

15 October 2010

OUR TRAFFIC JAMS ARE NOT HOMEMADE

Last month, in a low-level flight of oratory, I publicly described the state of through traffic in Westmount to my fellow Montreal Island mayors. "Westmount is in danger of becoming a traffic sewer," I declaimed.

After an eight-year absence from the mayoralty, I've noticed two, possibly related, things:

- 1) citizens are much stropplier; and
- 2) traffic volume and speed are much greater - in spite of the decreased quality of our roads.

Are we Westmounters part of this traffic growth? Let's start by examining our patterns of commuting. In 2006, 9,750 Westmounters were employed. 1,500 worked from home, more than double the island of Montreal rate. 2,000 of us used public transit to get to work, proportionally lower than elsewhere on the island; but we made up for it by the 1,500 Westmounters who walked to work.

This left 4,750 Westmounters who drove or were driven to work: 11% fewer than in 1996. But the number of Montreal Island car commuters *grew* 11% in the same ten-year period.

Certainly, employers in Westmount pay property taxes and some service our needs. Still, over a third more "outsiders" commute to Westmount than the reverse, and one-half of them in cars.

My hairdresser, Rose - to whom I present over the years an ever-diminishing workload - drives from Anjou to Westmount daily. Our cleaning woman used to drive in from Repentigny.

But it's not just a commuter invasion. Two CEGEPs in Westmount serve 12,000 students. And when Westmount allowed schools in residential areas, it was in the days

when kids actually walked to school and local schools served local kids. No more.

Our 13 schools in Westmount have a student watershed extending as far as the West Island. Many kids are individually driven to school, often necessitating two round-trips a day.

But probably the most significant source of our increased traffic is the daily swarm of drivers insouciantly barrelling *through* Westmount on their way downtown. Hence my "traffic sewer" boutade.

Of late, NDG politicians have been berating me for denying a Westmount access to the MUHC Glen construction site; they say their citizens are bearing the brunt of its construction traffic. Hmm. For years, NDGers have used The Boulevard and Sherbrooke as highways to downtown without so much as a thank you, all the while thumbing their noses at our speed limit.

And think about it. Since only one car commuter in ten has a passenger, it takes 2,000 kilograms of metal, glass and plastic to transport the average 75 kilogram driver - with smog, CO₂, and noise as byproducts. With one-half of Montreal Island commuters - and two-thirds of Greater Montreal Region commuters - driving cars, this nonsensical equation has to change.

Back home, I'm getting pretty stroppy myself. Since buying our house on Cote St-Antoine, we have seen traffic volume and speed soar, as drivers avoid the Great Sherbrooke Parking Lot. Lansdowne, Grosvenor, and other streets are even worse off.

Next week: what can we do about it?