
For a True Approach to Sustainable Development

Brief on the
Reconstruction of the
Turcot Interchange
submitted by the City of
Westmount to the
Bureau d'audiences
publiques sur
l'environnement

June 2009



Westmount

On behalf of the citizens of Westmount, I would like to thank the *Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement* for providing us with this opportunity to comment on the proposed reconstruction of the Turcot Interchange.

This project, being of major significance to the Montreal region, deserves that the necessary time be taken to study it in depth. This brief will address the several aspects upon which the City of Westmount wishes to be heard, namely:

- Westmount's interest in this project;
- Westmount's vision regarding sustainable development;
- Westmount's position on the project, in particular on the issues it raises and its impact on our residents during the work;
- The measures we propose in order to mitigate the impact.

Why is the City of Westmount interested in the project?

Because in Westmount, we fear the impact the construction process will have on our quality of life.

Because Westmount wants to ensure that this project will be carried out from a sustainable development perspective.

Because in Westmount, we are committed to the idea that our city must meet the needs of the current generation without compromising those of our children.

However, what has been presented here appears to be far from meeting sustainable development criteria. Rather than providing improvements, the plan continues the demolition work of the past. The construction of the Ville-Marie Expressway in the early 1970s created a genuine division in the south part of our city. It also led to increased noise and pollution, and a decline in the quality of life of our residents.

We all agree that the Turcot Interchange must be rebuilt because of the danger it represents. Public safety is the priority, and we recognize that efforts must be made to correct the situation. But, this is also an opportunity to undertake a project that will ensure the transportation of people... not only the circulation of vehicles. We could make this sector a true transit zone.

After all, this project costs one and a half billion dollars. Why not design a project from a global perspective?

We have come to a point in this era where we must find solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. What is the MTQ offering? A highway project from the 1950s in which the automobile continues to dominate.

To us, this problem is being looked at from the wrong angle. How do you rebuild to accommodate movement of the cars as opposed to how do you provide for the movement of people and goods? In other words, why build an interchange to facilitate automotive traffic? Rather, we should ask how to ensure the proper transportation of persons and goods. It is important to make that distinction.

Other cities, such as Boston, San Francisco and Washington, have built tunnels or bypasses for the transportation of goods. Why not use them as a model?

This is why at the City of Westmount it is of our opinion that the provision of public transit in the West Island, Montreal's north-west sector and in the downtown business sector must be improved. Reserved lanes for buses and more trains must therefore be provided.

Technology must be enhanced to ensure the addition of trains that do not cause more pollution and more noise. For example, a new light-rail train would enhance service without disturbing residents.

We believe that the MTQ should therefore support carpooling and public transit. One lane should be devoted to buses, taxis and other vehicles carrying more than two people. In short, this project must come to fruition, but have a truly sustainable development approach.

Westmount City Council adopted a vision statement on February 2 of this year. It is a source of inspiration that guides and supports our daily endeavours.

In concrete terms, this statement determines how we carry out projects. It forces us to take into account five fundamental aspects: The community, the environment, the economy, public health, and heritage.

- Community vision: *This means that we build a sense of responsibility and engagement – toward each other, other communities, and the peoples of the rest of the world.*
- Environmental vision: *This means that we are stewards of the natural environment – locally, regionally and globally. We acknowledge the need to work creatively to balance human needs with those of the Earth’s ecosystems.*
- Economic vision: *This means that we are part of an environmentally and socially conscious economy based on the prudent and socially responsible use of natural and human resources.*
- Public health vision: *This means that we provide mutual respect, and support human health and dignity in all of its aspects: physical, mental and social.*
- Heritage vision: *This means that we appreciate a strong sense of place and history, and work to preserve our distinctive landscape and built environment so they can endure over time.*

It is from this perspective that we took the time to analyze the Ministère’s proposed plan.

As mentioned earlier, the City of Westmount is concerned about the plan’s impact on its residents during and well beyond the period when the work will be

carried out; the impact on residents' quality of life, their health, their sleep, the air they breathe, noise, and traffic flow. The project, spread over seven years, will affect the local environment of Westmount for at least two years.

Two years of enduring noise and dust is a long time in a person's life.

Furthermore, the construction site will probably increase traffic flow on the arteries located on Westmount's East-West axis. If nothing is done, this situation could create real chaos in our city while the work is done.

Has the MTQ, jointly with the AMT and the STM, foreseen measures to prevent residential streets from turning into expressways?

Let me add that we at the City believe the time has come to permanently integrate photo radars on the 720 and even during the construction, to the sectors bordering residential neighbourhoods so as to limit speeding. We know that reducing speed on the highway has a direct impact on noise.

During this period, we want the Ministère to adopt measures to promote carpooling and public transit. Trucks should be banned from travelling through residential neighbourhoods, and forced to remain on highways. We also want the alternative routes chosen to be distributed equally among the various communities.

Another aspect to be considered: The City of Westmount stresses the importance of installing a noise-abatement wall to protect the sector to the west

of Greene Avenue and going eastward, that we have been requesting for a long time, before the onset of the work. A noise-abatement wall extending the prototype we already have is necessary. Throughout this process we have been told that we didn't know what we were going to do with the highway. Now that we know there is no reason to wait. This noise-abatement wall will protect Westmount residents. The Ministère might also consider the needs of Montreal residents living east of Atwater.

Landscaping improvements to the east of Greene Avenue should also be envisaged, to the extent possible. This landscaping would protect residents living on the outskirts of the highway.

The work schedule must respect our municipal by-laws pertaining to construction work. Our by-laws stipulate that construction work cannot be carried out during the following hours:

- Mondays to Fridays, between 9 p.m. and 7 a.m.;
- Saturdays, between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m.;
- Sundays and statutory holidays.

Our by-laws also limit the use of heavy equipment such as heavy delivery trucks, self-propelled excavating and loading equipment, cranes, cement mixers, and so on. The use of this type of equipment is restricted on the following days:

- Mondays to Fridays, between 6 p.m. and 7 a.m.;
- Saturdays, Sundays and statutory holidays, no work is allowed.

These by-laws also contain specific criteria on work site safety that we will be happy to forward to you again, upon request. Please note that these by-laws were developed with input from Westmount citizens. In this way, we wish to assure them a more peaceful quality of life even when construction is taking place.

In terms of urban integration, it is our opinion that with respect to design, the new viaducts should be harmonized with the Glen tunnel. We want to ensure visual continuity with the road of the same name.

The Glen tunnel is a true monument in our municipality, an important aspect of our heritage imprinted with historical value. We have reservations pertaining to the proposed design, whose shape and materials differ from those of the Glen tunnel, which is made entirely of stone. We are also concerned about the lighting proposed for the new tunnel, in particular the installation of rows of lamps which would contrast with the lighting in the existing tunnel.

We also believe that the construction of the complex should be well planned and coordinated with that of the future McGill University Health Centre. Otherwise, it could cause some inconvenience.

We have noted that the plan will have a very significant impact on the sector of Greene Avenue, between the off-ramp on Rose-de-Lima and the limits of

Westmount. This city block survived construction projects in the 1970s. We deplore the fact that the proposed layout would require the demolition of two residential buildings on Selby Street. With the highway coming closer to the citizens on Saint-Antoine Street, their quality of life will inevitably be affected.

This brings to mind the massive expropriation of residential property in our community during the construction of Highway 720. The government of the day decided to create the Ville-Marie Expressway by destroying the southern sector of our municipality. This had the effect of tearing the social fabric of this sector. The time has come to repair this tear. Once again, expropriation would result in the loss of rental property and property tax revenue for the City of Westmount. Is this really necessary?

Westmount is also concerned about the impact on the space occupied by its municipal public works department and Hydro Westmount. The loss of space in the road department and Hydro Westmount yards would cause substantial impairment to our operations, because we have no other space in the City to relocate them.

Another issue about which we have reservations is the St. Jacques escarpment. The St. Jacques escarpment from Montreal West to the Décarie Expressway has been identified as an eco-territory. After discussing the subject with the Municipal Council, we believe that its extension into Westmount must also be given special attention. It must be preserved and its natural topography promoted.

In brief, the City of Westmount cannot support the project as presented during the BAPE's public hearings. It is our conviction that we must encourage our citizens to remain on the Island of Montreal. But if their quality of life continues to be affected, this will entice our residents to leave the island.

Westmount, like other cities and certain boroughs of Montreal, has proven that it is possible to provide a quality of life to its citizens who choose to live in the city. We must continue to create conditions that encourage them to do so. The Turcot Interchange project is a step in the opposite direction.

Thus, we ask the BAPE to send the Ministère back to the drawing board to revise its project to integrate a wider range of transportation methods.

In the absence of a project with real vision, the Ministère must foresee all mitigating measures conducive to the creation and maintenance of a liveable environment for the duration of the work.

We recognize the importance of the project. We realize that the Turcot Interchange must be rebuilt. However, we insist that the project focus on sustainable development and that it enhances the quality of life for residents living on the outskirts of the interchange.

The Ministère must also offer mitigation measures to preserve the quality of life of our residents and maintain a viable environment during the two years of construction in Westmount.

Two years of enduring noise and dust is too much in the life of our elders,
children, families and students.

Karin Marks
Mayor, City of Westmount