

Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE)
Projet de réseau électrique métropolitain de transport collectif

**Brief Concerning the Proposed
Réseau Électrique Métropolitain Light-Rail Project**

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Introduction

Public transit in the Greater Montreal area has evolved from being a necessity to transport people between the downtown core and the suburban periphery to becoming an essential service all around the region. This includes connecting major employment centres, educational institutions and the airport. In my opinion, the proposed Réseau Électrique Métropolitain (REM) light-rail rapid-transit network by the *Caisse de Dépôt et Placement du Québec (CDPQ) Infra* have the potential to transform the way people use public transit in the Montreal Metropolitan Community. The concept of an integrated and unified rapid-transit system could be a massive advancement to the current transportation infrastructure in the region and provide real rapid transit at its finest for the 21st Century. Also, the project offers a significant opportunity to help improve mobility in communities where it is difficult to do so currently by foot, by bicycle and by bus or commuter rail. However, the project as presented so far does have some concerns I wish to address regarding the concept to improve connectivity, mobility and access at light-rail stations along with the offering of service, particularly on the Sainte-Anne de-Bellevue branch. For the project to be successful with the public if authorized, full collaboration between the CDPQ Infra, Transport Quebec, l'Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain (ARTM) and other public transit organizations, all levels of government and our citizens is essential.

An Ideal Option to Minimize the Impact on Quality of Life and the Environment

The idea to merge the airport shuttle proposal, the Brossard/Autoroute 10 light-rail project, the Deux-Montagnes commuter rail line and the Plan Mobilité de l'Ouest (PMO) initiative is a huge step forward toward creating a smart, fast and frequent regional network on double tracks with no at-grade crossings and fewer transfers. The regional light-rail project has the possibility to improve the quality of life of some transit users in Montreal and in the regions, in order to make commuting easier and shorter. For a commuter from the West Island, it is potentially sensible socio-economically and environmentally to travel between Pointe-Claire (near Centre Commercial Fairview) and Panama stations on light-rail without changing trains at Gare Centrale. I find it takes as long for a public transit commuter than an automobile driver living on the West Island and off the Island of Montreal - being to the airport or even to both shores – to reach their destination. Presently, transit users may require at least two transfers through different transit agencies via downtown Montreal and additional waiting time between buses, the Métro or a commuter train to get far. Hopefully, an integrated transit fare agreement for this project offering seamless transfers with the bus, the Métro, the commuter train or adapted transport can encourage new commuters by minimizing the cost of a one-way, round-trip, weekly and monthly fare and reduce socio-economical and built environmental barriers of access in the communities impacted.

There might be a long-term risk that the project could contribute to a change in travel habits (mode of transport, location of residence, employment, etc.) or in public health (air quality, walkability, etc.). People could be able to relieve the stress of driving long-distances or to encourage active lifestyles with more time to do so depending on where they live near the network. Whether it could mean less traffic congestion on highways, a shift in the population in various communities or lead to the development of innovative livable communities remains to be seen.

Concerns about the Project

In regards to the proposed REM network by the CDPQ Infra, there are several aspects of the project needing some clarification and improvement relating to current layout being presented to the public:

1. Connectivity, mobility and access to all light-rail stations on the Sainte-Anne de Bellevue branch

As much of the new light-rail network is proposed to be built along existing rail and highway corridors and the new Champlain Bridge corridor, there is an opportunity on certain branches like alongside

Autoroute 40 and near downtown Montreal to improve connectivity with communities, mitigate traffic circulation better and make pedestrian and cycling access safer to the light-rail stations proposed at a human urban scale. Hopefully, the following points could help by minimizing built environmental barriers along busy transportation corridors and create secure linkages between neighbourhoods.

-) **Secure pedestrian and bicycle crossings needed over Autoroute 40** – the existing north-south overpasses along Autoroute 40 at Saint-Charles, Saint-Jean and des Sources Boulevards are already challenging and unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists. This is the case every weekday rush hour period at on and off-ramps to the service road when intersecting heavy vehicular traffic. There are no intermediate multi-use crossings over Autoroute 40 between the main arterial routes to connect any proposed light-rail station safely. The gap between each arterial road interchange between Morgan Boulevard and des Sources Boulevard is on average 3 kilometres. This built environmental barrier in a very important employment sector near residential and commercial areas could be less intimidating for citizens if such intermediate overpasses (like the one planned at du Quartier station in Brossard) can be built between the interchanges in conjunction with Transport Quebec and the municipalities in the agglomeration of Montreal. The new CDPQ Infra project provides an opportunity to achieve this, particularly near the Kirkland, Pointe-Claire and des Sources stops.
-) **Make traffic management in the vicinity of the new stations less congested** – The proposal to include commuter parking lots at strategic light-rail stations is inviting for the flexible automobile commuter in low-populated density communities. Depending on the bus or riding a bicycle to get to a location out of reach from these services is still difficult to impossible in reality. Eventually, the parking lots at peak hours will get full in the outreaches of the REM network. Along the Sainte-Anne de-Bellevue branch however, connecting the proposed stations will likely require upgrades to the transport infrastructure for the Montreal agglomeration, with some careful thought needed to urban planning as to reducing any negative impact on the quality of life of nearby local residential streets. On the West Island, this would include extending the Jacques-Bizard Boulevard corridor to Autoroute 40 and completing the Morgan Road/Morgan Boulevard link between Autoroutes 20 and 40. As traffic along des Sources, Saint-Jean and Saint-Charles Boulevards are already congested enough, these improvements could improve north-south traffic circulation access to not only the new stations, as well as to make walking, cycling, driving and riding the bus easier and more direct.

2. *The Réseau Électrique Métropolitain and potential Impacts on existing local public transit services.*

The interesting choice to locate proposed Réseau Électrique Métropolitain light-rail stations and bus terminuses along the Doney Spur and Autoroute 40 to Sainte-Anne de-Bellevue is an intelligent strategy to serve a major employment zone while aiming at easing travel times to commuters living north of Autoroute 40. At the same time, the risk of impacting or restructuring existing public transit services locally and regionally cannot be ruled out where the financial viability and ridership of several existing bus and train services will be challenged. Transit corporations like the Société de transport de Montréal (STM) and the new Réseau de transport Métropolitain (RTM) - the transit agency soon to manage the operation of bus routes from every Conseil Intermunicipal de Transport and commuter rail lines from the Agence Métropolitaine de Transport - might have to review all services prior to and when the REM officially goes into service. In regards to the Sainte-Anne de-Bellevue branch, several examples of existing transit services in my opinion will need to be monitored carefully for any negative impacts:

-) **The AMT Vaudreuil-Hudson commuter rail line** – A public transportation landmark with a sense of heritage to commuters residing along Lac Saint-Louis and as far away as Hudson and Rigaud, the train line operates on rail infrastructure owned by Canadian Pacific Railway alongside Autoroute 20.

Once known as the Dorion-Rigaud service, it offers adequate direct service to downtown Montreal during the weekday peak hours and offers additional trips at other times. Train delays due to rail congestion from merchandise freight trains - especially in winter - are a common occurrence. From experience, transit users travelling from between Rigaud and Île-Perrot need a reliable, rapid transit service and this train line is one option that helps them avoid the traffic jams on the autoroute bridges over the Lac des Deux-Montagnes and the rivière des Outaouais. For the downtown and West-End Montreal bound commuters from stations between Sainte-Anne de-Bellevue and Lachine, the Vaudreuil-Hudson line is critical to support local employment and students, bypassing the traffic congestion on Autoroute 20 and at the Turcot Interchange. The proposed Sainte-Anne de-Bellevue branch of the REM offers an alternative to ride to downtown Montreal without any worry of freight trains via the Mount-Royal tunnel and may potentially attract some of these commuter train users needing the benefit of a shorter walking time once downtown to offices and educational institutions. However, for a new REM commuter to get to the planned parking and bus terminal facilities at the proposed stations along Autoroute 40, extra time may be added depending on the heavier traffic jams across the Île-aux-Tourtes and Galipeaut Bridges at rush hour with no reserved bus lanes planned. In spite of these considerations, it will be essential that the project complements the users of the Vaudreuil-Hudson commuter rail line (as an option) in order to prevent additional transit correspondences and additional traffic congestion.

-) **Missing link at Bois-Franc station** – The proposed REM light-rail network does not offer a connection to the orange Métro line at Bois-Franc station since the Métro line currently terminates at Côte-Vertu Métro station. This could be a missed opportunity to offer commuters not only from Vaudreuil-Soulanges and the West Island, also for Montrealers heading west for employment as another option to link Montreal's West-End where mobility is very congested with very little connectivity to the Saint-Laurent borough. The current network map proposed by the CDPQ Infra for the REM envisions a faster link to major employment hubs in Greater Montreal, such as Downtown Montreal, the Saint-Laurent borough, the Chabanel district in Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough, the Airport and the West Island. Adding the Métro extension of the Orange line by two stops at Poirier Street/Grenet Street and at the Bois-Franc train station, linking the Réseau Électrique Métropolitain could ensure a reasonable transfer for some commuters needing to bypass the traffic on Autoroute 40. In spite of a long-term belief that one upgraded service could funnel away another, some balance in transit planning is needed to assure that the west-end branch of the Orange line stays viable at the time the REM is in service. What will count for transit users is quick connectivity.
-) **Local and express bus service on the West Island** – Since the 1980s, the existing land-use, built environment barriers and increased traffic circulation on the West Island of Montreal has factored into the operational challenges for bus routes operated by the STM. As a regular transit user from the West Island, it is really stressful to have to travel on a local bus route, transfer at Fairview Terminus, then take another bus to get to another part of the West Island or to get to the nearest Métro or commuter train station longer than driving a car. To travel from one end to the other (between Sainte-Anne de-Bellevue [John-Abbott College] and des Sources Boulevard [Galeries des Sources]) takes about 40 to 60 minutes on two STM bus routes with a transfer at Fairview Terminus. The arrival of the REM may risk the reliability of bus service and decrease or increase overall travel time for citizens pending which neighbourhood they are going to or coming from. In a sector where the optimization of bus services is really needed, major restructuring of bus routes to access the new stations could be welcomed in order to improve transportation mobility and increase ridership. In spite of an extra transfer to board the REM and travel between the same points a bit faster, a short transfer wait for a bus at light-rail stations need to be considered. The application of upgraded

road infrastructure and reserved lanes near the projected stations is crucial in order for the STM to best navigate its bus routes and shared taxi lines efficiently for transit riders. However, the current locations of the bus terminal facilities planned by the CDPQ Infra at the des Sources, Pointe-Claire and Kirkland stations may determine how reliable some local and express bus routes will be going east-west and north-south and influence increased or decreased ridership. The launch of the new light-rail network could have an impact on several bus routes which may include:

- **470 Express Pierrefonds** - runs daily, including off-peak from north-west Pierrefonds to Côte-Vertu Métro station via Fairview Terminus with a non-stop segment on Autoroute 40.
- **468 Express Pierrefonds-Gouin** – weekday service to Roxboro-Pierrefonds and Sunnybrooke train stations. Continues to Côte-Vertu Métro station with limited-stops via Grenet Street
- **485 Express Antoine-Faucon** – weekday service from north-west Pierrefonds to Dorval train station and Lionel-Groulx Métro station via Fairview Terminus and Boulevard Saint-Jean. Non-stop segment along Autoroute 20.
- **419 Express John-Abbott** – weekday service between Fairview Terminus and John-Abbott College via the service road of Autoroute 40 and Chemin Sainte-Marie. Primarily serves post-secondary students, the bus route also service two major employment sectors.
- **407 Express Île-Bizard** – weekday rush-hour service to Roxboro-Pierrefonds train station via Pierrefonds Boulevard.

It will be a long shot to achieve quicker public transit travel locally on the West Island with hope that the creation of smarter bus lines which doesn't always end at the light-rail station or at Centre Commercial Fairview Pointe-Claire could help matters.

3. Offer compatible, affordable fare integration for the light-rail network and all transit networks

In regards to fare restructuring and seamless correspondence with existing commuter train network, the Montreal Métro and local bus lines, the CDPQ Infra and the new ARTM need to collaborate and aim for a favourable fare policy to encourage affordable travel between stations locally and regionally instead of the fare zoning by distance as currently structured by the AMT. Local travel within a community like the North-Shore or South-Shore or the West-Island by light-rail or commuter rail could be attractive at the equivalent fare of local public transit services by bus and save some travel time. Travelling beyond the local area into another local area regionally could cost a bit more.

-) **Travel within a Local Area Fare Zone (Tier 1):** stations within central Montreal, West Island, Laval, Longueuil agglomeration, North-shore communities, South-Shore communities
-) **Travel from one Local Area Fare Zone to another Local Area Fare Zone (Tier 2):** Example – Deux-Montagnes (North-Shore) to Brossard (Longueuil agglomeration) or Pointe-Claire (West-Island) to Île-des-Soeurs (central Montreal).
-) **Travel to the Airport zone to/from all other stations (Tier 3)**

Position on the Réseau Électrique Métropolitain and Suggested Improvements

I agree that this public transportation initiative brought forward by the CDPQ Infra need to be built as the regional Montreal Metropolitan Community seriously need high-quality rapid transit linking the Island of Montreal, the city of Laval, north shore and south shore communities. In regards to environmental impacts, minimizing the effects this project could bring to existing green spaces and wildlife, land use development, the functionality and efficiency of public transit networks, traffic circulation is important for improving the quality of life and mobility for citizens with well-needed connectivity between the stations and communities. I would suggest that the following elements of the proposed Réseau Électrique Métropolitain be re-evaluated or improved in order to take into

consideration some of the local and regional urban environmental challenges that may impact the quality of life of citizens and of public transit users.

Sainte-Anne de-Bellevue branch:

-) In respect to maintaining the wetlands and habitat species at the projected location of the ***Sainte-Anne de Bellevue terminal station:***
 - The station's built form and rail car layover will need to be compact in order to reduce or eliminate any natural environmental impact.
 - With the bus terminus facility being relocated eastward along the line, it would be sensible to offer public transit users or carpoolers accessing this station a bus stop for a few STM and CIT La Presqu'île bus routes and a maximum 5-min kiss-and-ride waiting zone by adding a shoulder lane on both sides of Chemin Sainte-Marie.
 - Open up the extension of the westbound Autoroute 40 service road (between civic no. 20045 and the Morgan Boulevard exit) with a 180 degree right turn intersection off eastbound Chemin Sainte-Marie. This could make commuting a bit easier for residents and workers in Sainte-Anne de-Bellevue, Baie d'Urfé and Senneville; McGill University and John-Abbott College students; and off-island commuters when leaving the station.
-) Construct a pedestrian crossing over Autoroute 40 at both ***Kirkland station*** (in the vicinity of Mountain View Street) and ***Pointe-Claire station*** (linking Centre Fairview with Alston Avenue):
 - This will encourage walking trips and shorter travel for potential light-rail commuters from nearby employment generators, residential areas and local transit bus services connecting the north service road with the south service road.
 - The Kirkland crossing will help offer a safer and secure passage for pedestrians and cyclists accessing the station over the autoroute instead of using the heavily used Saint-Charles Boulevard overpass.
-) Make the main access road to the ***Kirkland station*** meet the intersection of Boulevard Saint-Charles and the westbound to southbound ramp from the north-side service road (slight deviation north).
 - The new four-way intersection will reduce the need to have a two-way access via Boulevard Brunswick at rue Valerie (turning it into a one-way route) and mitigate traffic congestion.
-) ***Pointe-Claire station*** could benefit with two access points instead of one in order to better manage crowding due to it being located across from Centre Commercial Fairview.
 - The east end of the station linking the shopping mall and the earlier suggested pedestrian crossing to Alston Avenue makes for simpler and safer mobility for transit users instead of needing to cross Fairview Avenue or take a bus one-stop to access the mall.
 - The west end of the station grants access to the potential commuter parking lot at the vacant lot. To reduce the impact of the large green space, multi-level parking with a kiss and ride area and a few commercial or food kiosks may be ideal.
 - The proposed bus terminal for Pointe-Claire station need to be best located where the heaviest ridership will enter or exit the light-rail station. Fairview Pointe-Claire Shopping Centre is a major employment generator and commercial landmark on the West-Island.
-) Offer to have a secure multi-purpose pathway linking ***des Sources station*** as the northern extension of the existing bicycle path alongside des Sources Boulevard (east-side) which currently ends at Hymus Boulevard be built over Autoroute 40 to as far as the de Salaberry Boulevard bicycle path.
 - This can greatly improve mobility access and safety by foot and bicycle coming from Dollard-des-Ormeaux (north of the station) over Autoroute 40 unless they take public transit.

Mainline – Deux-Montagnes to Rive-Sud via Bois-Franc station and Gare Centrale:

-) At **Bois-Franc station**, consider applying a protected servitude entrance at this station in the event that a two-stop extension of the Orange Métro line from Côte-Vertu would be built northwestward.
-) At **Panama station**, offer a second access point to this light-rail station (like was suggested at Pointe-Claire) in the event of overcrowding as a large wave of transit users were initially projected by CDPQ Infra since the REM will replace the existing reserved bus lane over the Champlain Bridge.
-) Alongside the majority of the route from Mont-Royal to Deux-Montagnes stations, think about applying a complementary regional bicycle corridor in conjunction with the agglomeration of Montreal and other municipalities as there are very few secure bike lanes west of this point.

Other suggestions

-) In conjunction with the upgrading of local transport infrastructure by municipalities and public transit agencies, access to the light-rail stations need to include smart incentives in order to improve mobility for all multiple modes of transport:
 - o Install intelligent signage near and at the parking lots of the light-rail stations indicating how many parking spots are available (to help reduce queuing).
 - o Permit maximum number of bicycles on-board off-peak & [if possible] peak-hour trains
 - o Implement reserved lanes for buses, taxis and bicycles nearing a station
 - o Offer frequent public transit bus service if possible in residential areas where little or no services are offered. This could be by shared-taxi or using 30-foot mid-size buses (instead of the standard 40-foot bus) on narrower residential collector streets.

Conclusion

In order for the Greater Montreal area to further benefit with a socially economic acceptable regional rapid public transit system, an expansion of this light-rail network upon successful profitability and frequent ridership numbers be considered in the long-term once it provides no negative impact to the Montreal Métro network and local bus routes. Such an expansion of a light-rail network could apply intra-locally in communities like the Agglomeration of Longueuil as a new branch between Panama station and Ville de Boucherville along Taschereau & Jacques-Cartier Boulevards; and also toward Repentigny and Mascouche pending the impact of the existing commuter train line. The approach for a regional rapid-transit network is on the right track and the vision to improve the way of life for citizens using public transit needs to be easier to get around the Greater Montreal area in shorter travel times.

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