

Brief for BAPE hearings on the Réseau électrique métropolitain (REM)

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My name is Lisa Mintz and I am a resident of Lachine.

I am so glad there are BAPE hearings on the REM (even though they are shorter than they should be) as there are just so many things wrong with this project! I grew up in Toronto and I watched the implementation of the GO Train. This marvel of modern technology turned beautiful forests and farmlands into miles and miles of the ugly, identical houses which we now term urban sprawl.

I see this happening here and it breaks my heart. I am hoping, nay praying, that this august commission has the foresight to see that this is not the train that Montreal needs.

What I and many other people would like to have our pension funds used for is a train which has been well thought out and planned in such a way as to serve the most people possible, while reducing their reliance on cars. A project which would actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions and urban sprawl, not augment it. A project which would protect species at risk and our remaining and very valuable green spaces. I am united with a number of experts in feeling that the REM is not the project to do any of these very important things.

I believe the REM is a bad idea for the following reasons:

Lack of respect for urban planning

The REM was conceived behind closed doors without consideration for existing plans for urban development, land use plans, or the planning of different transport agencies. As such, the Réseau électrique métropolitain (REM) will serve almost exclusively neighbourhoods with low population density. The REM has only a few stations, all in low-density neighbourhoods far from population centres.

The success of a public transportation network is linked to the urban context. To attract passengers, the system needs to be routed through high or medium density neighbourhoods that promote access by foot or bicycle. Short distances to the nearest stations are a decisive criterion to ensure high ridership levels. This is NOT the case with the REM, whose entire West Island arms goes through very low density populated areas.

As well, the REM will likely create competition with the Vaudreuil-Hudson line, likely taking away many riders that use incentive parking lots today. With those riders gone, it could create a negative feedback loop wherein ridership keeps dwindling resulting in less service, which could result in 2/3 of the riders of the line using cars instead of taking the REM.

The REM will promote urban sprawl

With its four new incentive parking lots, including one for 3,000 vehicles at the Rive-Sud station, the REM will encourage the use of automobiles and of urban sprawl. Thanks to the REM, housing developments will spring up far from downtown with multiple automobiles per household

The Caisse is placing stations near new developments, while not providing stations where people live today. Even though they claim they want to be profitable via fares, it really appears they are more interested in getting money via real estate deals. The Caisse is demanding that any extra real estate revenue generated by development near stations will have to flow back to the Caisse, so they are much more interested in those users which do not exist now, but will once the West Island becomes a sea of sprawl.

The REM does not serve the lowest income neighbourhoods where public transit ridership numbers are the highest

Ridership maps of the STM clearly show that frequent utilization of buses is concentrated in areas of the East of Montreal. But the REM does not service these areas and will not reduce pressure on any of major bus lines in Montreal.

Not only does the REM only serve the more affluent suburbs of the West Island and Brossard while ignoring Montreal-North, Montreal-Est, NDG and Laval; it will actually harm those lower income areas by making future expansions of services on existing rail lines more difficult. The Caisse may also demand higher fares to make the train profitable, which will have to be paid by everybody.

Inadmissible environmental impact studies

At least six Quebec government ministries have clearly pronounced that the REM's impact study is incomplete and/or inadmissible. In any other context, such pronouncements would have delayed the evaluation process. How is it possible that the REM is nonetheless being debated before the BAPE, and even being fast-tracked?

Greenhouse gas emissions

In a recently released impact study, it was estimated that the REM would cause an annual decrease of 17,000 tons in greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). This is primarily because the train would replace diesel buses on the Champlain Bridge. But the urban sprawl caused by the REM would likely **increase** emissions of GHGs by **much** more significant levels. For some reason, the CDPQ refuses to evaluate this aspect of their project. The Quebec Ministry of the Environment has also asked the CDPQ to evaluate the GHG emissions caused by the construction of the REM, but the CPDQ also refuses to do this!

The REM is poorly connected to the current system of public transit

A new system with intermediate capacity, such as the REM, must be connected with other portions of the public transit network, especially the metro. In phase 1, only one

REM-metro link is foreseen, connecting to the Bonaventure metro station. While other future connections are considered for metro McGill and Édouard-Montpetit in a possible phase 2 of the REM, this is not sufficient. They have not been costed into the present project, and will have significant costs. Such connections are essential from the start and should be part of the initial price tag of the project.

The Caisse keeps saying that the REM will optimize their project for bus connections, but according to their own ridership study, $\frac{2}{3}$ of the trips on the West-Island branch correspond to parking spaces. On the last two stations of that line (Kirkland, St-Anne), virtually all ridership comes from incentive parking. In comparison, on the Vaudreuil (West Island) line today, only about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the trips correspond to parking spaces.

As well, the CDPQ maintains that there will be 10,000 trips going to and from the airport, but their own ridership study only shows 2,700 trips. Given the cost of half a billion dollars for the airport branch, the construction cost per rider will be the most expensive in Canada ever -- more than ten times the cost per rider of the Orange Line extension to Laval.

The Caisse owns Fairview, the Eaton Centre, Montreal Trust, Place-Ville-Marie, and two of the closest hotels to Gare Centrale, the Royal Elizabeth and Hotel W. There is a conflict of interest if the Caisse is planning a transit line, build largely with public funds, that will be used to make their own real estate more valuable.

Sale of public infrastructure (privatization)

As proposed, the REM will absorb at least \$2.5 billion of public monies. It will also benefit from expropriating public assets, most notably the Two Mountains train line and the train tunnel underneath Mount Royal. The CDPQ will therefore benefit from important public assets that it could subsequently sell to a third party to increase the yield on its investments.

Never mind that the government will force the AMT to sell (privatize) the Mont-Royal tunnel, the Deux-Montagnes line, and the Pointe-Sainte-Charles maintenance center to the Caisse. The public paid nearly billions for these assets, but the Caisse plans to only pay hundreds of millions for them.

Just let me rephrase. So the public pays for these resources and then a private company comes in and is basically given them by the government and can sell them when they feel like it. Hmmm.

The Caisse keeps calling this a Public-public-partnership, as if they are a public agency. But in reality, the Caisse is independent from the government, its mandate is to make profit, and most of its pension funds are actually private. So for every dollar they make in fares, $\frac{2}{3}$ goes towards private pensions.

Most public-private partnerships in the world that build transit lines are planned by the public and then built and executed by the private partner, and the ownership will revert

to the public after some time; the REM project is planned, built and operated by the private partner, and they will own it forever. This is not a public-public-partnership, it's not a public-private-partnership; it's merely a private-only project -- just financed by the public.

During the parliamentary debates for the bill that established the Caisse's involvement in transit projects (bill 38), the finance minister, Mr. Leitaó kept repeating that they would not take over any existing lines, that this law would only apply to new ones. They are now taking the Deux-Montagnes line and privatizing it.

The REM blocks the expansion of other modes of public transit

The Mont-Royal tunnel is the only heavy rail tunnel that allows a direct connection from the North to Downtown. It's used by two AMT lines today and both AMT and VIA were planning to use it to add more lines. The REM will prevent that by monopolizing the tunnel and not allowing any other lines; even though the REM only requires half of the maximum theoretical capacity of the tunnel.

The REM will expropriate the tunnel under Mount Royal and keep it in exclusivity. Because of the automated (driverless) technology used by the REM, the rails cannot be shared with other public transit agencies. Present commuters on the Train de l'Est (AMT Mascouche line) will be forced to transfer to the REM in order to go downtown. Moreover, the REM will prevent the creation of an effective inter-city train link between Montreal and Quebec City. This will interfere with VIA Rail's plans for a high frequency train from Toronto to Quebec City, passing under Mount Royal.

Uncertainty about management and transit fares

It is unclear who will manage the REM or even which institution will oversee operations of this 67km high speed train. The new agency, the ARMT (Agence Régionale de Transport Métropolitain) is not yet operational. The government is reorganizing all transit in the region of Montreal, creating a new regional agency tasked with integrating all the disparate agencies, and giving the municipalities more control over transit. This organization will be called ARTM. The REM will not be included in this organization.

There are concerns of how fares will be integrated with other public transit (metro, buses). Will the REM increase fares for all transit users in the metropolitan region, even if they do not benefit from any improvement in service? I do not know the answer to that as the Caisse, a financial institution, is not providing any documents describing the financing, the fares or a detailed break-down of the costs.

How come the REM is being forced upon the public leaving us very little time to react? Even these environmental hearings are being rushed. Why is the Caisse demanding that public officials sign non-disclosure agreements? What is going on here, with our money, that is so secret?

Dear President, Vice-President and members of the commission, with all of these questions and concerns unanswered, how can this, the largest infrastructure project in Quebec's history be allowed to go ahead?

We need a train, but not this train and not this badly!

Thank you,

Lisa Mintz

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Sauvons la falaise
Les amis du parc Meadowbrook
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