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NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION: OFFICE TREATMENT OF NAMES

Guide to the reduction of toponym duplication

(Submitted by Canada)**

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** Prepared by the Commission de toponymie du Québec (Canada)

Translation of the original French text – Guide pour réduire l'homonymie dans l'odonymie

GUIDE TO THE REDUCTION OF ODONYM DUPLICATION*

Paper submitted by Canada

The amalgamation of cities into larger units multiplies the number of identical or very similar names of transportation routes in a given area. This situation threatens both the quality of life and the safety of citizens. Faced with this situation, the Commission de toponymie du Québec (CTQ), Canada, has developed a guide to the reduction of odonym duplication <<http://www.toponymie.gouv.qc.ca/procedure.htm>>. The CTQ suggests that the responsible municipal authorities adopt a transparent approach that includes the use of a criteria matrix to evaluate the odonyms concerned; weighting attached to these criteria could be adjusted to suit the needs of the community. The Geographical Names Board of Canada would like to have the question of odonym standardization included on the work agenda of the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the Group of Experts.

1. Duplication in the names of transportation routes

Amalgamation of cities into units of larger size results in the sudden multiplication of the number of identical or very similar names of transportation routes within a given territory. This phenomenon can have an impact on the welfare and safety of the population if the responsible authorities do not include among the problems of the new urban entity the goal of reducing or completely eliminating odonym duplication.

Between 2000 and 2002, the municipal landscape of the Canadian province of Quebec underwent changes that affected several cities, including the provincial capital, Québec, which was reduced from 13 municipal entities to a single one, and the new metropolis of Montréal, which was created from 28 previous entities. In Québec alone, some 550 transportation routes of a total of approximately 4,850 were identified as requiring new names in order to eliminate all instances of duplication. In fact this is a conservative figure, given that it does not include odonyms that consist of the same specific associated with different generics, as *Rue des Érables* and *Avenue des Érables*.

Replacement of an odonym poses a very concrete problem for the citizens, businesses and organizations concerned. This process may also result in the disappearance of historical designations or of names that evoke a feeling of belonging, if it is not implemented in accordance with a plan that takes into account cultural, social and economic factors.

At present, in Canada, the Commission de toponymie du Québec (CTQ) is the only toponymic authority dealing directly with street and road names. For the other provinces and territories, odonymy is a matter dealt with by the municipal authorities.

The CTQ is of the opinion that standardization of odonymy to reduce or eliminate duplication should be founded on a rational basis, and on principles that are known to all.

The CTQ also considers that the appropriate authorities should take advantage of the opportunity provided by this type of standardization operation to establish a high-quality nomenclature, wherever a new situation requires. In this way, valuable and interesting cultural and historical facts that have previously remained in obscurity, often without good reason, could be brought to light, thereby enriching the urban landscape.

In order to assist the new cities with reducing the number of identical or very similar names of transportation routes within their boundaries, the CTQ has prepared a guide that can be consulted at the following address: <http://www.toponymie.gouv.qc.ca/procedure.html>. The guide is included as an appendix to this document. (Please note that the legislation cited in the appendix applies only to the province of Quebec; the other provinces and territories would have different legislation.)

The approach that the CTQ proposes for selecting the routes to be renamed is based on a broad-based evaluation matrix that comprises criteria of varying importance. In this way, each route is given a score that reflects both its own particular characteristics and the importance that the community attaches to each of these characteristics.

The following evaluation criteria are proposed:

1. The degree to which the toponym complies with toponymic standards in effect.
2. The age of the name.
3. The number of residential addresses affected by the change.
4. The number of businesses and institutions affected by the change.
5. The number of lanes in the route.
6. The impact of changing the toponym on the system of names of which it is already a part.
7. The existence of a logical relationship between the proposed name and its environment.

The CTQ invited the appropriate municipal authorities to signal the criteria they consider to be of the highest priority by weighting them more heavily. It also suggested that they entrust the evaluation of the toponyms concerned to a committee duly mandated to this effect.

Although we cannot speak for all other municipalities across Canada, certainly two or more of the proposed criteria were used when considering duplicated street names in the new city of Ottawa. (The enlarged capital city of Canada was the result of the amalgamation of 11 municipalities.)

The Geographical Names Board of Canada invites other toponymic authorities to pass on to it any guides or other standards that they may have developed in this regard to handle similar situations in their countries.

2. Odonymy: a current and future topic for the Conferences and the Group of Experts

Duplication in the names of transportation routes is only one of the challenges in terms of standardization that must be dealt with by authorities that must manage or use this nomenclature. Odonyms are a subset of geographical names that, along with the names of inhabited places, most

closely affect citizens in terms of places of work, places visited and, particularly, with regard to places of residence. As a result, their omnipresence in day-to-day human activities makes their standardization highly desirable.

The CTQ pays particular attention to the matter of the names of transportation routes within Quebec. By assigning an official status to toponymic forms that comply with the criteria for selection and the rules for writing place names, the CTQ completes a critical step in the standardization process: establishment of a reference nomenclature. The next step is to introduce this nomenclature in every area of society, particularly in names that appear on street signs, in mapping (particularly road maps) and in the data banks of public and private organizations that have sizeable clientele bases. As an information medium that is accessible to members of the public, geomatics is growing in popularity and has become a new information vector that is creeping into more and more areas of human life. In order to ensure that standardization of toponym nomenclatures is not abandoned, it is essential that a functional link be established between the act of officializing nomenclatures and the content of these strategically important information tools. The CTQ maintains relations with Canada Post Corporation in order to ensure, among other things, that the content of the Corporation's address files is as standardized as possible. The standardization process is under way, but it is slow and still far from complete.

As a consequence, the CTQ has come to the conclusion that what is lacking in toponymic standardization is an international moral authority that officially recognizes it for what it is: **an activity that facilitates communication and that should therefore be a part of every modern society.**

Noting that a standardized toponym nomenclature is of economic and social benefit,

Mindful of the omnipresent nature of this type of nomenclature,

And mindful also that toponymic work has been included in previous activity reports of certain countries,

The Geographical Names Board of Canada therefore suggests that the possibility be examined of including the standardization of the names of transportation routes as a regular item on the agendas of the Conferences and sessions of the UNGEGN.

APPENDIX

Municipal Amalgamations

Procedure for reducing the number of or eliminating names of transportation routes within a given municipal territory that can be sources of confusion primarily because they are identical or overly similar in spelling or pronunciation

Proposal by the *Commission de toponymie du Québec (CTQ)*¹

Note: The expressions “identical names of transportation routes” and “identical odonyms” both refer to names comprised of the same generic elements (street, avenue, boulevard, etc.) and the same specific components (e.g. *Saint-Pierre* in *Saint-Pierre Street*).

1. The authorities involved

1.1 The municipal authorities

Under the *Cities and Towns Act*, these cities and towns have the authority to name streets, lanes and public places within their territories, provided that they adopt a single by-law in this regard.

In some cases, the territory of a municipality may be divided into districts, which may have the authority to name transportation routes within its boundaries.

This is true of some of the new municipalities created by Bill 170. In the case of these municipalities, the municipal council is to identify the routes that make up the **arterial system** of the municipality. It is the City or Town which manages this system, including the names of the routes that comprise it. In this context, the district council, for its part, has the authority to name the routes within its boundaries that do not form part of the municipal arterial system.

1.2 The powers of the *Commission de toponymie* with respect to name changes

The Commission de toponymie may refuse to approve a municipality’s decision to change an official odonym under the *Charter of the French Language* if it considers that the change conflicts with toponymic standards and particularly in the interest of preserving heritage names.

¹ Translation of *Regroupements municipaux - Procédure pour réduire ou éliminer le nombre de noms de voies de communication pouvant être cause de confusion principalement parce qu’ils sont identiques ou encore trop proches quant à l’écriture ou la prononciation, sur un territoire municipal* prepared by the Commission de toponymie du Québec (Canada)

Example, **CRITERION 7: LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP** between the name and its environment.

Example case: The name *Woodland Street*. The name has a more logical connection with its environment if the street is located in a wooded area (situation A) than in an area of few trees (situation B). In this case, 30 points could be assigned to situation A, and none to situation B.

2.2.3 Weighting of the criteria.

If they consider it appropriate, the municipal authorities could choose to weight the selection criteria (i.e. attach unequal values to them during the evaluation of names) by multiplying by a certain factor the number of points assigned to a given criterion.

For example, one city could choose to assign priority to protecting names that have become time-honoured by tradition, while another could prefer to assign greater importance to choices that would minimize the number of residential address changes.

2.2.4 Evaluation of the situation of each route concerned.

Of routes compared (example: *St. Joseph Street* (A), 250 points; *St. Joseph Street* (B), 145 points), the one receiving the highest total number of points should be the one recommended to the *Commission de toponymie*.

2.2.5 Obtain the approval of the CTQ with regard to official names to be changed and proposed new names.

Given that the use of official place names is mandatory under Section 128 of the *Charter of the French Language*, the approval of the *Commission de toponymie du Québec* must be obtained for withdrawal of the official status of names that the appropriate municipal authority plans to change, before it does so. The Commission must also ensure that the new proposed names comply with toponymic standards in effect.

2.2.6 Publication of the names to be changed.

After an agreement is reached with the CTQ concerning the names to be changed, the appropriate municipal authority publicizes the list of such names, together with the proposed new names. The content of this list may be amended in response to public reaction.

2.2.7 Change the official names.

The appropriate municipal authority and the CTQ officialize the final changes.

3. How to change the names affected by this proposal

Identical or overly similar names can be reduced in number or eliminated by adding a detail or by replacing them with completely new names.

3.1 Adding a detail²

- . First names or titles of persons. [3 of the 6 odonyms in the city of Québec with *Auclair* as the specific, could be made more precise: *France Auclair Street*, *J.A Auclair Street* and *Wilfrid Auclair Street*]
 - . Parish name [e.g. Church Street > St. Roch Church Street].
 - . Complete species name [Maple Street > Silver Maple Street].
 - . Full name of the place referred to by the specific [River Street > Red River Street; Park Street > *So-and-So* Park Street. Specifics formed by geographic terms (e.g. *Cove*, *Cliff*, etc.) lend themselves well to this type of adaptation.]
 - . Name of the founding religious community concerned [Convent Street > St. Augustine Convent Street].
 - . Physical characteristic of the place in question. [School Street > Blue School Street or Church Street, in a certain city > Three Churches Street].
 - . Name of the district or sector incorporated into the specific component of the odonym or appended in brackets. [Park Street > Park Street (Montcalm)].
- NOTE. This approach does not really have the effect of curtailing the use of identical or overly similar names. It is proposed as a temporary measure until a better solution can be found.

3.2 Replacing the name

- . With the associated inhabitant name: De la Bretagne Street > Des Bretons Street.
- . In a system of odonyms, by another name associated with the theme of the system (Chateaubriand Street > Stendhal Street, after another writer in the same French Romantic genre as Chateaubriand).
- . By a synonym or a popular designation (Maple Street > Swamp Maple Street, based on the popular name for the red maple).
- . By a name related to this specific (Maple Street > Sugar Bush Street).
- . By extending the application of the name of a stretch located in the continuation of the transportation route whose name is a homonym.
- . By the former name of the transportation route.
- . By a heritage name that has disappeared from use but that can be conveniently recycled.
- . By a new name from a database of available names.

² Certain public safety organizations consider that adding a detail to existing names does not go far enough to eliminate the confusion caused by identical or very similar names for transportation routes. They prefer that problem names be completely replaced.

4. Other considerations

Holding competitions and soliciting names as a means of reducing toponym duplication could inspire a sense of belonging with regard to the territory in which the name is to be used.

Commission de toponymie du Québec (Canada), May 3, 2001