

Poliquin, Renée (BAPE)

Objet: TR: [POLLURIEL (Bayes)] Fwd: Brief to the BAPE regarding the Projet de Réseau électrique métropolitain de transport collectif, from Robert Hajaly

BRIEF TO THE BAPE REGARDING THE PROJET DE RESEAU ELECTRIQUE METROPOLITAIN DE TRANSPORT COLLECTIF

From Robert Hajaly

To the Bape Secretariat, attention of the commission secretariat coordinator

Good evening. My name is Robert Hajaly, and I am a resident of the city of Montreal. In brief, I will argue that your commission should reject in its entirety that part of the Réseau Électrique Métropolitain (REM) that goes to the P.-E. Trudeau Airport, the West Island, and to Deux Montagnes. The reasons for this rejection are, first, that this part of the REM does not improve the connection between the downtown centre of Montreal and the airport and the West Island, as the Caisse de Depot (CDPQ) was asked to do by the Quebec government; second, nevertheless, despite this failure, this part of the REM is excessively and unnecessarily expensive; third, it would weaken rather than improve the overall rapid transit system in Montreal, including by taking away money for other necessary improvements to this system; and fourth, it needlessly would harm parts of the natural environment in Ville St. Laurent and the West Island. I will briefly explain these points in the following paragraphs.

First, the reason why the REM does not improve the connection between the downtown centre of Montreal and the airport is that it takes a very circuitous and lengthy route to get to the airport, with eleven stops along the way (assuming future stops at McGill and Edouard-Montpetit), in contrast with the existing direct, short, route along the CP/CN track, with only four stops from downtown to the airport. This is important for business travellers and tourists using the airport, most of whom are going downtown. For the same reason, the REM route to the West Island is similarly lengthy, given that most West Islanders using the train are using it to get downtown. Admittedly, the REM route is closer than is the CP/CN route to West Islanders living in the northern part of the West Island, above autoroute 40, but this advantage is cancelled out by the REM route's greater length and number of stops to downtown. As for west islanders living in the southern part of the West Island, and off islanders living to the west, they would be doubly disadvantaged by the REM West Island train, since this is likely to take some passengers away from the existing Vaudreuil-Hudson train along the CP/CN route, resulting in a likely reduction in service of this existing train.

As for the western and northern part of the REM being excessively and unnecessarily expensive, this is because of its greater length and number of stops, given that it will involve rebuilding entirely the Deux Montagnes line, and its need to buy properties for a right of way and to build lengthy elevated portions of track and tunnels for the West Island and Airport lines. By contrast, an additional railway line, dedicated exclusively to passenger traffic, built alongside the CP/CN line to the West Island, would not have any of these expenses, as well as being far shorter to build. As for rebuilding the Deux Montagnes line for the REM, this is entirely unnecessary to increase service and the number of passengers along this line. This is because this line is not shared with freight trains, unlike the present

West Island line, and needs only some infrastructure improvements and two floor parking lots to increase service and passengers, at a much lower cost than that of entirely rebuilding this line for the REM.

As for the REM weakening the existing rapid transit system in Montreal, this is because it would take over the revenues from its most used passenger line, the Deux Montagnes train, diminish the revenues from its second most used line, the West Island Vaudreuil-Hudson train; and its excessive cost would use up government money needed for other improvements to the rapid transit system. The promoters of the REM claim that its costs, apart from its initial capital cost, would not need to be subsidised by the government, because of the lower cost of its technology which does not require train drivers. However, this claim may be doubted given the experience of the Canada Line in Vancouver, which uses the same driverless technology and was similarly invested in by the Caisse, which nevertheless has had to be subsidised annually by the government and even then had to cut some of its facilities and service to cover its costs. The promoter of the REM also suggests that it may gain some revenues from real estate investments made around its new train stops, but the extent of these revenues may also be doubted since most of its new train stops will be in the area near autoroute 40, which area is already generally built up.

Finally, the proposed REM would have some negative effects on the natural environment. In answer to a question by Mr. Irwin Rappoport in the public consultation session of Aug. 29, it was admitted that twenty to thirty hectares of agricultural land, and the same amount of wooded areas or of areas that are not well protected, could be negatively affected by the REM. My understanding is that some of these areas would be in the Tecnoparc area of Ville Saint-Laurent and in the l'Anse-a-l'Orme area of the West Island, affected by the REM going through these areas. By contrast, an added dedicated passenger line built alongside the existing CP/CN line would not have any of these negative effects since it would be using a preexisting rail corridor rather than creating new corridors as the REM would.

So, for all the above reasons, I repeat that your commission should reject entirely those parts of the REM that go to the airport, the West Island and to Deux Montagnes. However, this is not to deny that improvements of service to these destinations are necessary. The question is, how best to achieve these improvements? My view is that a better way is to build a new train line, exclusively dedicated to passenger traffic, alongside the existing CN line going from Central Station to the airport and the West Island. This would allow a direct connection between this train and the south shore trains coming from Mont-Saint-Hilaire and Brossard to Central Station; but this train would be quicker, cheaper and less environmentally damaging than the REM for the reasons I've explained above. And if it was connected with the orange Metro line at its Place-Saint-Henri stop, where this railway line and the Metro line come together physically, this railway line then could serve well the southwest borough of Montreal and N.D.G. as well as Montreal West, Lasalle and Lachine, all of which are not served by the REM. This said, I'm not asking you to approve this alternative, which is not your mandate, but rather I'm giving you another reason to reject the REM, given the knowledge that there is a better alternative to it. But, one last point, I would be willing to benefit from the Caisse's investment in building this alternative line that I have supported, as well as the line to Brossard, subject to public regulation of these lines, and provided the Deux Montagnes line remained in public hands, and was improved in the manner I've indicated above. The ball would then be in the Caisse's court, whether or not to get on board this new train!

Respectfully yours, Robert Hajaly

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