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Changes in Socio-Economic Status of North Etobicoke, an Inner Suburb of Toronto:

Poor new residents with reduced chances of achieving upward mobility

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ATLASof**SUBURBANISMS**

Abstract

Toronto's older suburbs have become "sandwiched" between the city's core and newer developments at the periphery. The new suburbs are attractive to new residents, especially to young families, as they offer larger homes built to modern market preferences at a lower cost and they are also near new employment centres and amenities such as large-format retailers. To other residents, the core is attractive due to its strong employment centre, volume and variety of amenities, efficient public transit, and varied lifestyle options. As the older inner suburb inhabitants leave to new suburbs or the core, property values and rents in the older suburbs drop, attracting recent immigrants who have a lower economic status. The spatial concentration of newcomers in the older suburbs is of concern, because those areas lack access to resources that could help them achieve upward mobility. This report provides a case study on the community of North Etobicoke, showcasing the pattern of socio-economic change that it has undergone, and calling for revitalization of the area to attract a population with a greater mix of ethnicities and income levels.

Introduction

The pattern of real estate development that leads to sprawl is all too familiar. Developers seek lower cost land to build residential properties to modern tastes at the periphery of a city. After that ring is developed, the next ring of land is engulfed by newer suburban homes. The new suburbs in the periphery become more attractive with their continued promises of larger homes designed to modern tastes, for a lower price tag, pitched as the ideal place to raise young children (Harris, 2004). Increasingly, these new suburban areas also attract businesses that were once located in the older inner suburbs, offering alternate employment opportunities for those who live in the newly developed areas. At the same time, the original city core has once again become attractive to young people and older empty nesters attracted by an urban lifestyle. What is left behind and stuck in the middle are older inner suburbs that do not have the amenities of the core, the modern housing styles of the new suburbs, nor the employment opportunities that exist in both (Lucy & Philips, 2000). Those who live in the inner suburbs lack opportunities that exist for those who live in the core or the new suburbs.

In this paper I will highlight the Toronto inner suburb of Etobicoke as a case study. I will show that the core and surrounding suburbs offer more choice for housing, employment, and shopping, drawing residents away from this inner suburb. I will show that the northern half of Etobicoke has entered a trend of economic decline and out-migration common to other inner suburbs, coupled with changing demographics as it becomes a new destination for the poorest segments of the new immigrant population. The questions I raise are: who is leaving this inner suburb? Who is left behind? And, what are the implications to the area's social fabric?

What is an inner suburb?

For this discussion, let us use the definition of inner suburbs given by Pavlic (2011):

post-World War II communities, built between 1946 and 1971 which are older and therefore structurally different from the later suburbs. At the same time, they lack the amenities of the core and the inner cities

In the Toronto case, the inner suburbs generally

include the old municipalities of Etobicoke, North York, East York, and Scarborough, which became part of the City of Toronto through the process of amalgamation in 1998 (Toronto City Council, 1999). "New suburbs" for the purposes of this discussion, are those towns immediately adjacent to the city of Toronto, typically considered part of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA): Mississauga, Woodbridge and Vaughan, Markham, and Pickering. This "outer ring," historically known to be auto-dependent bedroom communities of Toronto, now includes vibrant business areas such as the Mississauga City Centre near Square One and the "tech parks" in Markham, both of which provide employment opportunities for residents in the new suburbs. Arguably, the outer ring does not constitute an ideal urban form as it is highly car dependent. However, its residents have more choices for employment, recreation, and shopping than what is available in the inner suburbs, and that is a key point of differentiation.

The old suburb of Etobicoke covers a long, relatively narrow area which formerly was an independent municipality on the West side of Toronto. While the West side has generally been viewed as prosperous, I will show that decline has occurred in the northern part of Etobicoke.

Relationship to urban form

Etobicoke contains a wide diversity of urban forms. Some of this diversity can help explain how the southern half has been able to retain higher income, better educated, and second and third generation immigrants, while the northern half has attracted lower income, less educated, new immigrants. The southern half has many large homes which can rival the modern homes at the periphery of the city, which makes the draw of the new suburbs less relevant for this part of Etobicoke. The southern half also benefits from being closer to employment opportunities and urban amenities of the core, with quick access to the subway system. By contrast, the northern part of this inner suburb features many high-rise apartment buildings, older and smaller single detached and semi-detached homes, and numerous social housing projects, very little of which is near employment or thriving shopping amenities. The numerous high-rise apartment buildings serve a benefit to the broader city as they provide higher densities to feed a bus system from the north all the way down to the subway stations in the south – benefiting Southern Etobicoke's inhabitants. Residents of

North Etobicoke either have to drive out to the employment centres in the newer suburbs, or take long bus rides down to the subway system to reach the employment centres in the core (a commute of up to an hour and a half). The combination of quality of housing stock, efficiency of public transit, and proximity to employment centres and amenities would suggest that the southern half of Etobicoke is more attractive to those who can afford it than its northern counterpart.

Why do residents leave an inner suburb?

For every resident that moves from an outer municipality to the city core, 3.5 residents make the opposite move (Turcotte & Vézina, 2010). This section will summarize some key factors drawing middle-class professionals out of the inner suburbs: housing preferences, employment opportunities, and greater access to amenities.

Housing

Three important reasons why housing in the newer suburbs is attractive are: lower per square footage cost, market preferences for features, and market preferences during the family formation stage of life (Harris, 2004).

Newer homes in new suburbs are often larger than inner city and inner suburban homes – offering more space and accommodating new market preferences (Lucy & Philips, 2000). These market preferences include more recreational space and updated layouts and designs. They also accommodate lifestyle changes, for example by offering space for a home office or den for workers who telecommute occasionally. In contrast, inner suburban homes were built to modest standards and, having been built in the same period, are deteriorating in unison (King, Olin, and Poster as cited in Pavlic, 2011, p. 20).

There is a commonly held belief that suburbs are the ideal place to raise children, specifically the new suburbs: “at any time the outer ring of suburbs – the suburban frontier – is the city’s main breeding zone and the main residential building site” (Dingle as cited in McManus & Ethington, 2007, p. 334). The trend identified in McManus & Ethington (2007) is that the new suburbs are usually occupied by young couples in the family formation stage of life. The authors also highlighted a psychological factor in the draw to newly built outer suburbs: residents who moved in before roads and other infrastructural elements

were fully built related the experience to a form of ‘pioneering.’ They viewed house building and home building as the same undertaking.

The draw of new homes in new suburbs is negatively impacting the homes in the older inner suburbs. Despite being situated closer to the core, these inner suburbs are experiencing a decline in relative house value, and an increase in average rents. In Pavlic’s study (2011) comparing housing values in different sectors of the city, the only sectors in the Toronto area which showed consistent price increases were the new suburbs, which showed an index of change of 1.03 during this time period. In contrast, the inner and outer suburbs had an index of 0.99 and 0.95 (the index for the city core was 0.66, a number that is considered skewed due to the large influx of smaller homes in condominium buildings). In addition, despite a decline in the relative value of homes during Pavlic’s study period, the inner suburbs showed an increase in average gross rents, whereas the inner city, outer suburbs, and new suburbs all showed declines. Pavlic’s study also compared cities across Canada for the two decades leading up to the 2006 Census, and the trend observed for Toronto was found to be similar across the country.

In the Toronto area, the data shows that property is more likely to increase in value if it is located in the new suburbs. This trend adds to the incentive for purchasing housing in the new suburbs, based on speculation that house prices will continue to increase over time and the expectation of a capital gain upon sale. However, those who own homes in Etobicoke and other inner suburbs are seeing the relative value of their homes go into slight decline over time. The upside of reduced housing values is that they allow lower-income individuals to attain home ownership, and may be a sign of welfare filtering taking place (Skaburskis, 2004). Those who rent in Etobicoke, however, are deriving less value for their rent money than those who rent in other parts of the city.

Lack of Employment Opportunities

The flow of businesses is following similar patterns as residential settlement, with relocations to new suburban developments where more plentiful land translates into reduced property costs and/or lower taxes (Lucy & Philips, 2000). Even large enterprises can sever their connections

and move further out to the new suburbs, as they do not rely on local population but rather on a large catchment area that can span multiple communities (Pavlic, 2011).

Within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the highest concentration of employment opportunities exist within the core, followed by three of the city's new suburbs: Mississauga to the West, Markham to the North-East, and Vaughn to the North. This was shown in a study by Coffey and Shearmur (2006), where they mapped employment centres with a minimum of 5,000 jobs and employment-to-resident ratio greater than 1.0, using 1996 census data. Their results also show that inner-suburb residents of Toronto would have to commute the greatest distances if they were employed in any of the top four employment centres within the CMA. The issue of large employment-to-residence distances in the inner suburbs is most severely pronounced in both central Etobicoke, which is completely devoid of employment centres, and North Etobicoke, which has the smallest employment centre identified within the entire CMA. By contrast, the fifth largest employment centre is in South Etobicoke in the QEW/Highway 427 area: South Etobicoke residents benefit from quick access to both the second and fifth largest employment centres in the CMA. Similarly, there are numerous smaller employment centres in the eastern and central inner-suburbanites of Toronto, including Scarborough, Don Mills, North York, Yonge/Eglinton, and Yorkdale.

Lack of amenities – retail example

Access to amenities such as retail shops, restaurants, recreational facilities, and places of worship enhance urban life. Increases in the volume of such amenities can have the effect of drawing more residents to an area. As an example, retail establishments are clustered in the greatest volume in the downtown core of Toronto, and newer forms of retailing – big box retailers – are located in the new suburbs. Big box retailers are expanding at a remarkable rate of growth in the GTA – growing from 93 outlets in 1990 to 445 outlets in 1999 (Jones & Doucet, 2001).

Smaller shopping centres are negatively impacted by the rise of American-style large format retailing in the GTA (Jones & Doucet, 2001). The more vulnerable centres are typically located in the inner suburbs. This leaves residents in the inner suburbs with the desire to leave their

neighbourhoods to shop either at street retail locations in the downtown core, or new big box retailers in the new suburbs. To understand the implications for Etobicoke, Figure 1 below shows the clustering of retailers in the area and its surroundings. The figure shows the high degree of concentration in the downtown core and along subway lines. While there are some concentrations of retailers within the old suburb, the stronger concentrations are situated to the East and North-East. Two of the North-Eastern clusters, both of which are big box store complexes, are located in Vaughn near the intersections of Highway 400 and Highway 7 and Weston Road and Highway 7. This creates a draw for residents in Etobicoke and surrounding areas to move to Vaughn for closer access to modern forms of retailing.

Socio-economic changes

The draw out to the new suburbs or back to the core has caused a change in population within Toronto's inner suburbs. In this section I will review how the socio-economic profile of Etobicoke has changed in the decade between 1996 and 2006. I will show that the new population skews towards lower-income, less-educated, and new immigrants, suggesting that many middle-class professionals and multi-generational immigrants have left the community.

Median household income

Household income is a standard measure of economic prosperity. During the two decades leading up to 2006, the core and new suburbs of Toronto all experienced increases in median household income, while the inner suburbs experienced declines (Pavlic, 2011). The Centre for Urban and Community Studies (CUCS) also confirmed this trend in a report on income levels in Toronto from 1970 to 2000 (Gulliver, 2008). The inner suburbs also show a high proportion of low income residents, with higher concentrations of the lowest-income quartile or incomes below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) (Skaburskis, 2004).

To help understand the trend of shifting income patterns within the inner suburb of Etobicoke, Figures 2 and 3 compare the median household income mapped by census tract in 1996 and 2006. The purpose of the maps is to highlight relative income disparity between census tracts and areas within the suburb, ignoring the actual dollar values (which have not been adjusted to account for inflation). Although Etobicoke

followed the trend of the other inner suburbs with declines in median household income, the majority of these declines were in census tracts North of Highway 401. North Etobicoke also now belongs to an extremely poor grouping identified by the CUCS, in which 21 percent of residents had incomes lower than \$20,000 and only 11 percent made more than \$100,000 (Gulliver, 2008). The census tracts with the highest median incomes were in the South end adjacent to the TTC subway line (shown in red) in both cases. These findings suggest that people with higher incomes are choosing to live in closer proximity to the subway line.

Education

Education levels within a community can provide an indication of current prosperity and capacity to attain economic prosperity. Figures 4 and 5 represent higher education attainment (college diploma or university degree) of Etobicoke's working-age population, by census tract for the census year 1996 and 2006.¹ Across the entire suburb, levels of attainment for higher education increased substantially during this decade. But unfortunately, North Etobicoke (census tracts north of Highway 401) only showed two census tracts moving up from the fifth to the fourth quintile, whereas the south part of the suburb had two census tracts which moved up from the second to the first quintile. The dispersal of better educated residents has remained fairly static, with a concentration in the South.

Even levels of basic education are a concern for North Etobicoke. According to the CUCS, in the area that North Etobicoke belongs to (termed as "City 3" in their report that divides Toronto into three sectors), 21 percent of the population 25 and older does not have a secondary school certificate

¹ Due to the differences in Census questions between these two years, different fields were used. In 1996, the fields "WITH_CERT1" and "WITH_BACHE" were used. This covers those: "With certificate or diploma. Includes trades certificate or diploma, other non-university certificate or diploma and university certificate or diploma below bachelor level" and "with bachelor's degree or higher." In 2006, the field "No_CERTIF1" was subtracted from "Total_PO8" which removes those who have "no certificate, diploma or degree" from the overall population 25 to 64 years of age. In both cases, the data was normalized by the population 25 to 64 years of age (deemed the working population of age to have completed higher education), and mapped showing percentages of the working population that has attained higher education.

(Gulliver, 2008). Furthermore, the concentration of low-income residents reduces the chances for improvements in public education for the youth. The CUCS report (Gulliver, 2008) comments:

...the more startling issue is the decline of the middle class. What we are seeing in our schools is that the middle class, or those with middle-class sensibilities, demand a certain level of support and accountability that go into making services good. They demand that schools do certain things, that recreation centres do certain things. It's harder for lower-income families who want the same things to do the same kind of community work.

New Immigrants

According to Lucy and Philips (as cited in Pavlic, 2011) the median stay for home owners is only eight years. So who begins to move into the older inner suburbs after the first generation of inhabitants has moved out? In the case of Etobicoke, and more specifically North Etobicoke, the most likely candidates are those who do not have a choice – the poorer segments of new immigrants.

Over 40 percent of immigrants to Canada chose to locate in Toronto (Hiebert, 2000, p. 27). People of non-European descent now outnumber the city's traditional Euro-origin population, and the British/French Canadian constitute only 25.1 percent of its Canadian-born residents (Hiebert, 2000; Kay, 1999). Hiebert (2000) notes that traditionally, immigrants settled in the inner city,

...in many cases in exactly the neighbourhoods favoured by gentrifiers; for example, Cabbagetown in Toronto gained its name from the 'cuisine of poverty' associated with the post-famine Irish community. As these neighbourhoods experience renovation and rising prices, they become too expensive for most (new) immigrants who must look elsewhere for housing.

Hiebert goes on to state "those who came to Canada after 1984 have been more prone to suburban settlement." Kay comments that the post-World War II suburbs of Etobicoke, North York, and Scarborough have become some of the most important immigrant districts (1999).

The change in settlement pattern for new immigrants in Etobicoke between 1996 and 2006 is mapped in Figures 6 and 7. These figures show that across the entire suburb, the number of recent immigrant residents has increased dramatically between 1996 and 2006. This is especially true in the northern part of the suburb.

North Etobicoke also has a lower concentration of second and third generation Canadians (typically of European origin). Figure 8 maps the 2006 numbers of first generation immigrants in Etobicoke by census tract. Notice the highest concentration of first generation immigrants in the northern portion, north of Highway 401. In stark contrast, the southern portion of the suburb has several census tracts with the lowest proportion of first generation immigrants. Figure 9 maps out the data for second generation immigrants. This generation is most heavily concentrated in the south along the QEW, however they are more evenly spread across the entire suburb. Figure 10 maps the data for third generation immigrants (typically of Euro-origin), and shows almost a mirror image of the map for first generation immigrants. There are several census tracts in the northern half of the suburb with the lowest portion of third generation immigrants (including none), and the south is populated with census tracts that have mostly first and second quintile volumes of third-generation immigrants. This suggests that the southern half of the suburb has been able to retain multi-generations of residents, while the northern half has seen a far greater turnover. The generation that grew up in North Etobicoke seems to be following the pattern of their Euro-origin predecessors: households are starting to move out to the newer suburbs or into the core as their financial circumstances improve. New Immigrants with higher levels of education and income will also likely choose to live in newer suburbs or in the core (Moos & Skaburskis, 2010).

What are the implications of the current socio-economic state of North Etobicoke?

We have seen that there is a draw out of the Northern half of Etobicoke – likely a move out to the new suburbs of Mississauga, Vaughn or others, down to the Southern half of the suburb, or to the core. We have seen that this area has experienced a reduction in relative housing values, median household incomes, and education levels, coupled with an increase in rents. Lastly, we have noted that the new residents of this area are recent

immigrants, who are experiencing lower indicators of prosperity. This concentration of new immigrants coupled with the area's economic decline is a source of concern, as these circumstances may negatively impact newly arrived residents and their chances of achieving the upward mobility of their predecessors. Numerous researchers have warned against the negative effects of concentration of ethnic groups and poverty. I summarize some of their findings in this section.

Walks and Bourne (2006) raise the question as to whether ghettoization is occurring in Canada along the same lines as in the US. Although they conclude that it is not (yet), they raise several concerns regarding the spatial concentration of poverty. They state: “the concentration of apartment housing, of visible minorities in general, and of a high degree of racial diversity in particular, do help in accounting for the neighbourhood patterning of low income” (2006). They also comment that “Toronto stands out as the CMA with both the largest visible minority population and the greatest proportion of its population in highly concentrated tracts (mixed-minority and polarized).” Mixed-minority areas in Toronto have average household incomes that are 68 percent of the city average versus isolated neighbourhoods which have 125 percent above-average incomes (Walks & Bourne, 2006).

Hiebert notes that inner suburbs are “as prone to ethnic residential segregation as the inner city” (2000). Murdie comments that Afro-Caribbean social housing residents disproportionately live in the older suburbs (1996). And the Centre for Urban and Community Studies (CUCS) confirms that North Etobicoke belongs to the sector within Toronto where 62 percent of the population is foreign born, most are new immigrants, and 66 percent are people of colour (Gulliver, 2008). The CUCS report shows several additional concerning indicators such as: nearly one in four households are led by a single parent, and 63 percent of the marijuana grow operations and 53 percent of the homicides in 2005-2007 occurred in this sector of the city (Gulliver, 2008). Health trends for this sector show higher rates of low-birth rate babies, infant immortality, and diabetes (Gulliver, 2008).

During the 1990's about one-sixth of new immigrants were refugees, half were independent immigrants, and a third came to rejoin their families (Hiebert, 2000). Kazemipur and Halli find that immigrants in Canada are consistently

overrepresented among the poor (2001). The most recent rounds of immigrants are coming from the Third World, and unlike their European predecessors who were “escaping from extreme poverty and misery to normal lives,” for many of the new round it is a matter of “life and death” rather than ‘life’ and ‘better life’ (Kazemipur & Halli, 2001)”. For those coming as refugees, social capital is a concern – especially because computer skills are in far higher demand than manual labour in Canada’s current post-industrial economy. Those who are coming as independent immigrants are experiencing “declining returns on foreign work experience and devaluation and non-recognition of foreign credentials” (Bauder, as quoted in Walks and Bourne, 2006).

According to the famous work of William Julius Wilson, many of the ‘ghetto neighborhoods’ created in the US were a result of the ‘exodus of middle- and working- class families’ from such neighbourhoods (Kazemipur & Halli, 2001). Wilson states that:

Accompanying the black middle-class exodus has been a growing movement of stable working-class blacks from ghetto neighborhoods to higher-income neighborhoods in other parts of the city and to suburbs. In the earlier years, the black middle and working classes were confined by restrictive covenants to communities also inhabited by the lower class; their very presence provided stability to inner-city neighborhoods and reinforced and perpetuated mainstream patterns of norms and behavior (quoted in Kazemipur and Halli, 2001)

I am concerned that this trend could repeat itself in the inner-suburbs of Toronto. When visible minority middle-class professionals leave the inner-suburbs, they take with them an important part of the social fabric which brings stability to the area, and some of the resources which would have otherwise helped to elevate others. As Kazemipur & Halli conclude in their study on the spatial concentration of poverty, immigrants in these communities are left trapped in a vicious circle of poverty (2001).

Conclusion

The inner suburb of Etobicoke has undergone considerable socio-economic change in recent decades. It has experienced an overall decline in economic prosperity, following a similar pattern of many inner-suburbs in major Canadian cities. Throughout this report, I have highlighted the fact that this decline has been concentrated in the northern half of the suburb, and that these changes may also be tied to the arrival of new residents who belong to the poorest segments of the new immigrant population, as better-off immigrants choose to settle in newer suburbs or the core. I have discussed how the southern half of the suburb has been able to fight the draw of the newer suburbs and the core with better housing stock, public transportation, and proximity to employment centres and amenities. Lastly, I have raised the concern that the community of North Etobicoke now lacks mixed incomes and education levels, both of which could play an important role in facilitating upward mobility within poorer segments of the population. I suggest that visible minority middle-class professionals are leaving and taking with them an important part of the social fabric that brings stability to the area. As with other inner-suburbs, Etobicoke appears to be sandwiched between the core (attractive for its many amenities) and the newer suburbs (attractive for their modern homes), and its newcomer residents trapped geographically with reduced ability to achieve the success of previous generations of immigrants.

In closing, I would like to use this paper as a call for revitalization of North Etobicoke. I ask that we treat the social problems facing this community as part of a multi-faceted urban design problem, and conclude by proposing that the answer lies in making inner-suburbs more attractive for middle-class persons from all ethnic backgrounds.

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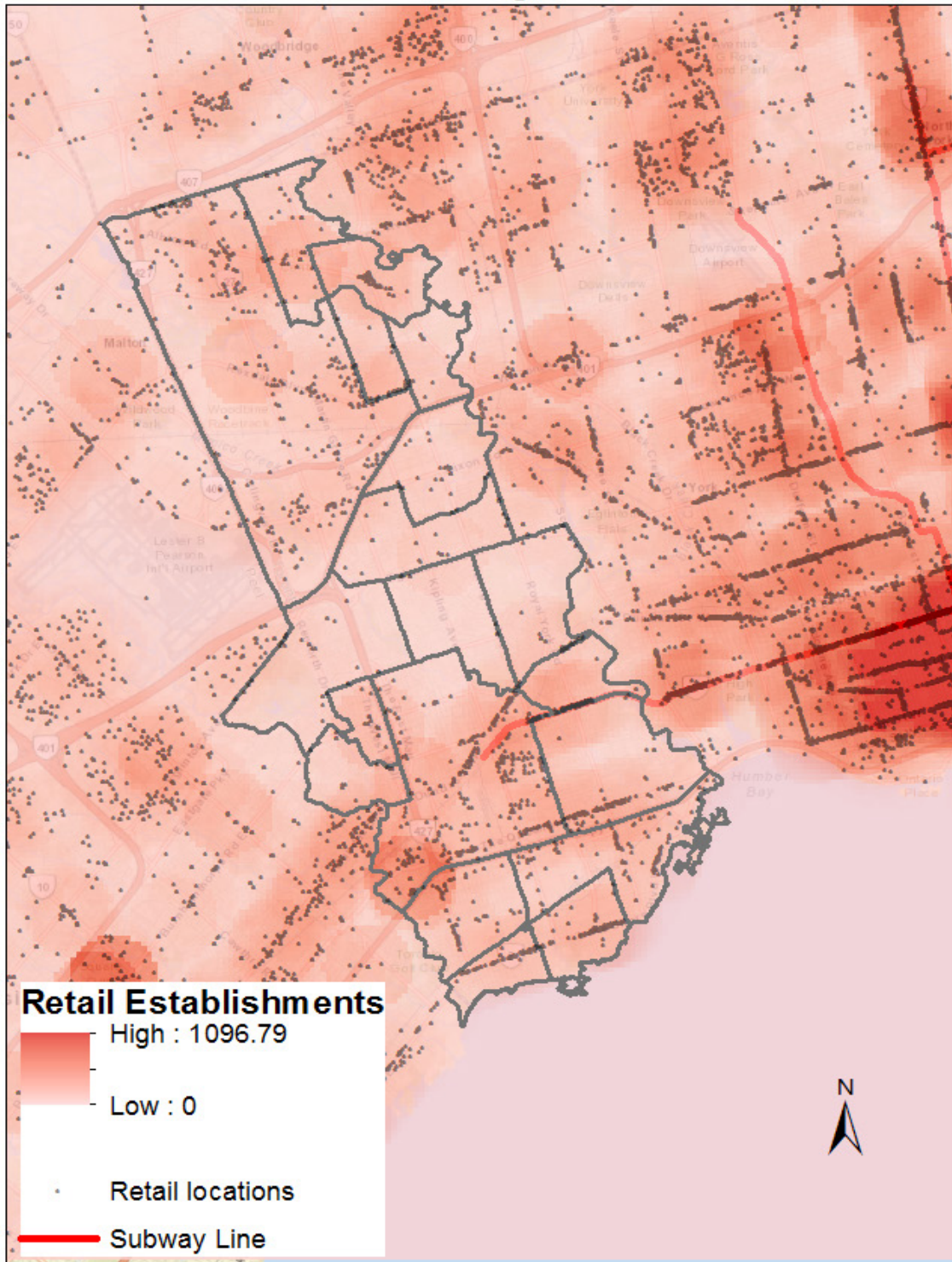
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Figure 1: Retail establishments in the West end of Toronto

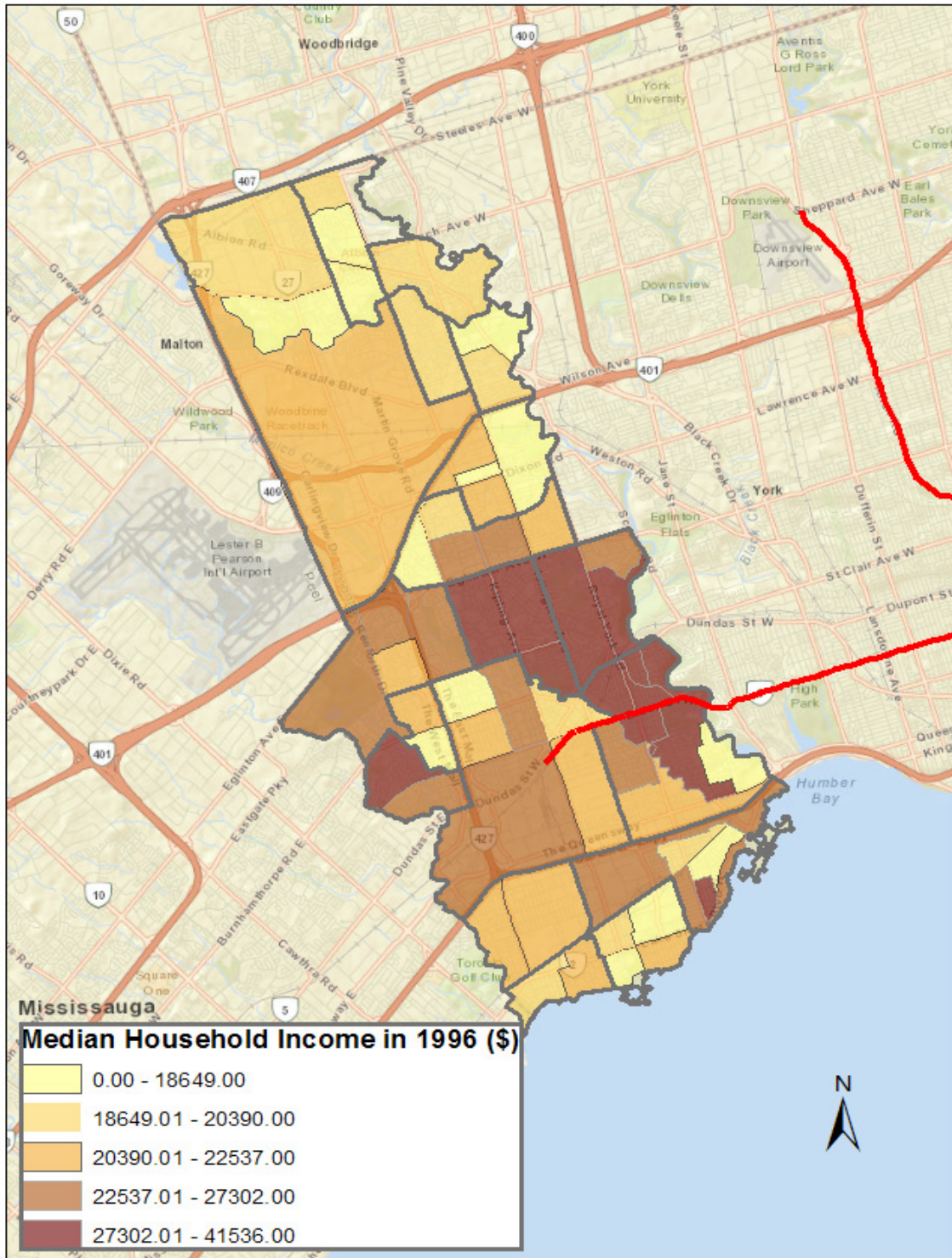
Retail Establishments in Etobicoke and surrounding area: 2006



Created by Sanathan Kassiedass with ArcMap 10
Data source: Statistics Canada 2006 Census

Figure 2: Median household income in Etobicoke, 1996

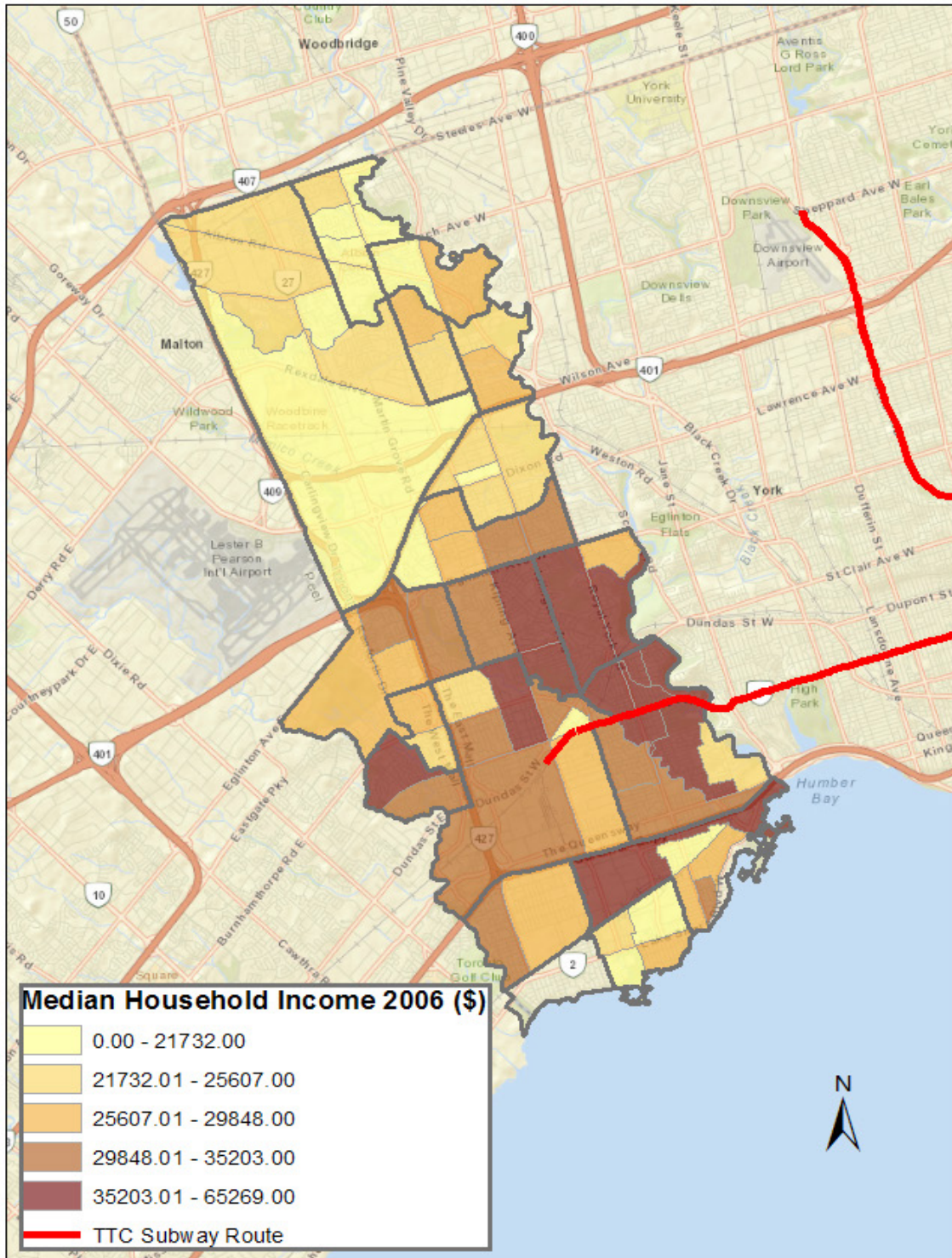
Median Household Income in Etobicoke (1996)



Created by Sanathan Kassiedass with ArcMap 10
Data source: Statistics Canada 2006 Census

Figure 3: Median household income in Etobicoke, 2006

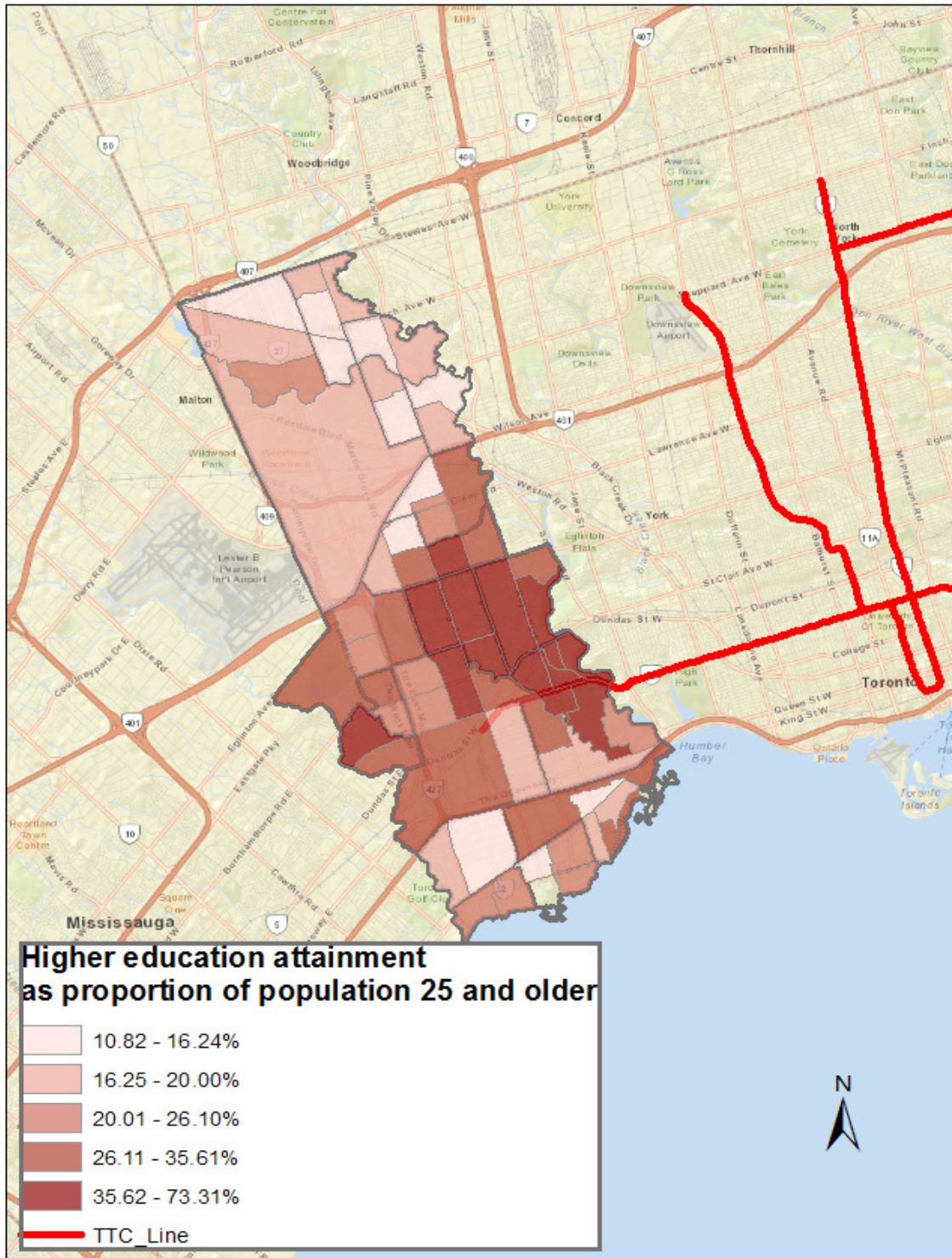
Median Household Income in Etobicoke (2006)



Created by Sanathan Kassiedass with ArcMap 10
Data source: Statistics Canada 2006 Census

Figure 4: Etobicoke residents with a College diploma, Undergraduate degree, or Higher education, 1996

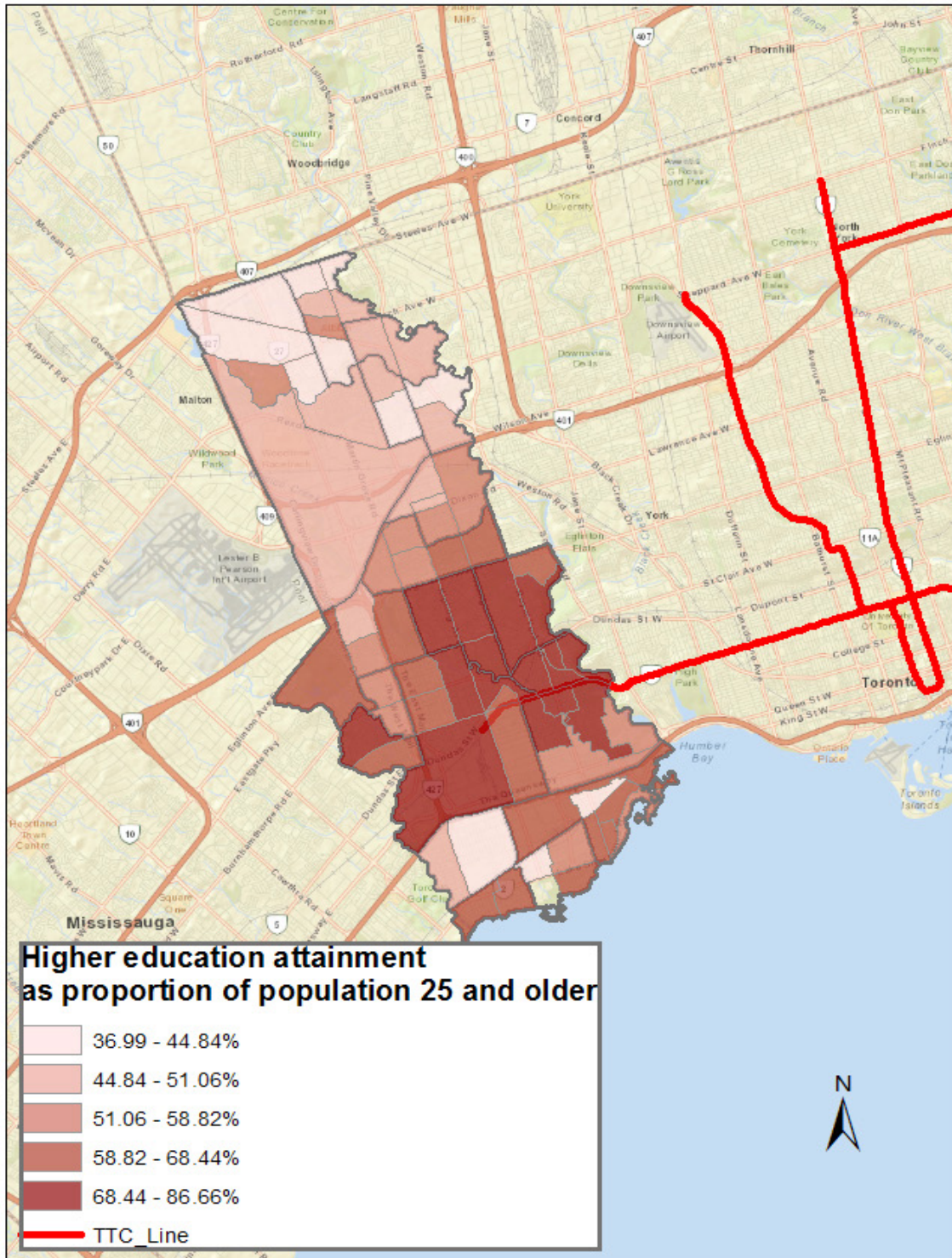
Higher Education (College Diploma, Bachelor degree or higher) in Etobicoke: 1996



Created by Sanathan Kassiedass with ArcMap 10
Data source: Statistics Canada 1996 Census

Figure 5: Etobicoke residents with a College diploma, Undergraduate degree, or Higher education, 2006

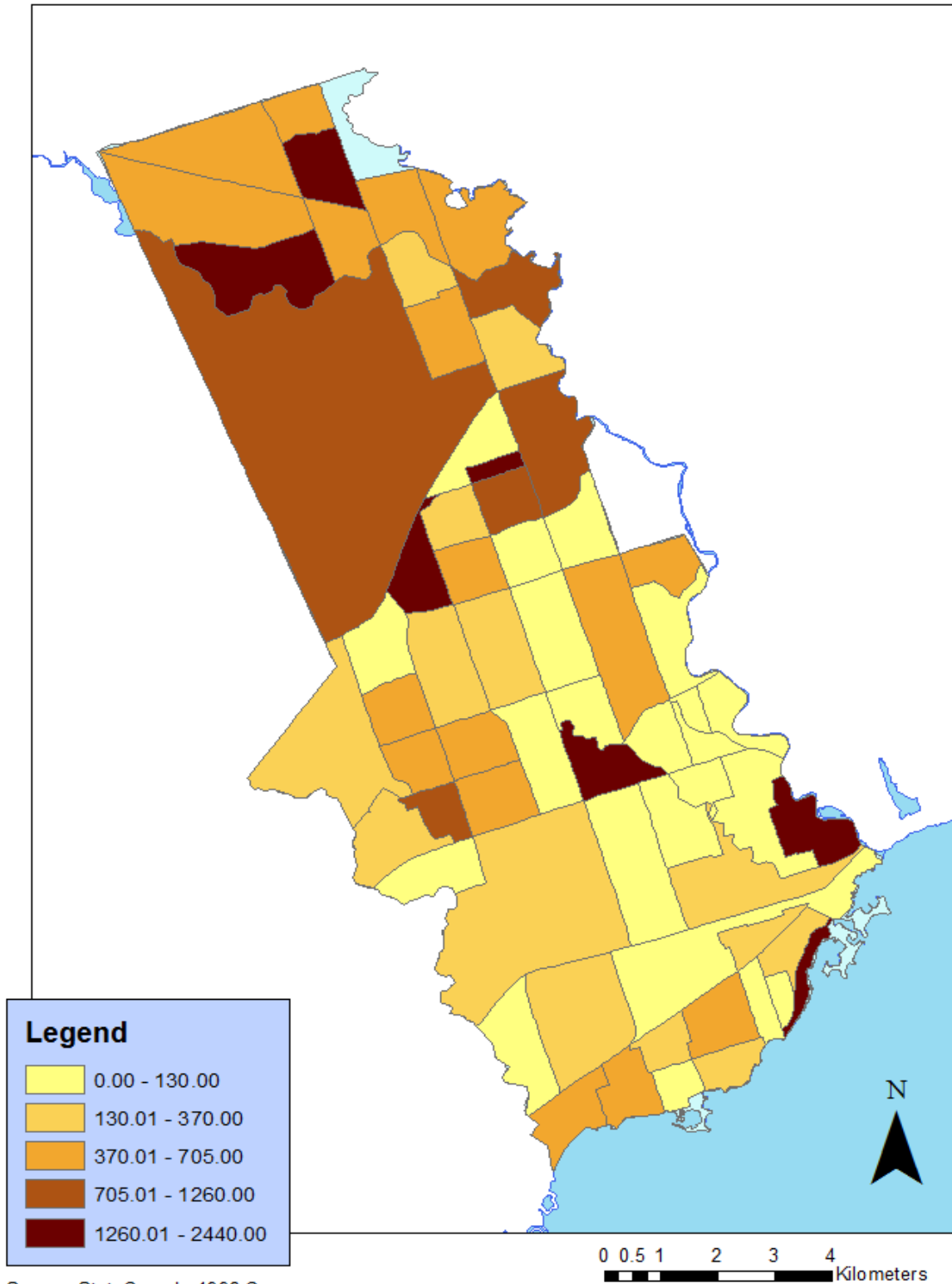
Higher Education (College Diploma, Bachelor degree or higher) in Etobicoke: 2006



Created by Sanathan Kassiedass with ArcMap 10
Data source: Statistics Canada 2006 Census

Figure 6: Recent immigrants in Etobicoke, 1996

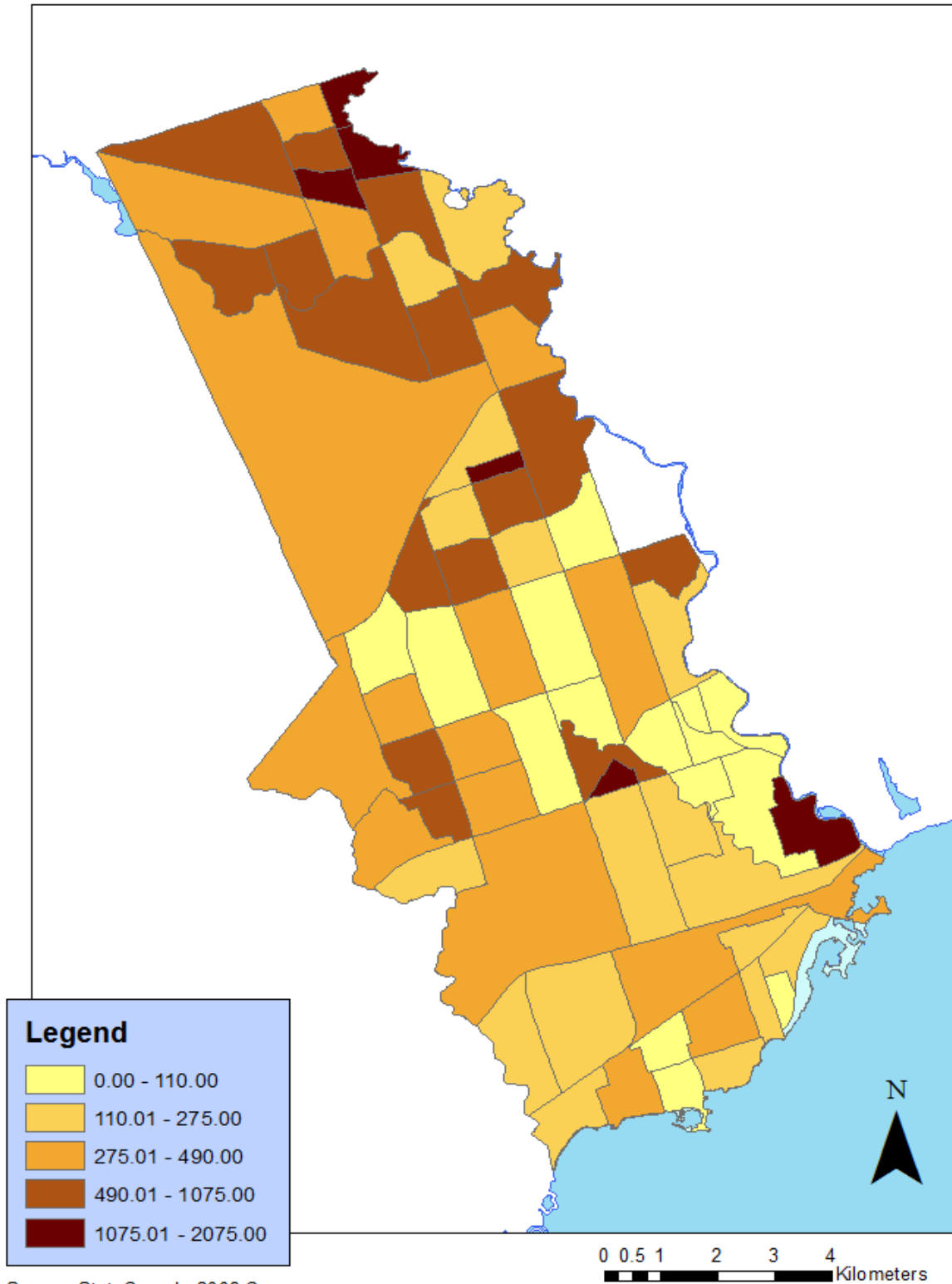
Recent Immigrants Etobicoke Neighbourhoods - 1996 Census



Source: StatsCanada 1996 Census

Figure 7: Recent immigrants in Etobicoke, 2006

Recent Immigrants Etobicoke Neighbourhoods - 2006 Census



Source: StatsCanada 2006 Census

Figure 8: First-generation immigrants in Etobicoke, 2006

Etobicoke: First Generation Immigrants

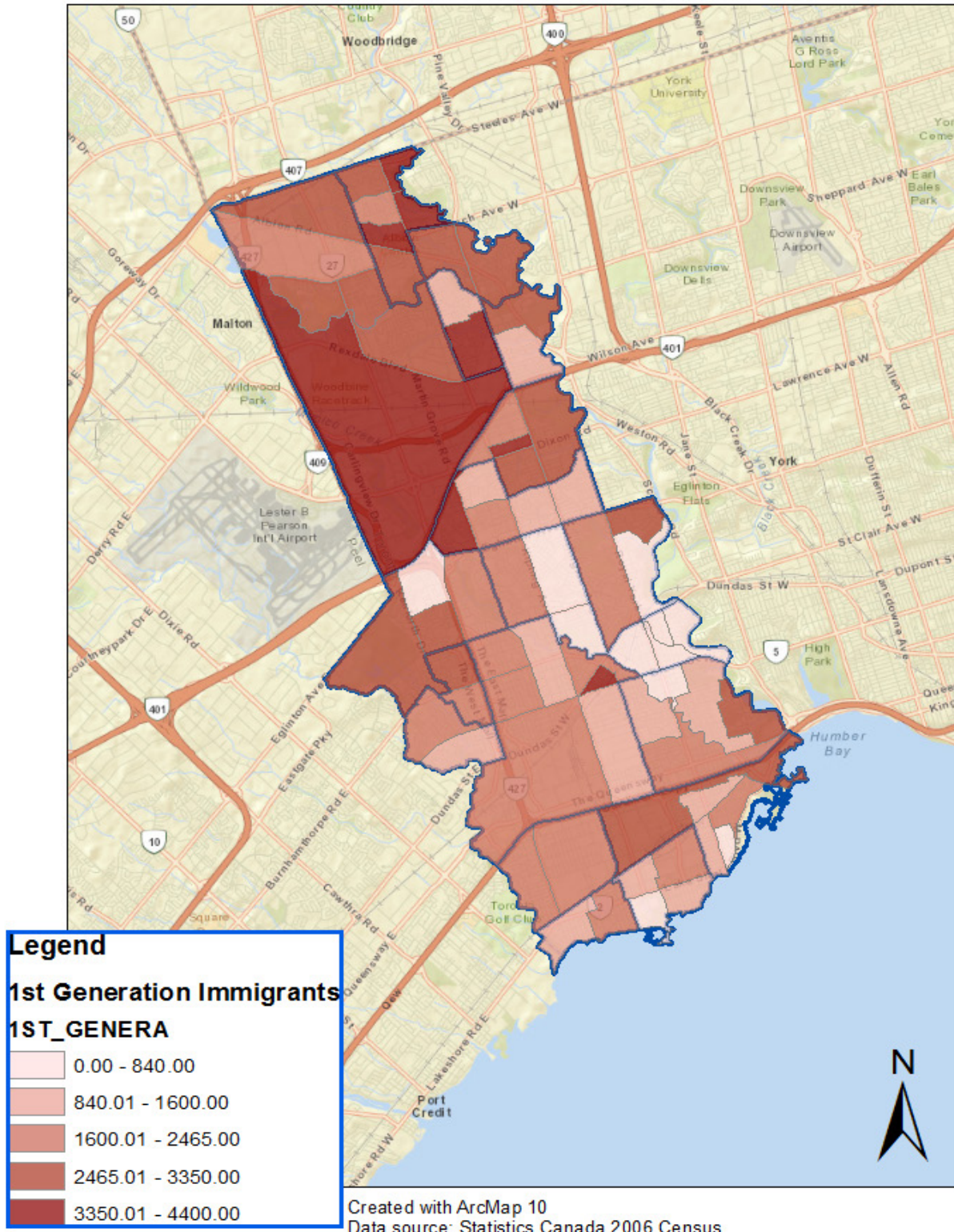


Figure 9: Second-generation immigrants in Etobicoke, 2006

Etobicoke: Second Generation Immigrants (2006)

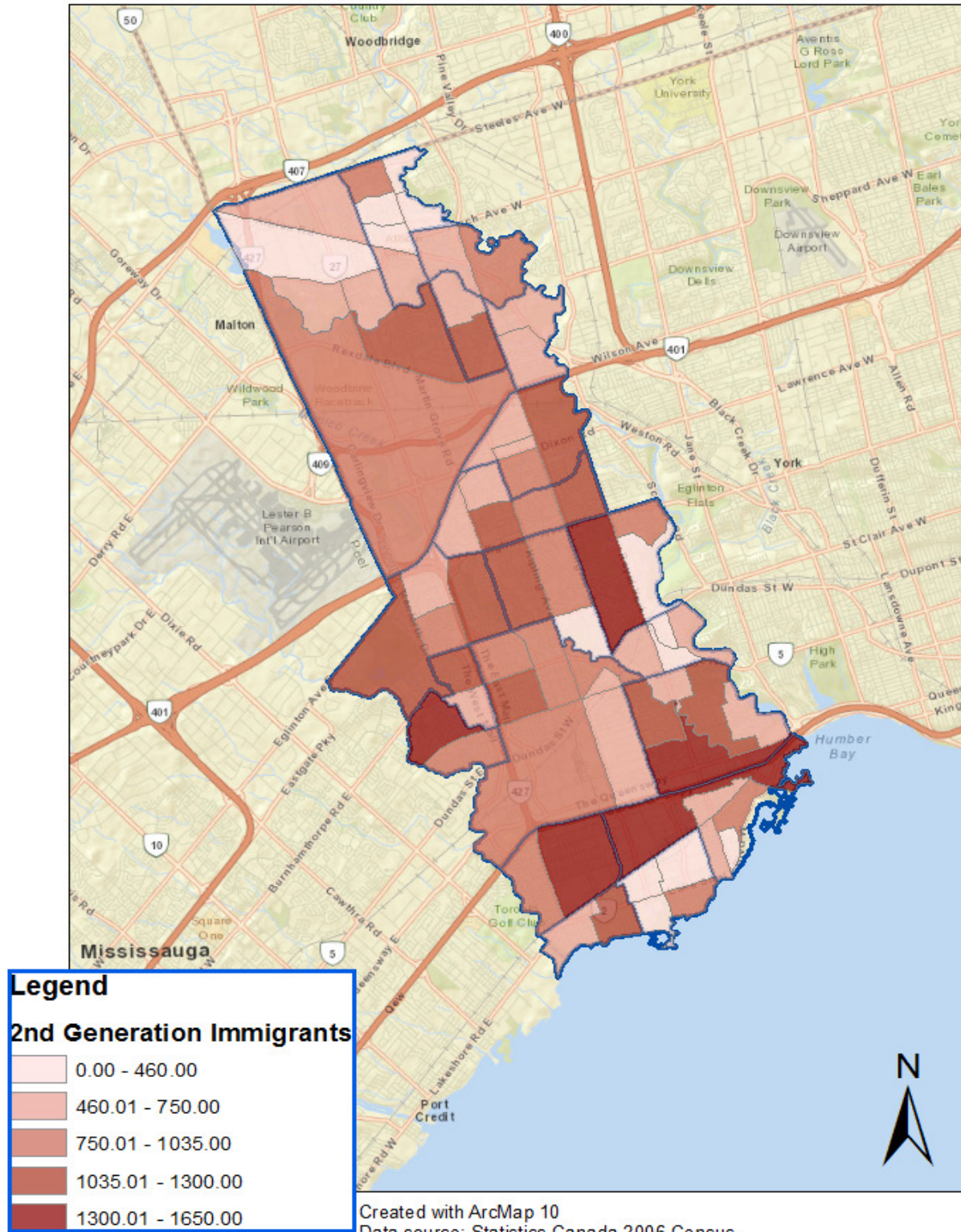
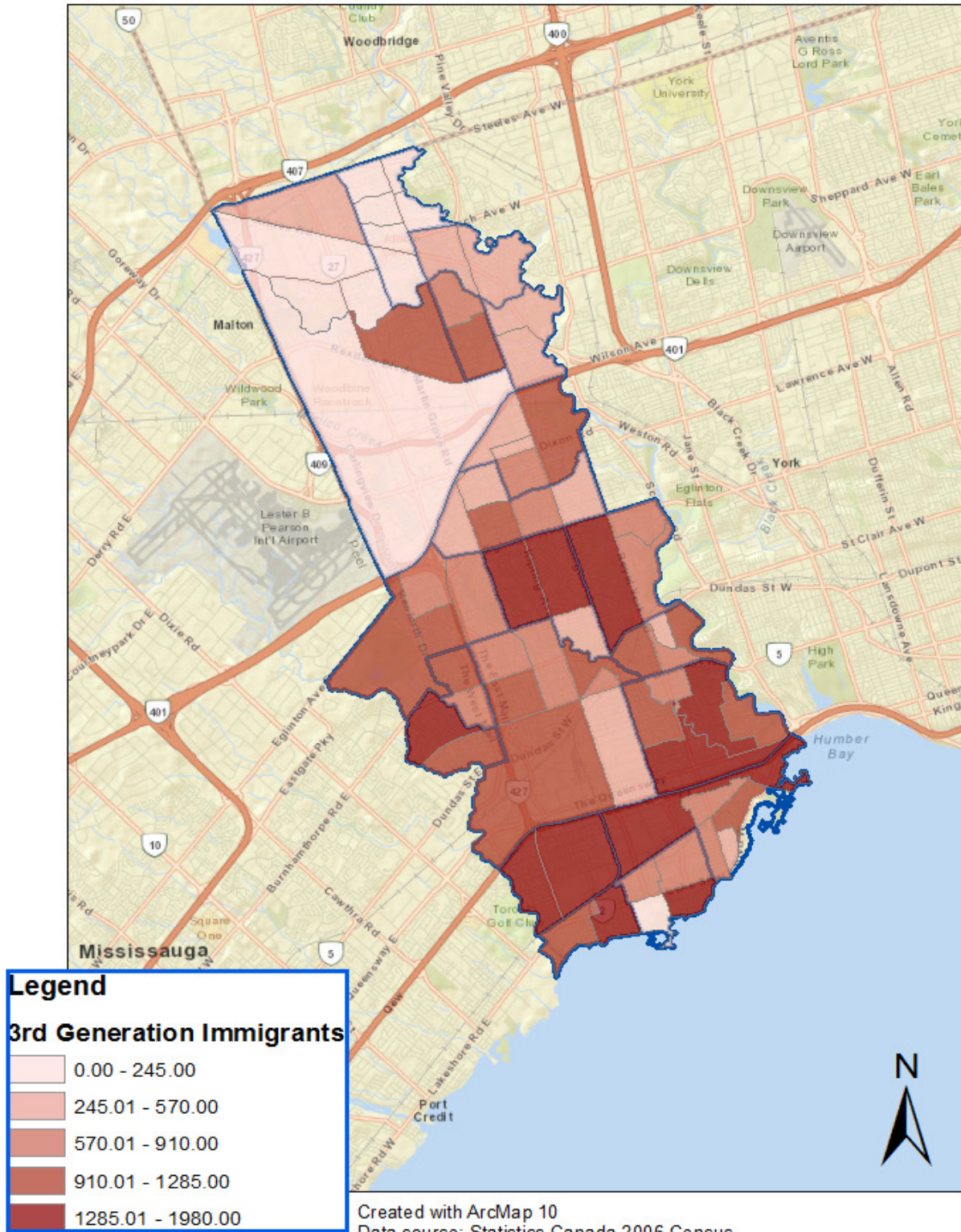


Figure 10: Third-generation immigrants in Etobicoke, 2006

Etobicoke: Third Generation Immigrants (2006)



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