

Montreal transport plan just what the mayors ordered: Nydam

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The West Island's former industrial commissioner says Montreal was listening to local mayors when it pieced together the island's transport plan.

Now, Georges Nydam says West Islanders have to make sure provincial and federal politicians deliver so upgrades can be realized.

"It is really positive," he said of the city's plan, released last week.

"It goes to show you when the West Island sticks together and makes a coherent proposal to Montreal, Montreal is willing to listen and adopt it. I was very pleasantly surprised."

Nydam, who retired last fall after more than 20 years at the helm of the Conseil Local de Développement, credited new-found consensus among local mayors.

For the last 10 years, Nydam worked with the mayors to determine the West Island's transport needs. This was the first time West Island community leaders were all basically on the same page, he said.

"We've done locally what we should have done," said Nydam, currently a West Island Health and Social Services Network board member.

But Nydam warned the Montreal transport plan is a "wish list" and not a final version.

With public hearings scheduled for the fall, he said the West Island should clarify its interests and prepare to press for priorities.

Still, he was pleased Montreal's plan addressed the need for express lanes on main arteries, including St. John's, St. Charles, Sources and Pierrefonds boulevards.

Nydam also noted the inclusion of the need to build an urban boulevard in the 440 servitude (in western Pierrefonds) and the extension of Jacques-Bizard Boulevard to Stillview Avenue.

Both projects aim to alleviate traffic in the northern half of the West Island.

Nydam also lauded proposed carpooling and express lanes on highways, a plan for a second bridge to Ile Bizard and special services for seniors and commuters with disabilities.

"The way the whole model planned for the West Island was in there," he said in an interview at The Chronicle office.

Still, Nydam says a few components were missing.

The planned rail shuttle between Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport and downtown Montreal will only connect with the existing commuter train service in a second phase. He wants to see the link added as part of the initial project, with a stop at the Dorval station.

Nydam said the plan also lacked improved access to McGill University's Macdonald Campus in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, which is slated for expansion in the next few years.

The next step is to get financial support and permission (for some projects) from the upper levels of government, he said.

"We've really got to get behind it and make sure our elected officials, both federal and provincial, deliver."

Kirkland Mayor John Meaney described the plan as a "Christmas shopping list" with "no real priority."

He noted the 440 and Jacques-Bizard projects appeared to be given low importance, estimating they will only be realized in 10 to 20 years. With swelling residential development in Pierrefonds, Meaney said both are needed to solve congestion, and soon.

"To me it brought up more questions than it had answers," he said.

Baie d'Urfé Mayor Maria Tutino was disappointed the West Island didn't have more say in the makeup of the plan.

She said mayors of de-merged cities only saw the proposals after the plan was complete.

"We have no input, we are only told to pay for it," said Tutino. "It's incredible that we were not informed."

She said the plan also left out the need for better public transit service in the Baie d'Urfé and Ste. Anne industrial parks.

"We're paying handsomely into the (public) transportation system, but we're not getting very much back," she said. "We're really not in a very good situation for our industrial sector."

Meanwhile, Green Coalition vice-president Dave Fletcher called Montreal's to enhance public transit "great."

However, he says all concepts for the West Island are geared for the automobile.

The Roxboro resident was disappointed the city did not pick up the Green Coalition's message to add commuter service to the Doney Spur rail line, which starts in Pointe Claire, runs along Highway 40 and ends in St. Laurent.

Improvements to the region's bus service should also be at the core of the plan, he said.

"What we've got is basically road projects," Fletcher said.