

Myths of Light-Rail Transit and Data Does Not Support the REM

Brief Concerning the Caisse de Dépôt Réseau Electrique Métropolitain (REM) de transport collectif

Why are you interested in the project?

The high costs of building this proposed light-rail transit project are primarily coming from Quebec pension savings, federal and provincial taxes and passenger fares. Cost overruns are inevitable. The proposed Caisse REM system model is also proprietary which means that the transportation authority will be legally required to use the original train-car contractor which seems to be Bombardier (with a record for cost overruns and missed deadlines) for all subsequent needs no matter how expensive. For \$5.5 billion, the project adds only 12 new train stations. With the same budget, it is possible to build 6 major tramlines with 120 stations and many connected with the Metro. Experts report estimates of a much higher actual cost of \$8 billion, which is not affordable and should not be supported by the Quebec government. If the \$5.5 billion estimates by the promoter and the Caisse, which is a semi-private financial institution, are in fact false then the other technical data may be equally unreliable and the project is not feasible. A transportation authority accountable to elected officials should be responsible for a new transit project and not a semi-private financial institution like the Caisse.

I am a Quebec taxpayer and I have an interest in urban planning and the affects of development on neighbourhoods where I live and destroying the small amount of remaining green space on the island of Montreal.

What are your concerns regarding the project?

The Vancouver Canada Line, an elevated and driverless light-rail transit system of specialized train cars, was expensive to build and operates needing a large public subsidy despite the reduced labour costs and much higher ridership than possible for the proposed REM and is considered obsolete by some experts. Quebec's winter climate also makes light-rail transit the wrong choice as the equipment is often unreliable with even normal snow accumulation and the entire system might be shutdown with predictable expensive and chaotic results.

The most important myths about light-rail transit versus existing bus or train service are that it is: rapid, high-capacity, traffic reductive, cost-effective, job generative and non-locally funded and guaranteed so local authorities can not spend the funding for other purposes.

The entire travel time including station access, transfer and waiting is longer by rail than by bus even if the train's actual speed is faster and travel time is shorter. Bus corridors have a much greater capacity than any single rail line. The "light" in light rail refers not only to the weight but to the capacity; light-rail by definition is low-capacity transit. Buses can carry more people, more comfortably and to more places for far less money, than light rail.

Most light-rail passengers switch from the bus rather than stop driving which reduces bus ridership but does not decongest roads.

Rail is much more expensive than bus transit. The fares for rail transit are usually higher than bus fares which is a hardship on low-income passengers.

Bus systems provide more jobs and local employment. Nonlocal funds can be misspent creating a light-rail system that depends on large public subsidies like the Canada Line in Vancouver.

The proposed route for the airport shuttle is inefficient and 15 minutes longer compared to the route proposed by the ADM in 2012, which follows Highway 20 and Sources Boulevard north to and west

along Highway 40.

Existing infrastructure inadequacies such as the obsolete Canadian National (CN) Deux-Montagnes line tunnel and Ile-Bigras Bridge are not included in the cost. Expensive and inferior light-rail lines should not replace the existing heavy rail lines. The REM is incompatible with the AMT network, AMT priorities or recent investments including a maintenance depot.

If fares are too high, few people will take the REM resulting in the same scenario as the expensive and badly planned Toronto airport train shuttle with the Ontario taxpayer paying for most of the costs.

Transportation plans and projects should be developed simultaneously with land-use development planning and should not conflict with detailed and existing zoning,

Instead of developing an expensive and problematic light-rail transit system the government should maintain and slightly expand the existing public transportation system on the island of Montreal prioritizing the users needs based on unbiased and believable studies which may already have been done.

Do you think the project should be authorized?

No. As a taxpayer, public transit user and driver, I am concerned that this public-private partnership (PPP) will benefit the promoter and the contractors instead of the taxpayers and passengers. Public infrastructure should be built for the long-term. Private companies are primarily motivated by short-term and medium-term profits so the contracts will be expensive and in the end the quality of the infrastructure may not last nor be properly maintained. Much of the existing public infrastructure is not maintained as most of the budget is spent on operating costs and high salaries for management and unionized employees instead of maintenance and expansion of service.

The Caisse and the Quebec government are rushing the preliminary REM project without any changes or public input or approval, which raises serious concerns that experts and the public and their concerns will be ignored.

Do you think the project is sustainable development?

Sustainable development is development that endeavours to meet the needs of the present (economic, social, environmental) without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The transportation needs of the public and their capacity to pay for the costs must be the primary objective along with preservation of the environment and the effect on the quality of life for residents for this proposed expansion of the metropolitan Montreal public transit system. The Caisse REM PPP economic framework does not set the same objectives and therefore should not be the proposed option.

How does the project affect the environmental and the quality of life?

Locations of at least two proposed light-rail train stations (Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue and Rive-Sud) are in areas threatened by development that will destroy agricultural and conservation areas and lead to more sprawl development. These locations should be relocated in order to protect the areas.

Des Sources Nature Park

The proposed route cuts through wetlands in the future Des Sources nature park area. Fact Sheet 1 on p. of the REM Environmental Impact summary dated August 2016 confirms this problem. The proposed solution of tunnelling underground is expensive and avoidable by revising the route and replacing it with the ADM 2012 proposed route discussed above.

Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue Wetlands

The proposed route, parking lot and bus terminal facilities in wetlands should not be built in this location. Fact Sheet 3 on p. 4 of the REM Environmental Impact summary dated August 2016 also confirms this problem. The proposed solution is to relocate certain facilities to another place on the branch. Moving these facilities further east will mean that the impact on the wetlands will be much less severe as a result of the station's more limited footprint. However, instead of elevating the tracks to reduce the impact on the environment as well as avoid traffic conflict with surface streets, the route should be moved and possibly some underpasses should be built to allow vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists to safely travel and avoid dangerous intersections or train crossings.

Cultural Heritage Preservation

Heritage buildings, such as New City Gas, Rodier and Drummond-McCall in the area formerly known as Griffintown and elsewhere, should all be protected so partial demolition of the Rodier building should not be considered. Access to Central Station using CN elevated tracks will reduce tracks for heavy rail which would be detrimental so another plan should be used to provide access to Central Station instead. Fact Sheet 4 on p. 5 of the REM Environmental Impact summary dated August 2016 confirms this problem.

Land Required/Expropriation

The least amount of land acquisitions should be considered to reduce the cost and to preserve the existing buildings and open spaces. Public properties should be considered whenever possible or the land or buildings should be leased from private owners. Fact Sheet 7 on p. 8 of the REM Environmental Impact summary dated August 2016 confirms this problem.

According to the information on the Quebec BAPE website under Frequently Asked Questions, no project can be automatically authorized by the government even if it complies with environmental regulations. The REM project threatens environmental quality in several areas as confirmed by its own report and the government review so the project should not be approved.

Proposed Options

Highway 20 Route, Improved commuter heavy rail or Metro expansion

The route along Highway 20 would have less effect on the environment and be less expensive. For less than the high costs of the REM, one or more Metro stations could be added and heavy-rail train service expanded as proposed in the Montreal Master Plan. The AMT Vaudreuil-Hudson line must be preserved as it serves the off-island population and the considerable public investment should not be wasted.

Bus Preferential Measures (BPM)

Bus preferential measures (BPM) consist of installing carpool and bus-only lanes during rush hour on the road system that ensure priority is given to carpooling and public transit, thereby improving the reliability and on-time delivery of service and increasing public transportation's attractiveness and modal share.

The project sponsors (CDPQ Infra) should compile and publish a comparison table of the environmental footprint and financial costs of all options including STM and AMT proposed plans and limiting the REM to a few shuttle lines that link to the existing train and Metro lines.

What are your comments and suggestions to improve the project?

Bicycle and Pedestrian Access

Separate bicycle and pedestrian paths should be built parallel to the train right-of-way that will reduce car use, add minimal cost and not affect the environment as proposed in the Montreal Master Plan.

There is no bicycle lane on Gouin Boulevard, east Of Sources Boulevard. Gouin Boulevard is only four-lanes wide east of the intersection with Pierrefonds Boulevard and very congested, which makes it impossible to add a bicycle lane.

Passengers will not cycle to a train station if there is no direct and safe route, security (lighting, security cameras) or bicycle racks which should be covered for protection.

Expanded Parking

Local businesses, customers and train passengers need sufficient free public parking. The borough should remove some of the no parking signs from street parking passengers and visitors have the right to use public street parking. Street parking provides a free alternative to construction and maintenance of costly public parking lots. The AMT pilot project at Roxboro train station which charges an expensive monthly fee for parking should be eliminated or the fee reduced or not expanded.

Pedestrian and Bicycle access to Ile-Bigras Bridge

The proposed plan is long overdue to enlarge the bridge over the Riviere des Prairies in order to safely accommodate pedestrians and cyclists.

Preservation of historic Roxboro Train Station and Neighbourhood

The town of Roxboro was carefully planned more than 100 years ago as a garden city with two commuter train stations, Roxboro and Sunnybrook. Densification around the train stations would increase the serious risk concerning safety for residents in the event of a train collision or fire. There is currently a serious risk of collisions between vehicles or pedestrians and vehicles due to the excessive congestion.

Date: September 22, 2016

Written by: 

References

Bicycle and pedestrian networks and safety

<http://oli.org/education-resources/safety-tips/bicycle-safety-tips>
<https://www.bicyclenetwork.com.au/general/for-government-and-business/2875/>

Environmental and Overview

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada_Line
<http://www.vancouversun.com/Vancouver+outspends+Toronto+Montreal+transit+lags+riderhip+study/10178068/story.html>

<http://www.railforthevalley.com/latest-news/zweissystem/montreal-quebec-op-ed-death-of-canadian-light-metro/>
<http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/light-rail-wrong-choice-cities>
<http://buzzer.translink.ca/2009/01/skytrains-snow-plan/>
https://www.cdpqinfra.com/sites/all/files/document/cdpqinfra_factsheets_24-08-2016_en.pdf
https://www.cdpqinfra.com/en/Reseau_electrique_metropolitain
http://www.cat-bus.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ADM-presentation-03-adm-aerotrainviaintermodal_2012-05-31.pdf
<http://www.transportdurable.org/critique-du-rem.html>
<http://www.theseniortimes.com/opinion-the-caisse-and-its-train-gotcha-no-thanks/>
<http://www.tayloroakes.com/tag/rem/>
http://www.stm.info/en/about/major_projects/bus-preferential-measures-bpm
http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=2762,3099886&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

Roxboro Train Station, Neighbourhood and history

<http://westislandgazette.com/news/story/2014/02/18/centennial-celebrations-aim-to-pump-new-life-into-roxboros-mainstreet/>
<http://www.tayloroakes.com/2013/03/30/un-projet-pour-pierrefonds-building-a-bridge-to-ile-bigras/>