

## Brief on the proposed Turcot Reconstruction

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# It Takes A Village

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## **Introduction**

I moved into my neighborhood in May of 2000. My housing options, like my income, were somewhat limited given my personal circumstances. Luckily, I found an apartment on rue Desnoyers that suited my needs, in what was an admittedly unattractive post-industrial area, in close proximity to the elevated highway. I saw it's potential however, and worked to make it into a home, ... my home.

Children were always running loose in the streets. There was little green space for them to play. As I slowly planted myself a garden, the children were there to help. They were thirsty like sponges, eager for attention from an attentive adult. It was then that I saw the need for a neighborhood committee (CCVT) that would foster the conditions for a healthy and cohesive community.

## **The Village des Tanneries**

I've once been told by a friend, already living in St-Henri for many years, that there was something special about the place and the people... Despite the dust and the rough edges, one cannot help but smile at this place full of character, so undeniably proud of its colorful history and working class roots.

I'd like to tell you about my specific neighborhood, which like many others, is to be greatly affected by the proposed reconstruction project.

This is where over 400 people will be directly displaced due to the new highway...Where they are to go is not clear to anyone.

Hundreds more people, while not expropriated per say, will also suffer from the effects of a major infrastructure construction site, the likes of which we have not been seen for forty years. I don't think anyone will be able to live under those conditions (The sewers system on my street is currently being replaced: after only four days of constant noise from the trucks and heavy machinery, I am going a little crazy).

## **A neighborhood's comeback**

A few community initiatives have changed the face of the community in recent years, thanks to a collaboration between citizens, community groups and municipal services.

The Allée des Tanneries was a barren brownfield where local residents planted 2280 trees to form a green screen between the CN tracks and the neighborhood.

The Community Gardens were built on the site thanks to local sponsors and community spirit.

The Bikers' Garden was an abandoned lot where a perennial garden now thrives and where residents have potluck BBQs on a regular basis.

*See appendices for photos of these and other projects.*

## **Description of the local population**

In general terms, it is fair to say that there is an eclectic mix of individuals who live in the area: Young professionals, students, many families with young children of low to modest income and a fair number of people who grew up here and decided to raise a family of their own.

It is my understanding that there is a high percentage of people who are known to the local CSSS for varying reasons; this is significant, simply because it underlines the fact that with poverty are associated a host of other problems that diminish one's health and well being.

This kind of vulnerable population will require increased support services in order to weather the kinds of prolonged stressors that any major reconstruction will entail: Prolonged uncertainty, powerlessness in the face of bureaucracy, loss of support systems, imposed relocation for some, for others there awaits several years chronic noise, air pollution, vibrations and loss of quality of life and of sleep.

Most people, especially those who are living in a context of poverty and alienation, tend to adapt to their environment, no matter how hostile or unhealthy. They are grateful to have found an apartment that they can actually afford, regardless of the proximity to train tracks, highways or other nuisances

## **Impacts of the proposed project to date**

The negative effects of the planned reconstruction have already been significant to those of us who are involved: In the context of a vacuum of clear and accurate information, there has been much speculation and anxiety amongst potential expropriates. Renovations are put on hold; long term plans shelved; apathy and denial settle in for some while others begin an anxious search for options. Several people chose to beat the rush and have already left the community, anticipating an increased scarcity of affordable rental units in the area.

There has been considerable frustration at the lack of support available. It would seem that meaningful citizen participation is still not an applied practice in St Henri: Those of us who have chosen to fight for the community's survival have had to overcome obstacles on many fronts. Community groups and coalitions have not been able to meet the needs within the communities affected by the project. Local organizations and individuals, staff or volunteers alike, are exhausted and burnt out from a year of Turcot and BAPE related activities. The community has

become fragmented and disorganized, as regular programming and activities have fallen to the wayside in order to focus on the many issues related to the mobilisation . There have been no BBQs in the community to date, no block parties, no fundraising, no respite ... We have done little else but eat, drink, breathe, sleep and dream Turcot in the months leading up to the BAPE.

## **The BAPE process**

While the staff have been very respectful and professional, and there were many positive aspects to the BAPE process. It must be said that the BAPE structure and timetable are far too rigid and too focused on technology in terms of information sharing. The concept of Citizen participation is a relative, mostly abstract value that needs serious improvements.

Many people do not have a phone, let alone internet access. The Documentation Centers are poorly staffed, poorly advertised within the building itself and the documentation itself intimidating to say the least.

There is insufficient time for anyone to read and understand the huge volume of highly technical information.

I'm both sad for and very proud of the people within my community who have participated notwithstanding: Many have come away from the experience feeling that they have somehow failed in this public consultation process; most feel anxious and exhausted and deeply disappointed that they did not have the time that they needed to properly articulate their thoughts ; most doubt

whether their voice was heard and wonder in the end whether they wasted their time.

This reaction, expressed by many of the citizens who participated, is evidence to the fact that the BAPE is not adequately upholding the espoused values of equity, impartiality and democracy.

As a society, it is of utmost importance that everything possible should be done to foster citizen engagement. Too few take the time and effort to get involved: We cannot afford to put obstacles in the path of those who want to participate.

The BAPE has much work to do in this area: Everything should be done to foster and not discourage citizen participation.

## **Recommendations to the BAPE:**

Additional resources must be allocated to communicating the documentation in a user friendly and context sensitive manner; Many people have no phone, never mind to ensure that people with no access to internet.

Additional time should be allowed between the first and second phase of the BAPE and a community based resource person assigned to assist citizens in the writing of their briefs.

Financial subsidies should be offered to community groups to hire community organizers with the specific mandate of assisting citizens in the writing of their brief.

## **The choices we make**

One thing we know for sure is that *change is certain - progress is not*. Progress depends on the choices we make today for tomorrow.

In the late 60s, Montrealers were swept up in a shared excitement and optimism for the future. Montreal was a showcase to the world and the Turcot Interchange was a majestic and fitting gateway to our city.

Brian Merrett was there and documented the plight of some reported 6000 people who were forced to leave their homes to make way for the new highway. A little group of citizens called the Westmount Action Committee fought to protect their homes to no avail.

When I first saw pictures of Mrs. Campbell and her neighbors, I was struck by the shared experience between people separated by time... 40+ years later. *See appendices for photos.*

## **What has changed?**

And it would seem that not much has changed within the mindset and modus operandi of the MTQ. History does indeed threaten to repeat itself.

Yet what has changed is our scientific understanding of the impact of car emissions upon our environment and upon our health:

We know much more now than we did even a few years ago about how the human brain develops and what children need from their environments to develop character, empathy, and intelligence.

- One recent study reveals that traffic pollution can actually lower children's IQs: The Harvard School of Public Health found that children living near heavily trafficked roads score worse on intelligence and memory tests.
- The Canadian Medical Association reports that an estimated 21000 Canadians died of air pollution in 2008 alone. We know that 80% of these were seniors.
- Asthma rates in children continue to rise dramatically.

- We know that seniors that live near high traffic roads are more likely to be hospitalized;
- That pregnant women living near high traffic roads are more likely to give birth prematurely and to underweight babies;
- That an estimated 1500 people per year die prematurely due to air pollution
- That our emergency rooms are overcrowded and our healthcare system is overburdened.

One cannot help but wonder how it is that we can legislate cell phone use in cars and smoking in restaurants... Yet schools and seniors residences continue to get built alongside high traffic areas.

## **Who is responsible?**

Whether in the case of a bridge collapse, the razing of a neighbourhood or the increased incidence of disease due to air quality, our political leaders should be ultimately responsible for ensuring the health and well being of its citizens... Especially those most vulnerable segments of the population, such as the elderly and children.

I also believe that as a society, we get the governments we deserve. We need to each take our share of responsibility for the mess that we have created in the world: By getting involved in our community, by being informed and by voting, we can help to ensure that the necessary changes are made in time and that future generations will not pay an even higher price than did Mrs. Campbell and others from that time.

## **Neighborhoods matter**

Living in a good neighborhood has nothing to do with the price you paid for your home or the amount of your monthly rent. Living in a good neighborhood depends on the support system that exists within the community.

We need to take the responsibility of truly being a good neighbor. It takes a village to weather the trying times. If we want that kind of support, the place to begin is with ourselves, in our own neighborhoods. If everyone were to get involved in their immediate neighborhood, the larger Montreal community would become a much healthier, more cohesive place in which to raise a family..

Over the past year, we've discovered many people who's shared vision of community extends beyond street boundaries and who contribute to making their world, their city, the kind of place where everyone feels safe and healthy and connected.

One need not live on Cazalais or Desnoyers, to be considered a part of the Village des Tanneries:

I'd like to say *Thank You* to our many good friends and neighbors from the *Coalition pour Humaniser Notre Dame*, from Concordia, from McGill and in NDG ; we have good neighbors on the web too, in *Spacing Montreal* and *Walking Turcot Yards*.

There are so many things in life over which we have no control but building a good neighborhood is something that anyone can do, right now, in the place where you live now.

## **Conclusion**

I add my voice, for what it's worth, to the many experts and community representatives who reject the MTQ project as proposed. There are too many negative impacts to allow such a plan to proceed. The Turcot issue has brought into focus the sad truth that Quebec is woefully behind the times.... And there is little excuse for it. We have everything we need to build a world class, sustainable, dynamic city.

Our government must radically rethink it's position towards transportation infrastructure in our urban centers and quickly take steps towards becoming a world leader in the field of sustainable inter-modal transportation systems. Montreal deserves nothing less. We have the industries, the technologies, the experts; and we have an ever increasing number of committed citizens, willing to share in the process.

The choices we make today will have a lasting impact on the look, the function and on the health of this city well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

# The Village des Tanneries



**Le Village des Tanneries  
St-Henri**

## **The CCVT**

### Le Comité des Citoyens du Village

**Tisser des liens entre voisins** / *Weave bonds between neighbours*

**Créer des opportunités pour s'impliquer et se connaître** / *Create opportunities to become involved in one's neighborhood*

**Développer les sentiments d'appartenance et de fierté envers son quartier** / *Develop feelings of belonging and pride towards one's community*

**Améliorer la sécurité et la qualité de vie des gens du quartier** / *Improve security and quality of life of residents*

## **L'Allée des Tanneries**



**2,2280 trees were planted by local residents in 2005 to create a green screen.**



## **Les Jardins Communautaires du Village**





**Building raised garden beds**





## Spring Clean-Ups





**An abandoned lot is brought back to life**





**Bringing beauty where there was none**



## The Bikers' Garden





**Creating opportunities for people to gather**



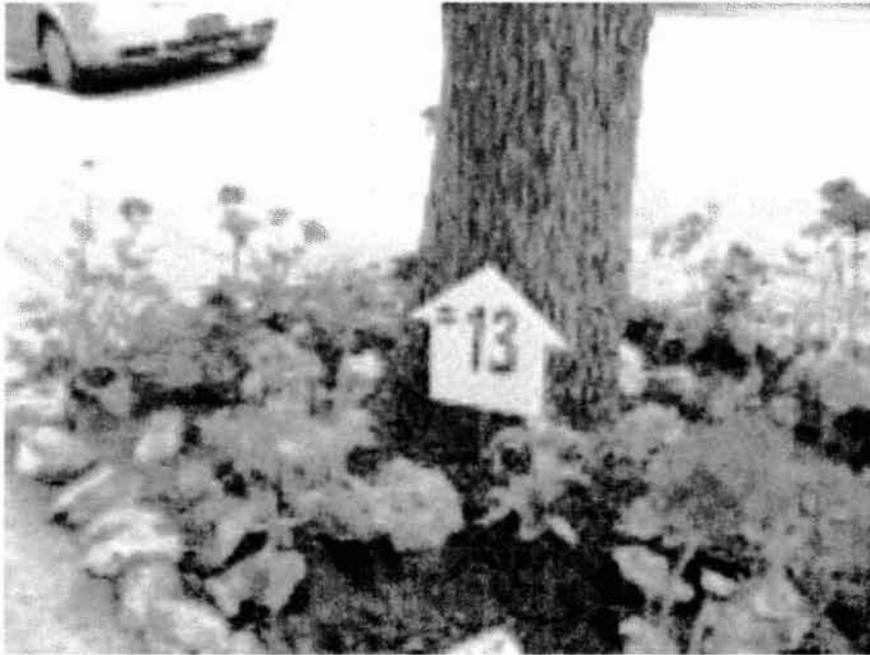


**Spring Bazaar at the 780 St Remi**





## Building Community



**Members of the CCVT past and present who have made significant contributions to their community**



**Jules Chomedey and Andrew Harvey**



**Jules and Mark McLellan**



**Daniel Roy, gardener extraordinaire**



**Caroline Duchesne and Stéphanie Dugas  
(CCVT)**



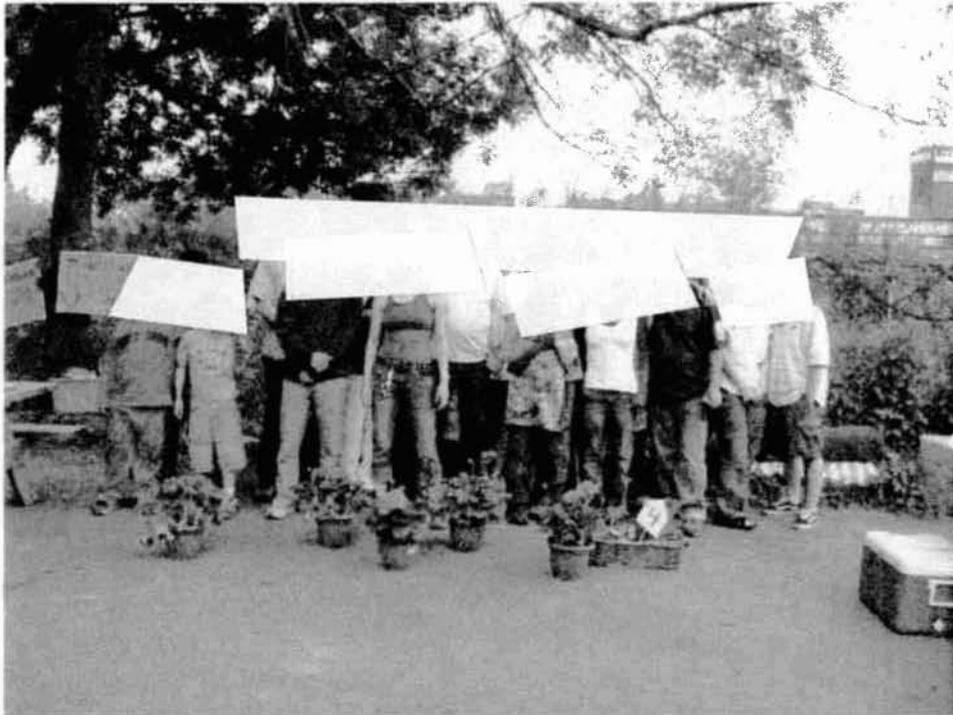
**Brian Merrett (photographer of Mrs Campbell series) with Daniel Guilbert (CCVT)**



**Mireille Gagnon, Nathalie Moisan and Stéphanie Dugas (CCVT)**



**George Hughes**



The MTQ's Environmental Impact Study put very little focus on the human impact of the Turcot reconstruction. There are many people for whom the BAPE process and timetable are not accessible. Their voices need to be heard nonetheless (thanks to Karen Vanderborgh for making this possible).

**- Interview with Suzanne and Robert**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZSZV\\_vLflI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZSZV_vLflI)

One recent study reveals that traffic pollution can actually lower children's IQs.

The Harvard School of Public Health found that children living near heavily trafficked roads score worse on intelligence and memory tests.

**- Interview with Charlotte Séguin and Raymond Tessier:** (will be online shortly: please search Turcot video scrapbook Fattageimale or via above link)

The Canadian Medical Association predicted that 21000 Canadians would die of air pollution in 2008 alone.

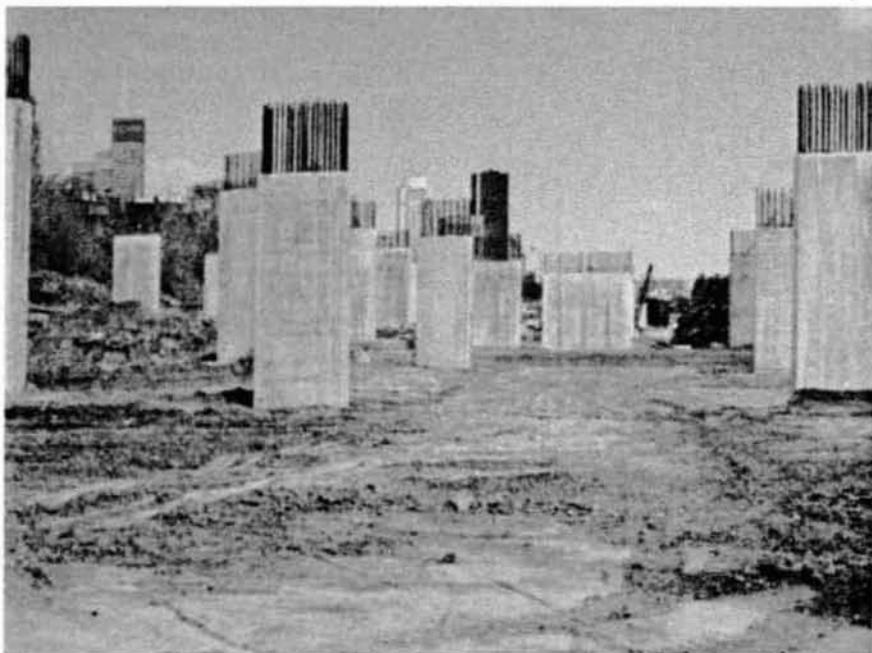
80% of these are seniors.

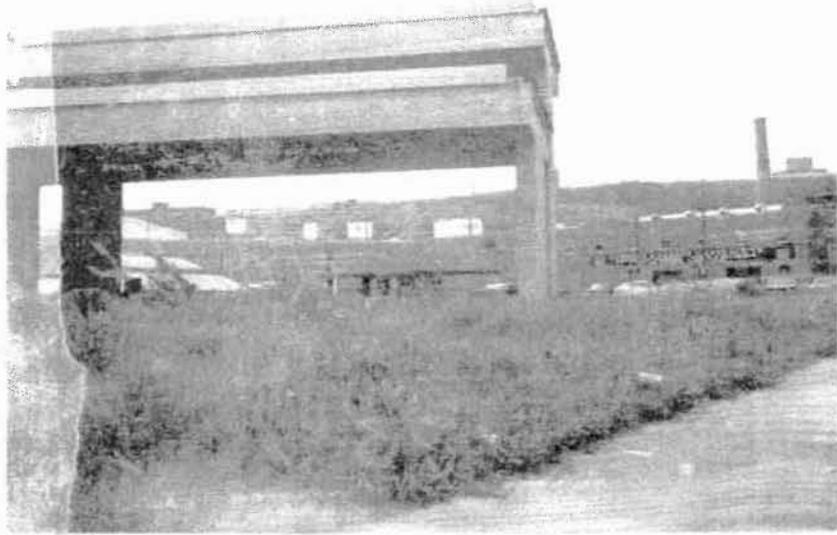
***Ah Real Mess, eh Mrs Campbell?  
Your street is gone,  
And so are your neighbours  
...And people who drive cars don't stop to talk***



<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Mrs-Campbell/40731087076>

Thanks to Brian Merrett for these photographs

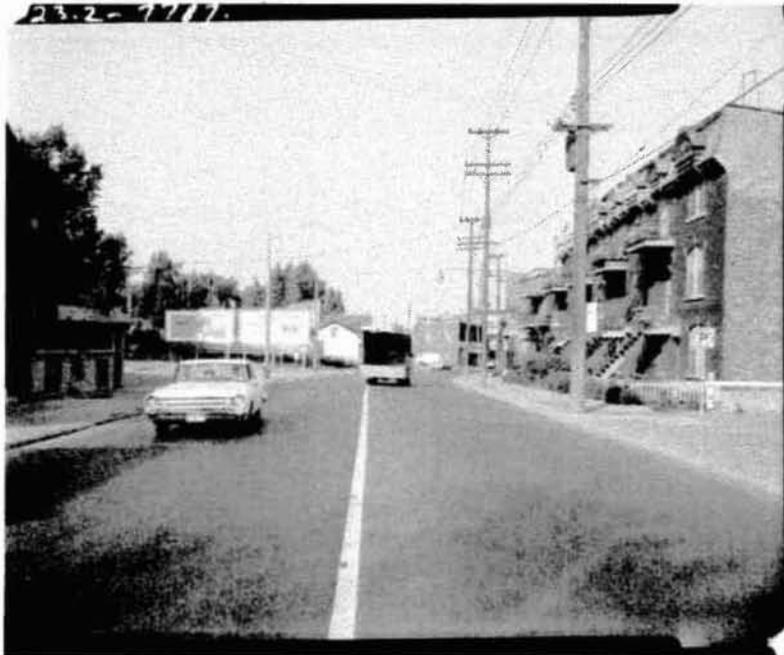




Beauty destroyed for a ramp on the Trans-Canada.



*View of the Village before the construction of  
the 720*



*Homes along St Jacques destroyed*

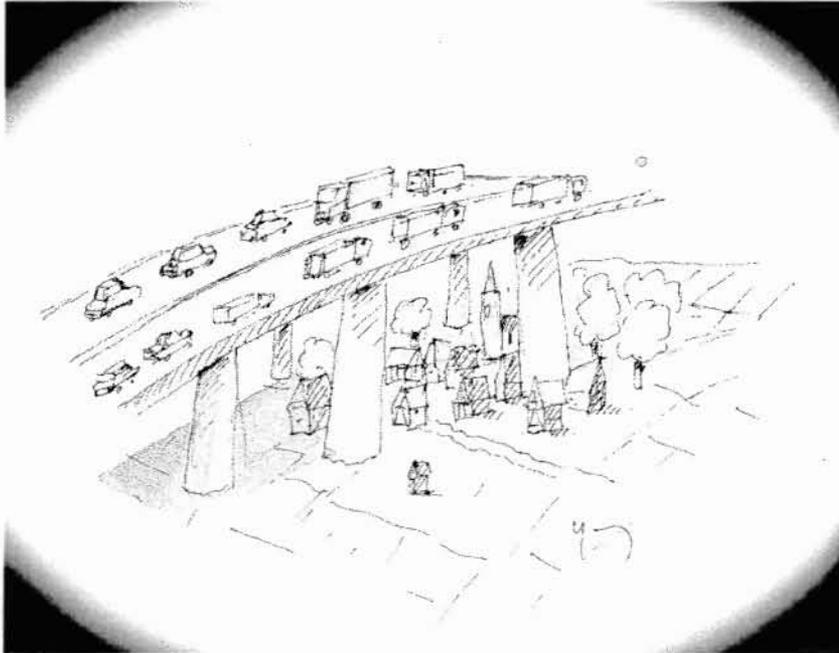


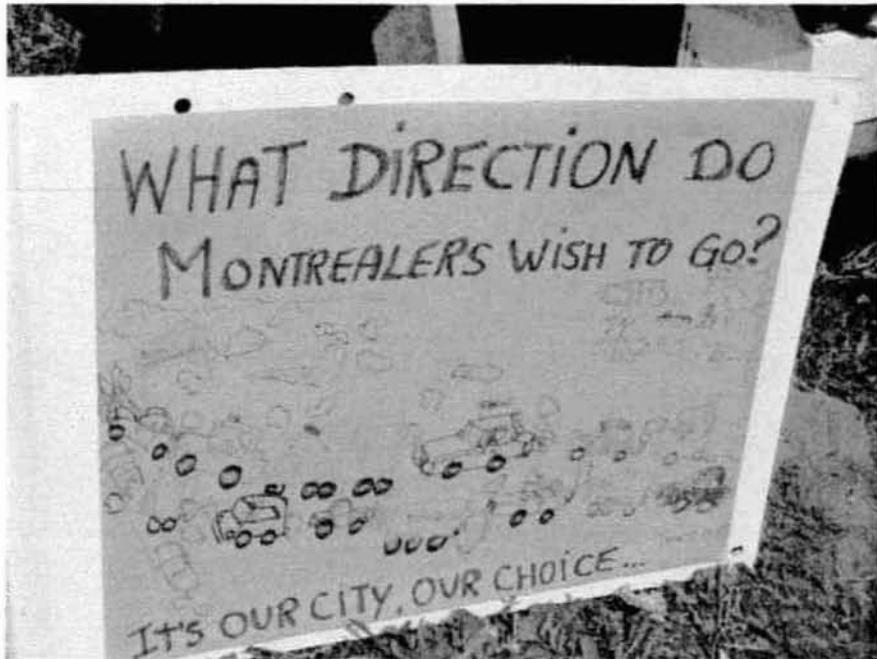
***Businesses along St Jacques also destroyed***



***Proposed path of new highway would destroy the homes on Cazalais street and the 780 St Remi***







***In life, change is certain -  
but Progress depends on the choices we make  
today for tomorrow.***