



McGill

Department of Geography
McGill University
Burnside Hall, room 705
805 Sherbrooke St. West
Montreal, QC
Canada H3A 0B9

Département de géographie
Université McGill
Pavillon Burnside, bureau 705
805 ouest, rue Sherbrooke
Montréal, QC
Canada H3A 0B9

Prof. Sarah Moser, PhD

Associate Professor
Tel: (+1) 514-266-9908
Fax: 514-398-7437
Sarah.moser@mcgill.ca
www.newcitieslab.org

17 March 2025

Dear CAPP Conference selection committee,

It is my pleasure to nominate **Hannah Rebentisch**, a Master's student under my supervision, for a presentation at the CAPP conference in May, for her manuscript titled 'Canadian megaproject governance and planning culture: The case of Ottawa's light rail expansion program'. Hannah is one of the most talented students with whom I have worked and has vast potential to make an original contribution in her Master's thesis.

She finished her undergraduate degree in Urban Studies at McGill several years ago with Distinction and First-Class Honours. We co-authored an article in *Cities: The International Journal of Urban Policy and Planning* based on an independent research course Hannah took with me during her undergraduate degree titled '[Unicorn planning: Lessons from the rise and fall of an American 'smart' mega-development](#)'. The article has been cited nearly 30 times and has received media attention in *Bloomberg* and the *Globe and Mail*. As first author, Hannah was invited to present the paper to a graduate class in the Systems Design Management program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2021. Hannah also published her undergraduate Honours thesis, supervised by Kevin Manaugh, in *Transportation Research Record*, and gave a lectern presentation at the largest gathering of transportation practitioners and researchers in the world, the Transportation Research Board meeting. To publish one peer-reviewed journal article as an undergraduate is a rare achievement. To publish two is extraordinary and speaks to Hannah's excellent research and reasoning skills, her ambition, her tenacity and determination, and her ability to take feedback and constantly improve her work.

After graduating, Hannah worked as a transit planner in Ottawa for three years. Hannah started her Master's degree under my supervision in September 2023 to examine the policies shaping transportation megaproject outcomes in Canada. This research project received competitive funding from both federal (SSHRC) and provincial (FRQSC) agencies, speaking to its high potential. Its key contribution will be to establish the Canadian policy and governance approach to transportation megaprojects, identifying constraints through comparison with international best practices. This research will use Ottawa's Line 1 light rail project as a case study; Hannah is uniquely qualified to carry out this research following her deep knowledge of the project having worked on the project as a transit planner during and after its launch. Given her on-the-ground experience, and her nuanced and sophisticated thesis proposal that draws on emerging research in comparative planning practices, she is well-positioned to contribute high quality research during her MA degree. Her manuscript 'Canadian megaproject governance and planning culture: The case of Ottawa's light rail expansion program'

speaks to the conference theme of multi-level governance in its exploration of Canadian infrastructure funding and procurement practices and the involvement of various levels of government in megaproject management. It is an innovative and very timely study, which I anticipate will be impactful.

Hannah and I are based in the Department of Geography, rather than the School of Public Policy. This brings the benefit of a strong basis in social science research methods and a particular focus on the impact of place. That said, Hannah is keen to engage with those working in the discipline of public policy and receive feedback on this research, and has identified the CAPPa conference as an ideal venue through which to do so.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,



Dr. Sarah Moser
Associate Professor, Urban Geography
Associate Member, School of Planning
McGill University
805 Sherbrooke Street West | Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Phone: 514-266-9908 | Email: sarah.moser@mcgill.ca
Website: www.newcitieslab.org

Researcher bio: *Hannah Rebentisch's federally- and provincially-funded research focuses on infrastructural megaprojects and the political and cultural factors contributing to their designs and outcomes. Specifically, she studies the ways in which macro-level factors like Canadian policy, professional norms, and funding and procurement mechanisms shaped the Line 1 light rail project in Ottawa. To establish an idea of Canadian 'planning culture', she also draws on practitioner interviews to investigate how Canadian transit planning practice at the municipal level is shaped by institutional and political factors as well as larger governance structures.*

Academic supervisor bio: *Dr. Sarah Moser is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at McGill University and is interested in the ways in which power and ideology are manifested in architecture, urban policy and planning, nation-building strategies, and more. Her primary areas of geographical focus are Malaysia and Indonesia, and she has expanded her research to include Saudi Arabia, Gulf states, and Latin America. One major strand of her current research is the global phenomenon of new city projects built from scratch. She has several ongoing projects relating to new cities in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.*