

Using Doney Spur could solve transit problem
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As has been reported in the media, Quebec intends to implement an emergency transit plan because of the high cost of petrol. The AMT is in negotiations with Canadian National and Canadian Pacific to increase frequencies on existing and planned commuter train lines. CP is even refurbishing one of the two unused tracks at Lucien L'Allier Station.

The MTC may also be instituting rapid transit bus service to downtown from all points including the West Island.

These are laudable short-term measures, but are not enough to coax many motorists out of their cars. In the long run, desolate railway lines such as the Doney Spur must be used as surface electric light rail metro lines with service levels akin to Paris' RER System, or New York's subway and suburban trains.

To that end, the bleeding and erosion of the Doney must stop. The Quebec Government must buy the line from CN and place a moratorium on further encroachment. Rail-banking or conservation of the right-of-way is key if there is to be any passenger service on the line in the near future.

I and a number of colleagues have been walking the Doney Spur this summer to document the current state of the line.

There are some positives: Nature has reconquered what man has disposed and freight trains run even on Sundays.

But there are a host of negatives: Rot and rust abounds. The line west of the Dorval/St. Laurent St. François Spur is not being used. Many leads, switches and crossovers have been lifted.

Industries have either shuttered their doors completely or switched to less energy-efficient trucking. According to the Association of American Railroads, "on average, railways are three or more times more fuel efficient than trucks. For every tonmile of freight shipped by rail instead of truck, greenhouse gases are reduced by two-thirds or more."

We can talk till we are blue in the face, and we have to continue talking up the Doney until one of our politicians listens.

But many political leaders are indifferent to this issue and think the Dorval rail shuttle is the be all and end all of West Island transit problems. No doubt service on the Lakeshore's Dorion-Rigaud line is in need of improvement. However, two-thirds of the West Island's population lives North of Highway 40 and that is where a Doney tram-train would come in handy.