

JUST THE TICKET CITY HALL TO ROLL OUT 3 PROJECTS

MAYOR'S PRIORITIES Extension of métro's Blue Line, rapid bus route on Pie IX Blvd., downtown-airport link
LINDA GYULAI GAZETTE CIVIC AFFAIRS REPORTER January 18, 2008

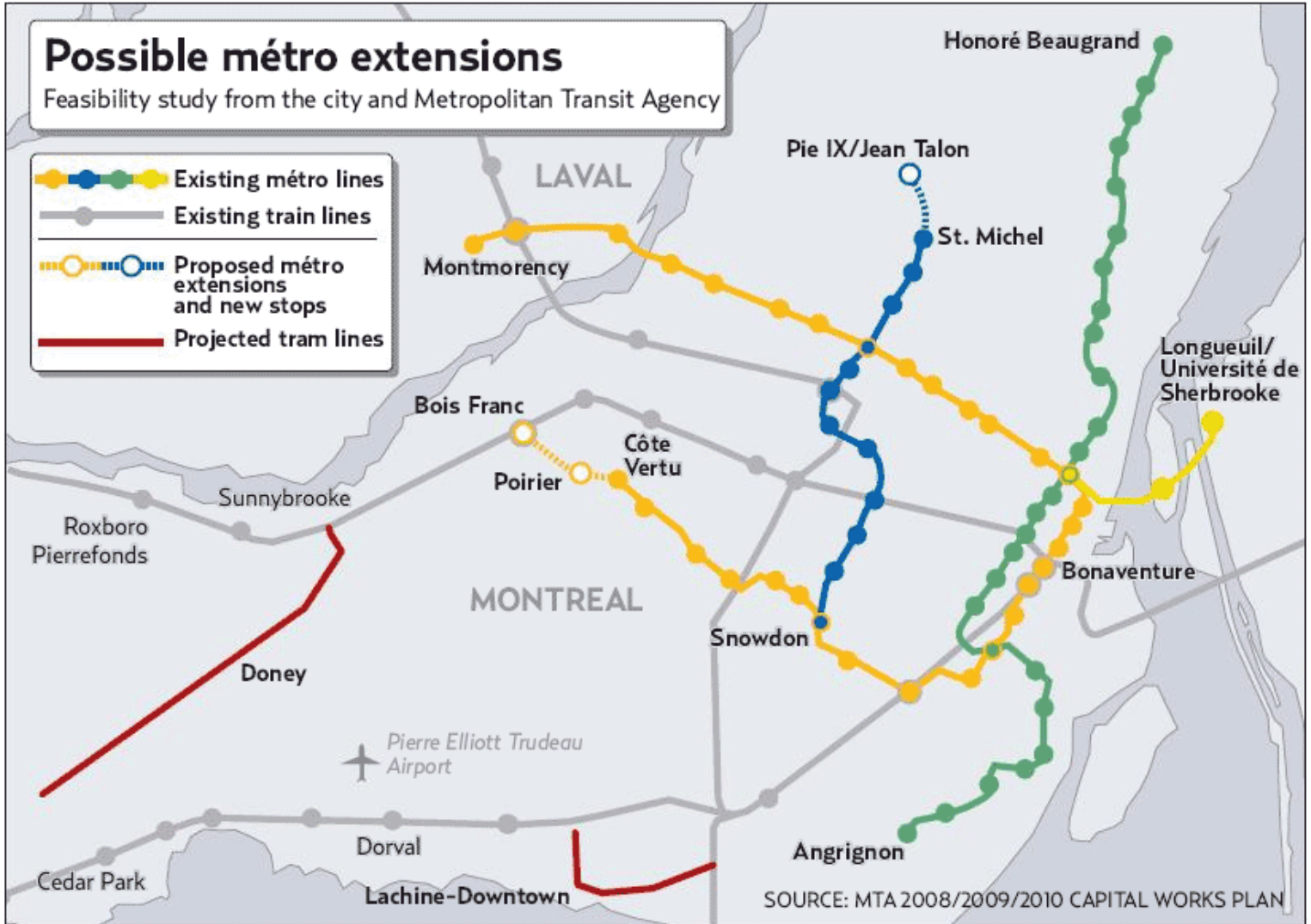
A short extension of the métro's Blue Line, a new uninterrupted north-end-to-downtown rapid-bus route, and building a downtown-to-airport public transit service are to be among the first big-ticket announcements out of Montreal Mayor Gérald Tremblay's 20-year, \$8.1-billion transportation plan.

City hall, which is preparing the final version of the plan Tremblay unveiled in May, as well as a financing proposal, is settling the details for those announcements, expected by the end of March, sources said.

The métro plan involves a one-kilometre extension of the Blue Line tunnel east to Pie IX Blvd. from its terminal at St. Michel Blvd. near Jean Talon St., according to the sources.

The Pie IX métro stop would go hand-in-hand with another Tremblay priority: to build a 20-kilometre Bus Rapid Transit corridor from Henri Bourassa Blvd. E. near the northern edge of Montreal Island, down Pie IX to Notre Dame St. and then to René Lévesque Blvd. and downtown, the sources said.

The route would not require bus transfers.



PLAN Pie IX Blvd. big part of vision

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) refers to dedicated bus lanes that are separated from other traffic and get priority signals to allow buses to arrive at and leave intersections ahead of cars.

The stations on such corridors are elevated and feature ticket dispensing machines and boards that offer real-time display of bus arrivals.

A third project – a shuttle service between downtown and Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport in Dorval – was in the news last week after it was revealed the Metropolitan Transit Agency and partner agencies are looking at a tram-train line to link the West Island, the airport and downtown.

A tram-train is a light-rail vehicle sturdy enough to run on both railway and tramway tracks.

A committee composed of the MTA, the Aéroports de Montréal, the city of Montreal and the federal and provincial transport departments has three studies under way.

The airport authority is spearheading those studies, as well as a call for proposals for the route's design, Montreal executive committee member André Lavallée, who represents the city on the panel, said yesterday.

The airport authority also soon will lead a cost-benefit analysis of the route for the committee, Lavallée said.

The studies are to be completed by the end of this year, he said.

"We hope it will be one of the next projects to be built," he said of the airport shuttle.

The airport receives more than 12 million passengers a year and is the source of 25,000 direct jobs, he noted.

Other airports, in Plattsburgh, N.Y., for example, are competing with Montreal for travel business, he added.

The downtown-airport link was priced at \$550 million in Tremblay's transport plan and is to be ready by 2012.

Lavallée said Montreal city hall soon will announce whether it intends to impose bridge tolls to finance the projects.

"I intend to make ambitious proposals to city council so the plan can be accomplished," he said, but refused to give details.

Lavallée confirmed Pie IX Blvd. is a vital part of the coming announcements.

Pie IX is the busiest north-south public-transit route in the east end, he explained.

The Pie IX BRT corridor would attract 50,000 passengers a day, Tremblay's transportation plan predicts.

City hall is ready to announce at least an initial phase of the BRT corridor, along Pie IX, sources said. Different scenarios of where to end the line downtown are being studied, they said.

The Tremblay administration also is said to be looking at the possibility of using electric trolley buses on the route in the short term and, later on, a tramway.

Tremblay's transportation plan called for the Pie IX BRT to be developed within five years. It also called for the route to be extended to Highway 440 in Laval within 10 years.

The project was priced at \$100 million in the plan, plus \$15 million a year to operate the route. The métro extension to Pie IX is being taken seriously by the MTA, which has set aside \$1 million to conduct studies on it this year, the agency's new capital-works program reveals.

The studies will estimate cost and potential ridership, the capital-works program says.

The MTA also has budgeted \$1 million for studies on an extension of the métro's Orange Line, as proposed in Tremblay's transport plan.

The extension, from the Côte Vertu métro terminal north to the Bois Franc commuter train station, would tap into potential new ridership from St. Laurent borough's growing Bois Franc district and the St. Laurent Technoparc industrial park.

The Tremblay administration is keen on the Orange Line project but would begin with the Blue Line work, sources said.

The transportation plan calls for the one-kilometre extension to Pie IX within five years and a further extension, to Anjou, within 10 years.

The plan forecast it would cost \$170 million to extend the Blue Line from St. Michel Blvd. to Pie IX, plus \$2.9 million a year in new operating costs. The extension to Anjou would cost \$775 million, plus \$13 million a year in operating costs.

The Orange Line extension from Côte Vertu to Bois Franc was projected to cost \$340 million, with \$5.7 million a year for operating costs. The plan called for it to be built in 10 years or more, however.