

Re-development area: A closer look

Brief for the BAPE hearings June, 2009

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ABSTRACT

The personal point of view on Transport Québec's proposal from Alex Carruthers an independent urbanist, father and resident of St Henri. Corrected version (corrections in blue).

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Introduction:

My name is Alex Carruthers and I am attending these sessions of the Bureau d'audiences public sur l'environnement (BAPE) as a concerned citizen. I am also a graduate of Concordia's school of Urban Planning, a citizen living in St-Henri, a member of McGill's CURA project *making mega-projects work for communities*, and I administer the website turcot.wordpress.ca.

Orientation:

My interests in this project are as a local resident, an academic, and a father. This will be the largest infrastructure project in Canada and its design deserves broad based, focused, and world-class attention.

In an era of diminishing oil resources and new understandings of the automobile's influence on urban communities it is important that the design of this new infrastructure seize the opportunity to improve the character of Montreal's and Quebec's transportation infrastructure for subsequent generations. [In my opinion this means pursuing the following three points in the design of major transportation infrastructure:](#)

1. Protecting the walkability of the existing communities, and proposed developments.
2. Exploring new solutions in public transit.
3. Avoiding re-entrenching our dependence on automobiles by building bigger highway infrastructure.

The Environment:

As I understand it, the "environment" according to the BAPE includes the social economic and natural environment that makes up our urban habitat. My concerns deal primarily with the Problems faced by the human population living downtown Montreal.

This proposal suggests building the entire Turcot complex brand new in such a way as to:

- Dramatically increase the footprint of the roadway compounding the highways influence as a divider and barrier between people. ([Appendix A, B, C](#))
- Ensure continues and increased Automobile use well into the future, a liability for future generations
- Provide for increased automobile traffic down town, a public health and safety issue. ([Appendix E](#))

- Recommend the development of new automobile dependent community in isolation from [its](#) surrounding neighbourhoods, risking the promotion of social alienation and further automobile dependence. ([Appendix C](#))

Increasing the number of cars downtown is not favorable progress for the environment and quality of life of Montrealers.

Community

Is this project acceptable to the community? Why?

Re-examining the possibilities for the Turcot complex opens up a wealth of interesting possibilities for improving life in Montreal. This project [is](#) a rudimentary attempt at remaking our [ailing](#) Turcot complex. [The plan](#) needs refinement and more attention before it is acceptable for Montreal. [Areas](#) that need reconsidering are the following:

[The land to be developed](#)

The Turcot yards are well suited to accommodate a hub [for storage of](#) new rail and bus stock for public transit and other large uses that do well in isolation.

This area is poorly suited for residential development. The canal along this stretch should not necessarily be considered an asset for residential communities. It is singularly industrial in nature.

The proposed residential development ([Appendix C](#)) would suffer from isolation in all directions from its neighbouring communities. It will also be surrounded by highway infrastructure a very dirty dangerous and impermeable boarder. This Isolation means a risk of social alienation and a future ghettoization.

Using this opportunity to add residential development to sites within existing communities would be a more responsible, more lucrative and more feasible initiative than trying to develop a community out of nothing in the middle of nowhere.

Transportation

Communities to the west of the complex are currently poorly served by public transportation. Commuters, given the option, will choose to use alternate modes of transportation because highway congestion is a universally repugnant experience. This is an opportunity to substantially improve transit service to the West Island and NDG.

Increasing the capacity of the Highway will ameliorate flow in the short term but it is commonly acknowledged in transportation planning that improving capacity of a motorway does not solve the problem of congestion.

Planning for continued and increased automobile use in Montreal is to proceed in ignorance of broadly acknowledged facts about the dwindling global supply of cheap oil, and the unfavorable environmental consequences of automobile use.

The capacity of Montreal's highways should be diminished or, at the very least, maintained at the same size.

Surrounding Neighbourhoods

St Henri, St Raymond, and Cote St-Pierre, neighbourhoods that make direct contact with the Turcot complex, already suffer from extreme local traffic by virtue of proximity to the highway.

Improving the capacity of Highway will augment traffic downtown and increase the number of cars passing by the Turcot's neighbouring communities

Claims that the new configuration will diminish traffic on local roads are insulting. No studies have been conducted on how local traffic will change and the reconfiguration of Pullman will ensure that traffic from Notre-Dame's East West axis will be re-routed to St Antoine and St Jacques, already very busy and very dangerous local thoroughfares ([Appendix E](#)). This section of St Henri does not need the influence of increased commuter traffic further threatening its pedestrian population.

Modifications

In your opinion, are there elements of this project that should be modified? What are these elements and how should they be modified?

In my opinion there are elements of this plan that should be modified. They are the following:

- I believe the Highway's configuration should be left as it is. A complete re modeling of the infrastructure seems excessive and unnecessary.
- I think repairing and reinforcing the existing structure is a more constructive and cheaper alternative to demolishing and re-building.
- This option would save the Housing in the tanneries, [save public money](#), and save the residents of the local communities and down town Montreal from having to deal with increased automobile traffic on their streets.

- Opening development potential along the canal should be re-examined. This is potentially a poor strategy given the area's isolation. Realizing the development potential of existing sites in surrounding communities Ex. CN land St Henri ([see Appendix F](#)), Carfour Angrignon environs... rather than trying to create a new neighbourhood in the Turcot yards where none presently exists.

Authorization

In my opinion not authorizing this project would a strong show that Quebec is capable of sophisticated reflection, and it would allow for changes to be made to the plan that would better suit the surrounding communities and the ability of future generations to live in a sustainable manner.

The reasons for this are as follows:

- This plan misses the realities of global oil exhaustion, the global environmental crises, and the bad effects automobiles have on urban communities.
- Transport Quebec has not properly examined the exciting alternatives afforded the planners by virtue of the situation of this site and its surroundings.
- The proposed design is generally of poor quality, the product of crisis planning, and the misguided notion that automobiles are critical for the economy of Montreal.
- Transport Quebec has shown no commitment to altering the plan since it's inception except to add features of dubious utility.

This is not a complete list of the project's weaknesses.

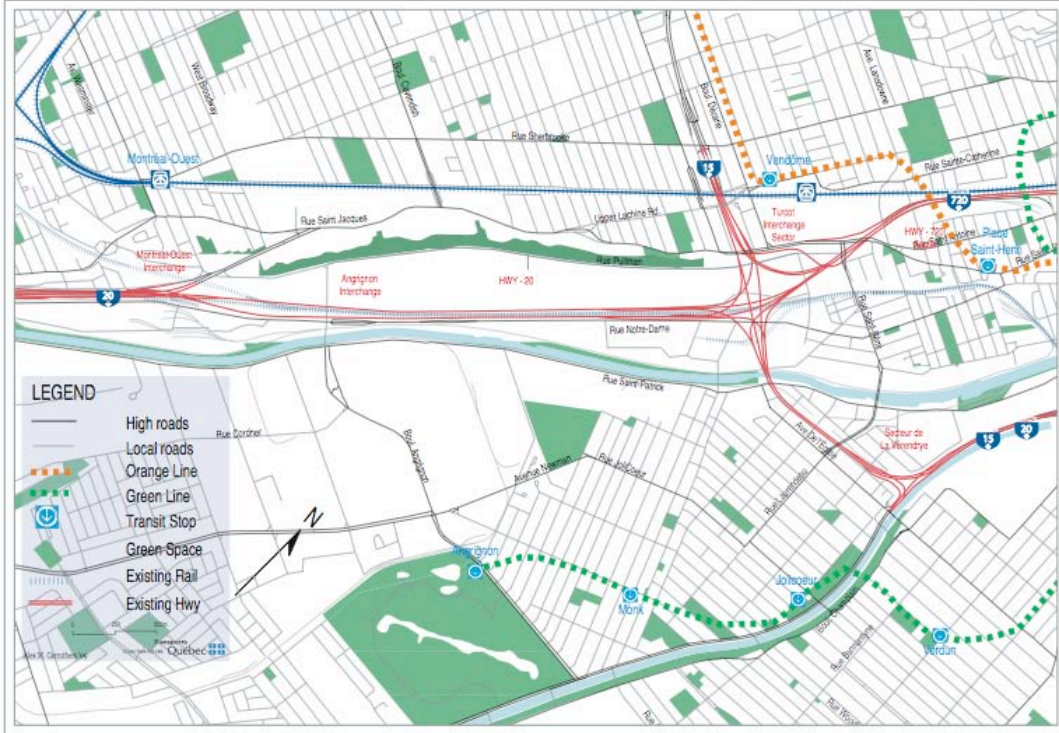
Additional Suggestions

I think the Turcot Yards, as they are now, are well suited for hosting large uses like storage and a depot for future public transit options (Light rail, and expanded bus fleet, etc.)

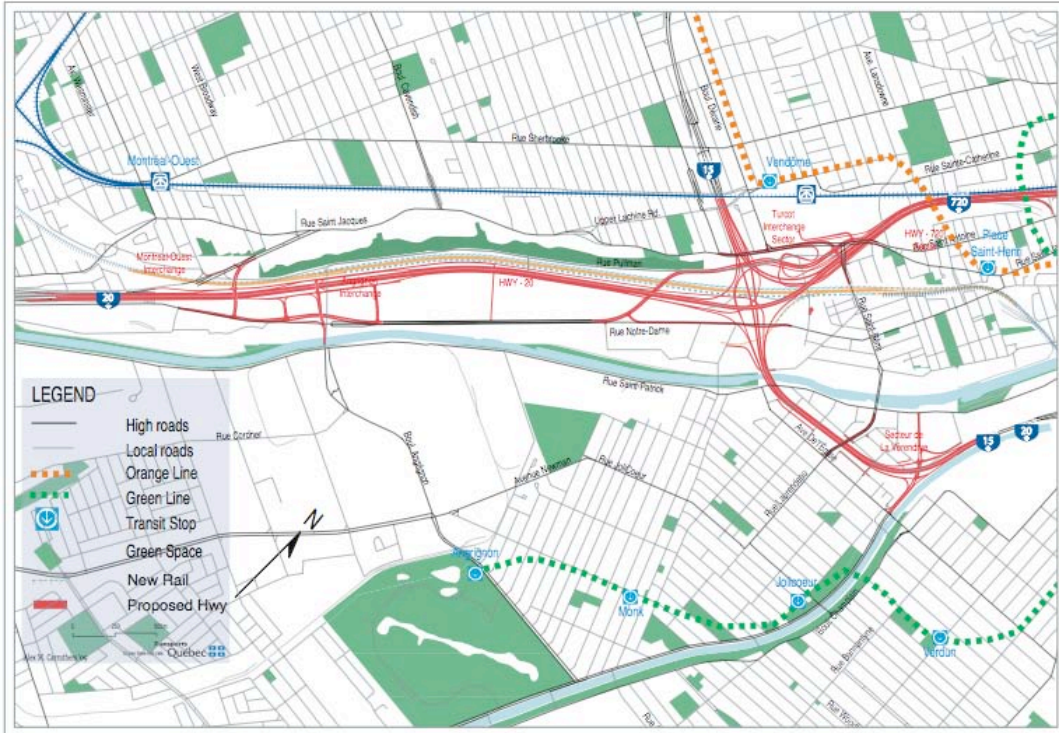
In the mean time they will serve as a convenient location for manufacturing the necessary structures for re-enforcing the elevated portions of the interchanges.

The alternatives presented by this city's academic and professional community have proven to be much more dynamic than what's been produced by this consortium under the direction of Transport Quebec.
(see:turcot.wordpress.com/alternatives/)

Appendix A: Existing Highway



Appendix B: Proposed Highway



Appendix C: Utopian Vision

FIGURE 7.6 : PLAN CONCEPT – SCÉNARIO DE
DU SITE



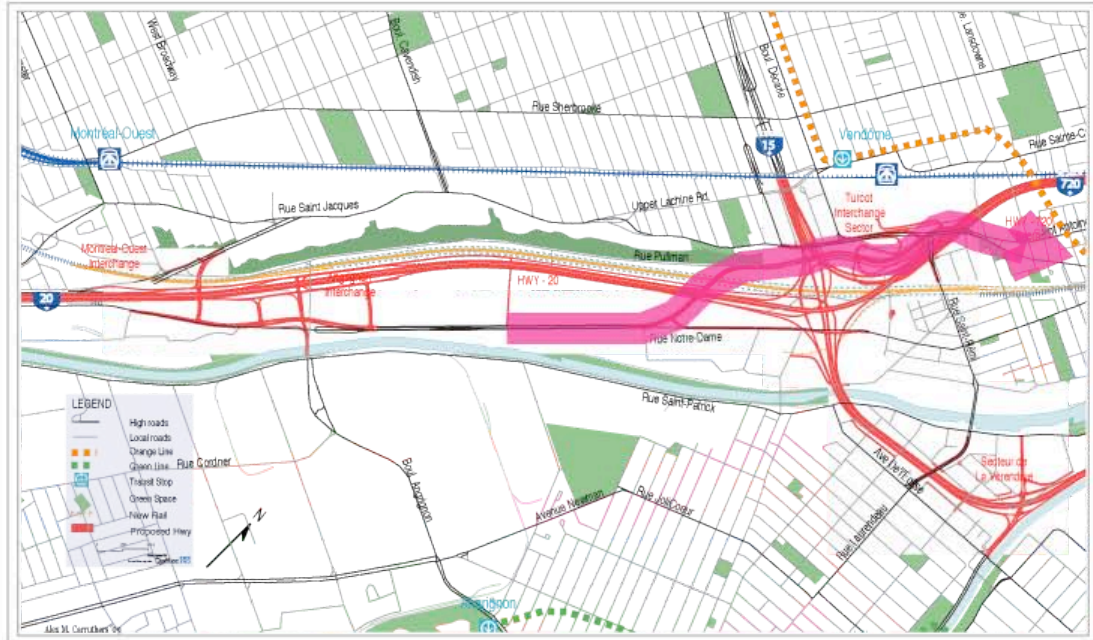
Transport Quebec *Etude d'opportunité Complex Turcot - De La Vérendrye - Angrignon - Montréal Ouest: Étude Des Solutions*: Figure 7.6 Rendering by Daniel Arbour et Associés

Appendix D: Terrain Isolation



The Turcot yards are surrounded by barriers that make pedestrian development in this area untenable. To the North is a community, St-Raymond that suffers similar isolation (shown enclosed in red line). It is known to be inhospitable to pedestrians seeking to gain access.

Appendix E: Increased Local Traffic



This plan proposes re-directing East West Traffic from the Notre Dame axis through the Northern half of St Henri. This will have the inevitable effect of increasing automobile traffic on St Antoine and St Jacques already busy and dangerous thoroughfares.

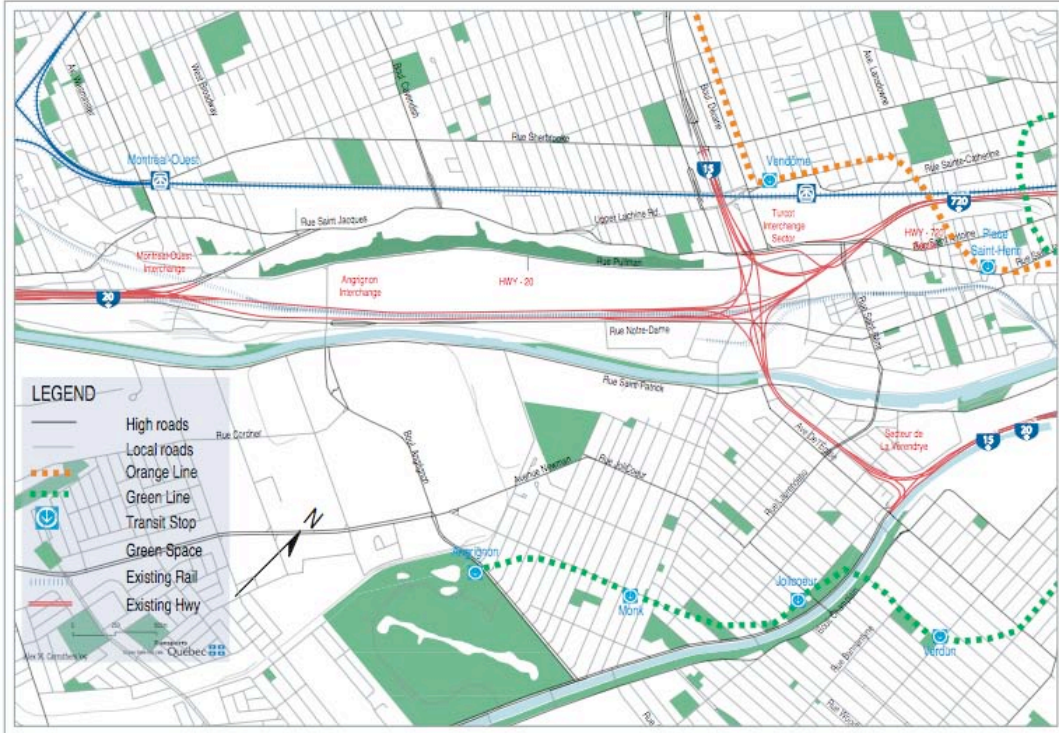
Appendix F: CN Land in St Henri



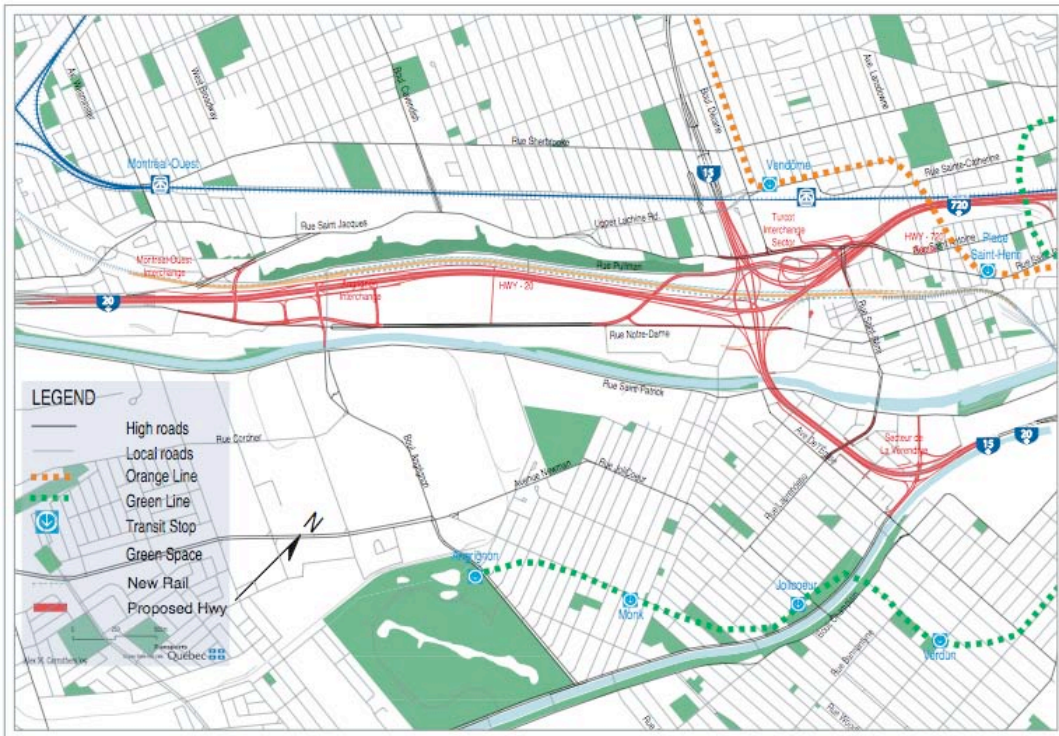
In Red: St-Henri's own barriers
White Mask: CN Corridor

The CN corridor through the center of St Henri represents a large piece of internal land that would make a good alternative location for additional residential development.

Appendix A: Existing Highway

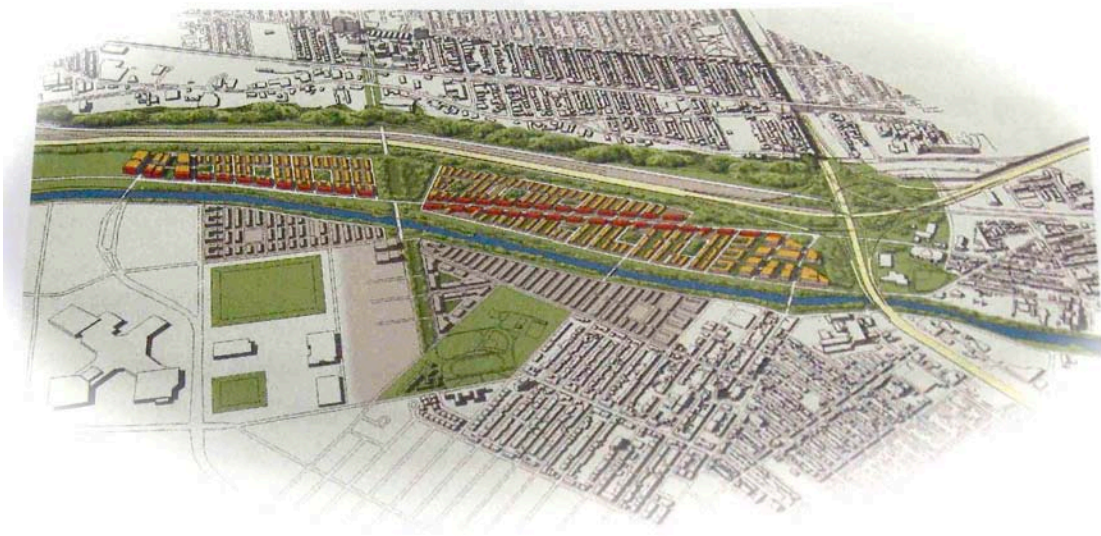


Appendix B: Proposed Highway



Appendix C: Utopian Vision

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