



Green Coalition Brief

Re: Modification to the Urban Scheme Currently in Force on the Island of Montreal Related to the Completion of Autoroute 25 by Transport Quebec

Written by
Avrom David Shtern
Transportation Issues Spokesperson
September, 2006

INTRODUCTION:

The Green Coalition, an association of many groups and individuals dedicated to the protection of our natural environment, is opposed to the construction of a 4-lane autoroute and 6-lane bridge between the 6th avenue/Henri Bourassa Blvd E. area in Montreal and Highway 440 in Laval (Autoroute 25 extension), for the following reasons:

1) CHANGE THE BASIC REALITY:

“A solution to the nation’s congested transportation system ‘... must be multimodal’, [translation: relying strictly on the old fly-drive system will no longer work].” (Frank Basalucchi, Wisconsin Transportation Secretary, Railfan & Railroad, October 2006, p. 18).

More highways and roads equal more cars. That is, more gridlock ...The old paradigm is stale, but it is very seductive and seems very much in vogue at Transport Quebec. Boston’s unstable “Big Dig”, the “bridge to nowhere” in Alaska and Quebec’s proposed and hugely expensive highway to Blanc Sablon come to mind. There are 50,000 more cars in the greater Montreal area every year. The number of cars is growing 25% faster than the population growth rate. This dynamic must change if Transport Quebec truly cares about **sustainable development**.

2) GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION AND THE LACK OF A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD:

“The free market may work for some sectors, but transport isn’t one of them.” (Simon Geller, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, UK, Rail, #544, July 19 – August 1, 2006, p. 45).

There is an illusion of a free market, but this is virtual reality. Government funded roads are a subsidy to truckers, car companies, paving and construction concerns and especially the developer. If mass transit, rail, bicycles and other environmentally friendly alternatives were subsidized as heavily as roads, then there would be no talk of building this extension.

3) STUCK IN THE PAST:

Quebec still seems to be stuck in the post World War II car-culture mentality that highways pave the way to boom and long term prosperity. The added costs of pollution, health-care, security, waterworks, visual impacts, psychological barriers, loss of green fields and biodiversity, etc., are ignored. Like their corporate cousins, the government/highway complex externalize these costs. There is little or no consideration or follow-through for the following alternatives or issues:

a) Improved freight rail networks with intermodal nodes/terminals;

b) Dedicated, reserved and separated light rail/high frequency passenger (commuter) lines using wherever possible lightly used or dormant railway lines;

c) Transit Oriented Developments (residential/commercial) which encourage transit use, discourage short haul car use and provide for pedestrian and bicycle access ways.

d) Integrated Living:

“The most efficient travel kilometer is the one not traveled at all. That kilometer is 100% energy efficient.” (David Fletcher, Green Coalition Vice-president).

Keep people close to work and amenities: Encourage walking, bicycling, telecommuting and locate goods, services and food sources next to residential developments and work places. This may also lead to better physical fitness.

e) Prime Farmland and the Need for Local Sourcing of Food Supply - A Finite Resource:

Security of food supply is a growing concern. Some of the most fertile agricultural land in Southern Quebec will be destroyed if this project proceeds. Indeed, the loss of the Montreal Melon fields was as a result of unbridled, unfettered and unrepentant industrialization, materialism and development.

The price of food has been held down artificially since the early 20th Century. Costs will begin to skyrocket very soon since modern agricultural techniques, (The Green Revolution) is based on the oil model of petrochemically based fertilizers, pesticides, mechanized tools and other forms of machinery **and** the fragile 3-day “warehouse on wheels” method of delivery.

We may be approaching “peak oil” sooner than later. Peak oil describes the situation where oil production and discovery will stabilize and begin to decline, but the demand for it will continue to increase due to massive industrialization in Mainland China and the Indian subcontinent. The “globalization” of the world economy may therefore endanger the world.

Chevron’s recent discovery of oil reserves in the Gulf of Mexico will only delay this day of reckoning. Deep sea, offshore wells require expensive technology, more energy for extraction and a higher price of oil per barrel. There is not an infinite supply of oil. At present, all other energy alternatives are unable to replace the relative ease of oil’s supply.

Also, caged methane gases at the ocean bottom may be unleashed by deep sea exploration. If 3-6 times the amount of carbon currently in the atmosphere were to be suddenly released by the hand of man or by an act of God (earthquake), it would probably lead to massive extinction.

Since the current methods of food production require huge quantities of oil, food supply will be under intense pressure in the near to mid-term.

Instead of putting topsoil lifted from abandoned farms onto transitory suburban flower beds, Transport Quebec should think twice before it encourages further erosion of the local farming economy.

f) The Highway 25 extension will encourage sprawl and destroy greenfields. It goes against the Government of Quebec's policy of adhering to its Kyoto commitments, brownfield redevelopment, sustainable development, energy conservation, energy efficiency, energy self-sufficiency, reduction in hydrocarbon use and pollution mitigation.

g) Negative impacts on the De Montigny Stream Ecoterritory:

Highway 25 will endanger the integrity of the De Montigny stream Linear park. The footings of the new bridge will be planted in the rare and fragile spawning grounds at the mouth of the stream.

The Falaise St. Jacques Cliff/Bluff/Escarpment Ecoterritory is a prime example of what happens when it is surrounded by the constant hum and pollution of automotive traffic 24/7. It is isolated, encircled; Access is hard to come by. It is still used as an illegal dumping ground. The remnants of the historic St.Pierre River are in a pitiful shape.

There is a paucity of natural space in the Montreal area and the Government of Quebec should help the region acquire more green areas, not destroy the little we have.

4) COMPETITION WITH THE METRO AND COMMUTER RAIL:

The Autoroute 25 extension will compete with the costly new Laval Metro extension, (almost \$1 billion!). If Transport Quebec truly wishes the Laval Metro venture to remain a white elephant, then it should proceed with its project. If not, it should reconsider. Not only will the Metro be impacted, but the planned commuter rail line to Repentigny/Terrebonne/Mascouche will be undermined as well – especially at its eastern end. Motorists will circumvent this proposed service and take Highway 25 instead. This road will eventually become clogged with traffic -- a vicious circle.

The planned rail line to Mascouche is a costly endeavour. New tracks have to be laid. It is reminiscent of the Laval Metro extension. Mascouche/Terrebonne would be better served by the more direct CPR/QGRY (Quebec-Gatineau Railway) route via Laval. Build two commuter lines instead of one and the environment as well as the taxpayer will win.

5) MORE TRAFFIC ONTO MONTREAL ISLAND:

The Highway 25 extension is not a true bypass/circumferential highway or beltway. This is a misnomer since it does not circumvent Montreal Island. It feeds traffic onto one of the most congested highways in Quebec - the Metropolitan Expressway. Also, beltways do not solve congestion problems. They are just ambulatory measures, patchwork, Band-Aid deferments similar to heart bypass surgery - a reprieve, a hindrance to true progress until government finally realizes that there are less invasive alternatives. Political expediency is not the right path.

Inside the Washington, DC, Beltway, for example, the last commercial farm disappeared in 2005.

6) CREATE A SMALLER FOOTPRINT IF A LINK IS DEEMED NECESSARY:

The planned reserved bus lane should be converted to a light rail line as soon as possible. Plan as if there were to be a reserved LRT system to begin with. This should be done whether or not the Highway 25 project proceeds. Again, bus lanes are a fig leaf for Transport Quebec's "fly-drive" mentality:

"All you want are busways. Well, people don't want buses. They don't want to ride them." (Paul Weyrich: A renowned conservative Republican in the US, President of the Free Congress Foundation, Railfan & Railroad, October 20, 2006, p.18.)

High frequency bus lines carry less riders and require more personnel to operate. Thus more costs in the long run...

CONCLUSION - WINDS OF CHANGE:

As a society and as individuals, we require knowledge which hopefully helps promote positive action. But sometimes action requires a leap of faith due to the lack of certainty of science. (Even engineers "over-engineer.") We are at one of the critical junctions in the river of time where we have to decide which path to take. We face massive and concurrent existential struggles. First, the intertwined international troubled oil economy and the resumption of the ideological struggle in the Middle East and second, the worldwide race between short-term development at all costs and long-term conservation efforts may lead to cataclysmic events.

Please begin to realize that highway 25 is not only a local project, but has an effect on foreign policy and the future of the environment worldwide. With all due respect, go back to the drawing board!

Montreal, September 2006