

Memorandum to the Office de Consultation Publique de Montréal

From Robert Hajaly

January 7, 2010

Regarding the restructuring of the Bonaventure Autoroute, 1st phase

Just to introduce myself, I reside and work downtown, though not in the area of this project. I am interested in issues of urban development, particularly of the downtown area, and of public transport; hence my double interest in this project.

The project has two distinct aspects, whether to replace the elevated portion of the Bonaventure Autoroute with an urban boulevard, and where to route buses to the south shore. I will treat these issues separately.

Regarding the replacement of the elevated autoroute, this was justified as promoting development in this area, as linking the areas east and west of the autoroute, and creating an impressive gateway to Montreal. Starting with development, I do not think this project will promote significant development at this time, at least as envisaged by the promoters. There are many vacant sites available for development in the established downtown area and there has been in particular little office development there in the last few years. Why then should a developer wish to put up an office building in the peripheral area of this project? Also why locate a residential building or hotel in what would essentially be a traffic island between Duke and Nazareth Streets?

Mr. Gaëtan Rainville himself admitted to me at the information session of December 2 that no developer had committed himself to building any of the buildings projected by the promoters. Therefore, the specific figure claimed by the promoters, that this project would result in \$1,528 million of investments, is deceptive, since it suggests that actual commitments have been made having a precise value. I would therefore conclude, contrary to the promoters' claim, that this project will not pay for itself, at least in the next ten to fifteen years.

Regarding the new urban boulevard linking together the areas east and west of it, I think this claim is equally false. There are now underpasses under the autoroute at William, Ottawa, Wellington and Brennan Streets, and the urban boulevard replacing the autoroute will not add any more crossings. It is true that the elevated autoroute creates a visual barrier, but removing it would still leave over the barrier created to the immediate west of it by the elevated railway viaduct.

Finally, regarding the creation of an impressive gateway, I think it is more important to promote the harmonious and respectful development of the area neighbouring the proposed urban boulevard, particularly to the east of it, than to create such a gateway. In this regard, the high rise character of the imagined buildings between Duke and Nazareth Streets is way out of scale with the neighbouring buildings to the east, most of which are

low rise or at most no more than nine stories. Also, these high rise buildings would throw long shadows over their neighbouring low rise buildings, particularly in winter but also in spring and fall.

To conclude, I believe this project is premature and that it will not pay for itself in the near future. The better option for now is to repair the elevated portion of the autoroute as necessary. The \$55 million cost of this repair claimed by the promoters is, I believe, exaggerated. When I casually inspected the autoroute to Brennan Street I could see no crumbling concrete, visible cracks or salt erosion. At most there was a metal mesh under one small part of the autoroute which might indicate trouble. I would suggest that an independent professional inspection of the autoroute to de la Commune be made to get a verified estimate of the cost of repair.

The promoters claim that if the autoroute is repaired it will still have to be reconstructed in twenty years time. If this is truly so, or if, in the meantime, the pace of office construction downtown picks up and vacant spaces there are being used up, or if, alternatively, the promoters can get actual commitments for a sizable portion of the projected investments, then this project can then go ahead.

If this project does eventually go ahead consideration should be given to making the area between Duke and Nazareth Streets down to Brennan Street into a linear park so as to create a more pleasant environment there and thereby promote development to the east of this park. In any case, buildings associated with this development should not be much higher than the tallest buildings immediately to the east of Duke Street, that is, about ten to twelve floors. Also, sidewalks on Duke and Nazareth Streets should be no more than about 3.5 metres (11.5 feet) wide, not the projected 4.2 and especially 9.5 metres which will create wide expanses of barren concrete with few people walking on them. And the monument at the south end between Brennan and Wellington Streets should be more indicative in its character of Montreal.

Finally, whether or not this project goes ahead, the appearance and impact on its environment of the elevated railway viaduct should be improved as soon as possible through cooperation between CN and the city of Montreal. Specifically, where the sides of the viaduct are dirty, stained, discoloured or covered with graffiti they should be cleaned and/or repainted in the same colour as at present. Also, all the underpasses between Notre Dame and Brennan Streets also need to be cleaned and, at least for the doors and beams, painted. And they need to be better lit, particularly the pedestrian walkways which have no lighting, and to be lit in the day, when the underpasses are still dark, as well as at night. All this should make using these underpasses, particularly by pedestrians, a more secure and pleasant experience, and so increase their use.

I turn now to the issue of the route for buses to the south shore. The Dalhousie corridor is supported by the promoters as being the most direct and the only dedicated corridor from the terminus at 1000 De La Gauchetière to the Bonaventure Autoroute. My

own view is that if you take into account both buses leaving as well as arriving at the De La Gauchetière terminus the Dalhousie route is not significantly more direct than other possible routes, and its dedicated character does not justify its disadvantages.

Specifically, if buses leaving the terminus instead went south along Peel Street to the autoroute while those arriving took the Bonaventure Autoroute and then University Street until turning left onto either St. Jacques or St. Antoine Street, the total distance travelled would be about the same as with the Dalhousie corridor. It should be born in mind that buses leaving the terminus and using the Dalhousie corridor must travel three blocks eastward to get to the projected Dalhousie Street. My proposed alternative would work best, specifically for buses turning left from University Street onto either St. Jacques or St. Antoine Street, if there were for a short delay a red traffic light preventing traffic moving southward along University Street while the buses had a green light to make their left turn (just as there is now, for example, for traffic moving north on Atwater Street to make a left turn onto de Maisonneuve Street).

The dedicated character of the Dalhousie corridor is an advantage, though it does not escape the bottleneck created by the Bonaventure autoroute having only three lanes each way to accommodate all traffic, and is not enough of an advantage to compensate for its disadvantages. First, it will cause considerable noise, smell, pollution, vibrations and possibly corresponding diminution of property values for the residents of the Lowney buildings, particularly those facing or close to St. Maurice Street. Bear in mind that buses leaving the terminus on their way to Dalhousie Street pass right in front of the Lowney building on St. Maurice Street, and news reports speak of 1400 such buses eventually passing daily. It is morally wrong and perhaps legally actionable to subject people to such a negative impact if reasonable alternatives can be found.

The second disadvantage is possible damage to the heritage New City Gas Company building south of Ottawa Street from buses passing very closely to this building. The space between the elevated railway viaduct and this building is so narrow that buses passing between them will almost be touching this building, and indeed the diagram of the project in the OCPM brochure shows the bus corridor actually touching the New City Gas building, which now has a sidewalk in front of it allowing people to get out of the building. The final disadvantage is the \$86 million cost of this corridor, which would be better spent contributing to the cost of a light railway to the south shore.

It was suggested by a city of Montreal employee at the information session of December 2, I believe, that Peel Street was not suitable for south shore buses because it was being reserved for a tramway. Leaving aside that this tramway is for an uncertain future, it should be noted that the STM 515 bus, whose route follows that of the proposed tramway, is now little used to go south on Peel Street. It hasn't been shown that having a tramway would make a great difference in this respect. It seems to me that public money should be spent rather to alleviate a situation where there is now a real and increasing demand, and that is by creating a light railway to the south shore. This offers, in my view,

the only long term solution to the problem of congestion to the south shore caused by the bottleneck of the six lane Bonaventure Autoroute and the Champlain Bridge.

However, until there is such a light railway, buses arriving from the south shore should come up to the terminus, to repeat my view, along the Bonaventure Autoroute, and then University Street, turning left on either St. Jacques or St. Antoine Street, with a time delay of the traffic light to facilitate their left turn. And buses should leave the terminus along Peel Street to the autoroute. This alternative route, it seems to me, offers the best balance of advantages over disadvantages of all the routes proposed, and in particular is preferable in this respect to the use of the Dalhousie corridor supported by the promoters of this project.

Robert Hajaly