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BRIEF PRESENTED TO THE  
BUREAU D'AUDIENCES PUBLIQUES SUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT  
(BAPE)  
REGARDING THE RÉSEAU ÉLECTRIQUE MÉTROPOLITAIN (REM)

BY  
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## Vancouver's SkyTrain in Montreal?

By Avrom David Shtern

Introduction: The rolling verdant Meadowbrook Lands in southwestern Montreal are not directly affected by the REM project, but we as a group of concerned citizens want to express solidarity with the protected and unprotected natural spaces that will be negatively impacted and threatened by the REM project.

We are concerned about the further erosion of places like l'Anse-à-l'Orme in Pierrefonds-West with the erection of new housing projects without any real plan for Transit Oriented Development. The current proposal will encourage Transit Adjacent Development, but it will not decrease the use of the automobile, as stations will be few and far between and massive parking lots will be built to accommodate them. The rate of return on new residential construction is questionable as municipal services like water, sewer, paved roads and sidewalks and an electrical and communications grid have to be built and maintained.

Meadowbrook is defined by the railroad as it was created by the Canadian Pacific Railway and neighbours a railway yard. The original Train de l'Ouest project was supposed to pass by Meadowbrook and it is still by far the most efficient route time-wise and cost-wise to Dorval and the West Island. As the CPR line already exists, there will be a lot less disruption. It also takes up a smaller ecological footprint versus the proposed metropolitan train. Furthermore the fare structure is less expensive and more attractive to the passenger. The fare rate has not yet been determined by the promoters of the REM, but if a one-way fare is too pricy,



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the train may end up running near empty. The Union Pearson Express in Toronto is a prime example.

The AMT repair workshops inaugurated in May 2016 at Sortin Yard in Ville Saint Pierre/Lachine close to Meadowbrook was built at a cost of \$120 million. It will be affected by what happens to the future prospects of the Vaudreuil-Hudson Suburban Train Line as this line is the most patronized among the three AMT lines on the CPR system. The REM will compete directly for its clients and the Quebec government may see fit to close it.

Certainly, the \$320 million AMT facility in Pointe Saint Charles will be negatively affected by the cannibalization and decommissioning of the Two Mountains Suburban Train Line. The Dual Mode Electric/Diesel Electric locomotives will be declared surplus if the REM gets built as most opportunities to run them under catenary wire will be eliminated. The electrification of the passenger train only CPR line till Lachine is very plausible. Metrolinx/GO in Toronto and Caltrain in San Francisco are going ahead with existing full-size loading gauge railway lines. It is time to reconsider the REM rail project as proposed.

The Caisse plans to use \$5.5 billion of public pension funds to build 67 kilometres of rail lines stretching from Brossard, to Deux Montagnes, with a branch to Trudeau Airport, branching again along the 40, to Fairview Pointe Claire shopping centre and Sainte-Anne de Bellevue. To offset capital costs, Quebec and Canada are expected to contribute an additional \$3 to \$4 billion dollars. Cost overruns are inevitable.



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The project is an unwise investment of public capital for reasons of **cost, impact and utility.**

**Cost:** A light metropolitan railway of the SkyTrain/REM type involves a concrete-based, often elevated structure, sometimes entubed, that is incompatible with any existing railway mode in Montreal. While we are dismantling the Turcot Interchange, we will be elevating other heavy concrete structures for rails. Will steel netting and permanent scaffolding be commonplace here, once the REM starts to show its age, like the old Turcot structures?

A Light Rail Transit line (LRT) has greater flexibility within reserved rights-of-way. Higher capacity LRTs and TramTrains are far more efficient in terms of construction, operating and maintenance costs.

The figures speak for themselves:

—The operating cost of Calgary's 2006 LRT is 27 cents per passenger versus \$3.92 per traveller for Vancouver's 2013 SkyTrain. The Caisse's decision means Quebeckers will be paying 10 times as much for a less efficient system.

—Calgary's LRT costs \$15 million per kilometre to build versus Vancouver's \$86.9 million per kilometre. Building the REM is at least 5 times as expensive.

—Toronto's airport shuttle Union Pearson Express (UPEX) was promoted, just like Montreal's REM, as a profitable concern. It has failed miserably. Since UPEX



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cannot break even, taxpayers pay an additional \$46 per individual rider. The Ontario government has cut the fare structure; but even under this condition, higher volume simply means greater costs for the public purse.

Yet, the Caisse has sworn to turn a profit, counting partially by selling excess expropriated land for new buildings along the line. More likely, properties nearby will be built up long before the Caisse's land unless its prices are competitive and discounted. The route is a gift to real estate speculators through the West Island and elsewhere. Speculation will mean more sprawl and necessary expropriation will imperil heritage buildings.

**Impact:** The line will also threaten farmland, the Sources Road Watershed and natural spaces as Saraguay Woods and the Bois de Liesse. It will fragment the meadows and woods at l'Anse à l'Orme.

The REM is not inclusive or equitable. It segregates areas of the urban territory, playing east off against west. It does not integrate with existing systems. As with Boston's Big Dig, the huge cost of the REM will delay any other transit projects for years.

Rail freight service along the Doney Spur will disappear meaning more trucks on roads. Cohabitation of different technologies is unlikely, such as loading gauges, track sizes, complex switching and electrical systems. The relatively new Deux Montagnes line will be retired before its time.



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The Train de L'Est will be truncated and the expected diversion of AMT's Saint Jerome line to Central Station will not be built. Future Higher Speed Trains would not be able to use the Mount Royal Tunnel. Tunnel safety under Mount Royal is another problem that requires a separate discussion.

**Finally, utility:** with the REM, travel time to the airport from downtown will be far longer. The airport connection to the shorter Vaudreuil-Hudson line is 15 minutes faster. NDG and Lachine are excluded. There are no stations foreseen for Lakeshore Hospital, nor for John Abbott—McDonald Colleges. The West Island will not have better access to McGill Super Hospital or schools in NDG, Westmount or Montreal West. In fact, the Vaudreuil-Hudson line will atrophy as it competes with the new REM line.

Lastly, the REM will offer poor connections with the Metro.

This plan is improvised and represents a high risk for taxpayers. We should not allow the Caisse to determine the future of urban mass transit while Quebec shirks its responsibility and authority. The informed public needs to have real input.

Avrom David Shtern

NB: The Caisse made 14% on its investments last year, 13% the year before. The provincial bonds are running in the three and four percent range. The Caisse also owns 30% of Bombardier's Transport Division. Can we really afford this boondoggle?



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