.