

Montreal vague on bridge toll plans

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The toll proposal recently floated by the city of Montreal received a cold reception from off-island mayors, and its' effects on the region remain uncertain.

Montreal spokesperson Bernard Larin said the city will hold public consultations on the toll proposals in the fall to hear what citizens have to say about the idea.

"We have not finalized the final plans for tolls, where they will be placed and so on," Larin said.

The off-island Centre local de développement (CLD) Vaudreuil-Soulanges, an organization promoting the off-island economy, have yet to discuss the prospect of tolls.

"Personally, we have yet to talk about it, we have yet to be consulted, we have not received any documents, but I'd imagine that discussion will be had in the next few months," said CLD managing director Gérald Brassard.

Brassard said Montreal's sizable information and technology sector have thousands of off-island residents, and businesses may be incited to relocate if tolls are implemented.

He also said public transit would have to be improved if tolls were put in place on the western tip of the island.

"If they put tolls, and nothing comes our way, then it's not necessarily valid," Brassard said. "They have to be conscious that this money absolutely has to go towards public transport."

Vaudreuil-Dorion Mayor and CLD President Guy Pilon is not taking the proposal too seriously, suggesting that a toll would be near impossible to implement on Highway 40 or Highway 20.

"That thing makes me laugh a bit," Pilon said. "I really don't think it's a good idea for Montreal to apply tolls."

Pilon said Montreal proposed the idea simply to gauge how the region would react. "I'm sure that they'll go with anything else but toll booths," he said.

The effects of the upcoming tolls for a bridge spanning the St. Lawrence between Salaberry-de-Valleyfield and Vaudreuil-Dorion also remain uncertain.

Tolls are projected to cost \$0.30 to \$0.70 for family cars for the first year of service based on 2008 figures, but fees may adjust to inflation by the bridge's opening in 2012. Fees will increase for larger vehicles to \$0.60 and \$1.40 respectively.

Soulanges Liberal MNA Lucie Charlebois said there are alternatives to using the bridge when it is in service in 2012. Vehicles can bypass the tollbooth by using the Mgr. Langlois bridge near Coteau-du-Lac, Charlebois said.

Michael Fortier, the federal Conservative candidate for Vaudreuil-Soulanges, said only a portion of people living off the island travel to the south shore, while a majority travel to companies in the West Island or the Northern belt of the island and won't be affected by the Highway 30 tolls.

Environmental and transport critics have charged that Highway 30 will be a sprawl generator. The Green Coalition, a provincial environmental advocacy group, recently held protests on the South Shore against the highway development.

"Eventually, the bucolic agricultural nature of the area will disappear," Green Coalition transport critic Avrom Shtern charged. "Important biodiverse natural spaces will also be threatened. We need these to breath, to cleanse our air and perhaps to find the next great cure."