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Projet de reconstruction du complexe Turcot
à Montréal, Montréal-Ouest et Westmount

Montréal 6211-06-124

June 16 2009

Dear commissioners,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to comment on the Environmental Impact Assessment for the MTQ's Turcot project.

My intervention will be brief.

An urban planner, I currently coordinate a five-year action-research at McGill University in collaboration with 5 other universities and 13 community groups. The Turcot Interchange has been the object of several research initiatives, including a graduate level Environmental Impact Assessment course at Concordia University as well as a year-long planning studio.

What I am contributing today is inspired and informed by my work, but my comments are personal.

I will make three points:

One: Please accept complimentary copies of a book recently published by our community-university research alliance. *Montreal at the Crossroads: Superhighways, the Turcot and the Environment*, published by Black Rose Books., explores some key themes in the Turcot debate and alternative approaches and proposals. Some of the research conducted by our community-university research alliance is included in this book.

Two: The MTQ should be required to rerun their regional transport model incorporating mass-transit and modal shift strategies, in collaboration with the university and community sectors.

We saw in today's Montreal Gazette an alternative to the MTQ's proposal, which details how we might be able to move some of the East West commuter traffic to public transit by implementing various mass transit solutions already on the drawing boards. Our book contains a carefully considered calculation of this alternative, in Chapter Two, by Pierre Brisset and Jonathan Moorman.

In my opinion, the MTQ should be invited to return to the drawing board, and rethink their traffic solution with a view to significantly reducing East-West volumes. Using their transport modeling software (EMME 2), the MTQ should introduce a new set of variables that have been identified by the *Conseil regional de l'énvironnement* (CRÉ) and others, such as: increased suburban train capacity, airport shuttle, the Lachine tram-train, toll pricing, reserve bus lanes, additional parking capacity at mode-change points (e.g. train stations and metro stations), downtown parking pricing strategies, and the like.

Armed with these new variables and new data and new approaches, the MTQ should be encouraged to come up with a new proposal. This new planning exercise must be done in close collaboration with informed critics in the universities and the community sector and, importantly, in perfect transparency. This must not be, nor appear to be, a public relations exercise, but a true collective exploration of options.

Find attached a one page synthesis and the complete paper by P. Lewis (1998), to understand how this approach unfolded in San Francisco, in the mid-1990s.

Three: Montrealers must be able to understand the environmental and health implications of these modelled options, before they can make an informed choice.

Allow me a short parenthetical anecdote. I attended the final presentations of a one-year long course on Environmental Impact Assessments, a post graduate-level certificate course at Concordia University. Four teams of graduate students examined the Turcot project at 4 scales of analysis, and with interesting results. Some of their work is published in our book (Chapters Seven and Eight).

One of the groups of students compared two distinct alternatives for the Turcot Interchange, against the "do nothing" option: one, based on the fundamentals put forward by Pierre Brisset and Jonathan Moorman, reduced East-West traffic volumes by 68 000 vehicles, the other was the MTQ proposal.

Students used state-of-the-art modelling software to illustrate the different impacts these two approaches would have on air quality and noise. Alas, due a methodological error, their results cannot contribute meaningfully to this debate: one of their data points touches a ramp and irreparably skews the data.

Had they succeeded in clearly demonstrating the differences in the "ecological, health and noise footprint" of these two proposals, they would have been able to submit this material to the BAPE for your consideration. *Une opportunité ratée.*

Importantly, if presented with these two options, we might actually expect to SEE differences between these two approaches. As it stands, the MTQ's EIA shows us differences between their proposal and doing nothing. We see nothing. We are presented with no clear and distinct alternative.

It would have been much more interesting and a much fairer process to have modelled a real alternative, such as that proposed by Brisset and Moorman and the CRÉ.

So, in conclusion, I would hope that the BAPE would insist that the MTQ model a clear Mass Transit oriented alternative, using their modelling software, that clearly aims to reduce traffic volumes in the East-West corridor, using all the techniques at our disposal: improved mass transit, tolls and traffic pricing strategies, reserve bus lanes, parking pricing strategies and the like.

As a second step, the MTQ should show Montrealers the environmental impacts that these two clear and distinct alternatives would have on our populations, our region and our planet.

It is only in this manner and with these assessments, properly done, that we can make a real and informed choice for our city.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share some observations with you.

Good luck in preparing your final *sythèse*.

Jason Prince
Urbaniste

Attachments:
Lewis, S. (1998). Land use and transportation: Envisioning regional sustainability. *Transport Policy 5*: 147-161.

One-pager: Lewis, S. (1998). Land use and transportation: Envisioning regional sustainability. *Transport Policy 5*: 147-161.

In 1994, San Francisco's Metropolitan Transport Commission (MTC) used the assumptions recommended by the Regional Alliance for Transit (RAFT) citizens' group in their computer-modelling program. RAFT's recommendations outperformed those of the MTC. These findings provided quantitative support for the viability of alternatives to car-centric development, and demonstrated the redundancy of MTC-proposed freeways.

Context

RAFT, a group of activists and analysts, was critical of the MTC's 1994 transportation plan for the region of San Francisco. The plan, they argued, lacked cost-effective transit solutions, was based on faulty assumptions, and, if implemented, would negatively impact the region. Curious of how RAFT alternative plans would fare in their model, MTC planners invited RAFT to detail an alternative set of assumptions for a "RAFT run". This run assumed the same population and employment growth as the MTC run. Results showed that the RAFT run significantly outperformed the MTC plans.

The MTC approach

The MTC approach included 500 new lane miles of freeway and 2-person carpool lanes, which would effectively lighten the load on existing mixed-use lanes. This approach had three major shortcomings:

1. It didn't address the effects of transportation capacity on land use, economics and demographics.
2. It didn't assess alternative solutions, comparing only "project" and "no project" scenarios.
3. It re-enforced the subsidization of car culture and sprawl.

The RAFT approach

RAFT assumptions centred on pricing reform, land use changes and a redirection of investment. Assumptions included:

- A *cashout* of $3.00/day, offered to employees if they choose to trade in their free parking place.
- Protection of the greenbelt, promotion of "COMUTO" (compact, mixed use, transit-oriented) development, and brownfields revitalization.
- Public investment redirected towards transit.
- Cancellation of most new freeways and a case study where more minor road improvements were tested as an alternative scenario.

Key Results

- While there would be no change in travel speed, transit ridership was projected to go up by 24%, and 128 million gallons less fuel would be consumed per year following RAFT's recommendations.
- The case study revealed the large impacts of small, co-ordinated interventions.

Lessons for Montreal

- The MTC's computer model, designed to test MTC plans, provided compelling support for RAFT's proposals.
- The RAFT run provides quantitative evidence for the effectiveness of modest, strategic policies in achieving multiple objectives.
- Despite ample evidence in favour of RAFT's recommendations, the MTC claimed that it lacked the authority to implement such plans, underscoring the power of political context.