



Consultation on Québec's Sustainable Development Plan

Green Coalition Brief

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INTRODUCTION

The Green Coalition is a non-profit association of grassroots volunteers. Its member-groups and individual members are dedicated to the conservation, protection and restoration of the environment. Members are actively involved in many issues such as saving Montreal's last natural green spaces, preventing road building through established Nature-Parks and other green spaces, boosting public transit strategies; promoting alternatives to pesticides, pressing for the clean up of waste-water runoff and polluted creeks, and for responsible waste reduction and management. In short, the Green Coalition is working vigorously in Montreal, to shape a sustainable development city.

But, it is the green space issue and its urgency, like no other issue, that has stirred the passions of Montrealers and spurred long-term community participation. The Green Coalition traces its roots back to early conservation efforts in the 1970s. Persistent lobbying through the late 1980s by the volunteer member-groups persuaded the Montreal Urban Community to adopt its \$200 million **Green Space Acquisition and Aménagement Program** in 1989. Nature-Parks were created and augmented, but a Moratorium ended the program in 1992, leaving one-half the budget, \$100 million, unspent and many important sites unprotected. In December 2004, the City of Montreal adopted its **Policy on the Protection and Enhancement of Natural Habitats (Natural Spaces Policy)** long-sought by the Green Coalition.

This brief is presented by Mr. David Fletcher and Mrs. Sylvia Oljemark. Both are porte-parole of the Green Coalition. Mr. Fletcher is Vice-President; Mrs. Oljemark is a member of the Board of Directors and served as the first President of the Green Coalition.

Scope of this brief

While the focus of this brief is the conservation of the remnant pieces of natural green space on the Island of Montreal, the principles embodied in this pursuit apply equally to Greater Montreal, indeed the entirety of Québec. On Saturday, January 29, 2005, the Common Front for the last Natural Spaces in Greater Montreal held its first Forum, building a stronger and broader constituency of support for Québec's Sustainable Development agenda. With groups and individuals from across the region, from the South-Shore to the Lower-Laurentians gearing up to work together in the Common Front, green space conservation efforts have been given an important new impetus and wider horizons. Grassroots initiatives are evolving quickly across the Greater Montreal region and beyond. The Québec Government will have to address the needs and aspirations of the Common Front as these needs crystallize. An overarching land-use strategy for the entire region, structured on sustainable development principles is badly needed.

Efforts to save Montreal's green spaces have been complicated by the constant threat of new road construction through Nature-Parks and other natural areas: the Green Coalition became involved in transportation, an important environmental issue in its own right. This paper deals mainly with concerns about current proposals for new road building.

Theme: Conservation of Genetic Biodiversity

It is to the credit of this present administration that, at long last, Québec's new direction in policy and practice will be brought into conformity with a worldwide consensus derived in "*Our Common Future*", the 1987 report of The World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the "*Brundtland Report*" after its chairperson, Gro Harlem Brundland. In setting out the broad principles for sustainable practice by the nations of the World, the report states: "*Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future.*" It is now nearly eighteen years since its objectives

were published. In the interim, there have been numerous environmental developments, some hopeful, others more ominous.

In June 1992, at Rio de Janeiro, Canada was among 157 nations that first signed the Convention on Biological Diversity. The principle objectives of this Convention are "... *the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from its utilization.*" Further, "*The Convention recognizes that the key to maintaining biological diversity depends on using this diversity in a sustainable manner*" On a darker note, by the time of the Convention's coming into force on December 29, 1993, Canada had declared a moratorium on cod fishing in the Atlantic due to overfishing and the collapse of stocks. We, in Montreal and the surrounding region, are alarmed and dismayed to see the same decimation befalling our local forests and wetlands.

The Montreal region is an ecologically distinct part of Québec, rich with a diversity of species and habitats. The maple-hickory forest of this area represents the northern terminus of the range for many southern species that can be found nowhere else in Québec. Interspersed throughout are marshes, peat bogs and other types of wetland harbouring their own assemblages of plant and animal species unique in Québec. *Québec's Sustainable Development Plan* should give special consideration to the conservation needs of Montreal Island and its region. Here in this ecologically distinct corner of Québec lies the zone of greatest development pressure. Its once contiguous forest ecosystem is now mostly fragmented into small remnant pockets. Unrelenting and uncompromising urbanization has put unique spaces, as well as species unique in Québec, at risk. If there is any place in Québec where development is not sustainable, it is in the Montreal region. The situation on Montreal Island is particularly grave.

"Habitat alteration and species extinction are not the only threat. The planet is also being impoverished by the loss of races and varieties within species. . . . Many species are losing whole populations at a rate that quickly reduces their genetic variability and thus their ability to adapt to climatic change and other forms of environmental adversity. . . . Thus there can be an important difference between loss of species and loss of gene reservoirs." (*"Our Common Future"*)

Genetic biodiversity - overlooked in the Sustainable Development Plan: The question of genetic biodiversity is not raised in the '*biodiversity action plan*' of the draft Sustainable Development Plan. Diverse gene pools present in unique populations, races and subspecies also need conserving. The process of constricting or even homogenizing gene pools is insidious and can be driven by ill-considered renaturalization schemes of the sort practiced by the forest industry. The process is likely to be irreversible. Remnant natural spaces in the Montreal region, often containing species and races at risk, represent an archive of genetic information whose value for future evolution - and exploitation - can only be guessed at. It is that interactive archive that drives the natural processes that maintain the healthy functioning of both species and ecosystems. This self-generated and adaptative "handbook" is at the root of the workings of the living environment. We cannot know where those individual specimens exist that harbour those characteristics that will in future secure the species from changing environmental conditions or the threats posed by new pathogens. The precautionary principle does not allow us to presume that these homegrown resources will not be of future value, to the species, to the environment or to our children who may wish to draw on them. Priority must be placed on conserving and corridorizing what fragments remain of local relatively undegraded natural spaces for this reason alone.

Renaturalization of farmland - precaution needed: The *biodiversity action plan* has, as one of its objectives, to "By 2005, set up pilot projects for the restoration of natural habitats in agricultural areas." It is to be hoped that this will be undertaken with the greatest sensitivity. It must be kept in mind that agricultural lands themselves are under development pressure in the Montreal region. In a world struggling to feed itself, these are

lands that currently provide an indispensable sustainable development service in their own right. Their renaturalization can be no substitute for the conservation of ecological areas rich with indigenous species and genes. Only where environmental services previously rendered outweigh those from agriculture would such transformation be justified. It does not make sense to attempt the renaturalization of farmland while allowing pristine ecosystems to be denaturalized elsewhere. While restoration of disturbed lands will be warranted in some locations for a variety of reasons, rehabilitation can never be a complete surrogate for ecologically intact living laboratories. On Montreal Island we are building in both farmland and relatively undisturbed natural areas!

Conserve green zones where people live: As to the goal to set up 10 ecological reserves this is easy where there is only wilderness to be dealt with. However, the real need for ecological conservation is where it is hard - where people and developers and speculation are. John F. Kennedy in setting a goal to put a man on the moon declared: "We choose to do this not because it is easy, but because it is hard." The measure of how serious we are about sustainable development is seen in how doggedly and courageously we take on the tough challenges such as conserving a green zone in southwestern Québec. A national park in Nunavik is not half so impressive as one embracing the forests and wetlands of the Montreal Region. Québec voters will be delighted - and so will the world!

Al Gore, in his book "*Earth in the Balance*", states: "In drawing a circle of value around those things we consider important enough to measure in our economic system, we not only exclude a great deal that is important in the environment, we also discriminate against future generations." We must ensure that the Québec "circle of value" includes the richness of species and integrity of natural spaces we enjoy now with all their diverse genetic inheritance intact for the benefit of those generations that follow us.

References¹

CONTEXT

Développement durable, le choix de Montréal is the city's new slogan. But to attain its sustainable development goals and international endorsement, the city must first conserve its natural spaces and ensure the indigenous biodiversity of its territory. Laudably, in December 2004, the city adopted its long-awaited Natural Spaces Policy. The objectives outlined in the new Policy are excellent. The city has pledged to boost protected natural areas from 3% to 8% of Montreal's territory. Achieving the 8% target would satisfy both Québec and International norms and validate the city's sustainable development aspirations. Ten eco-systems or "Écoterritories" across the city, offering a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna, are delineated for protection. Implementing the plan is a tremendous challenge, demanding resources and time. Both are limited. Political will and determination are paramount necessities. The Government can no longer ignore the plight of Montreal – the economic engine of Québec.

Urgent: Without green spaces Montreal can never be a Sustainable Development City

Unchecked, construction has stripped 1,000 hectares of forested lands from the metropolis since the late 1980s - the city has had no green space program for over 12 years. With almost 90% of the territory already developed and with the housing boom, valuable biomass is being torn from the city landscape daily. Montreal's last natural green spaces (1600 hectares) are owned by developers and are zoned for development. Development pressures are so severe that these unprotected green spaces are at risk of disappearing completely in the near future. Even if all 1600 hectares that are left of the natural spaces are protected, green space quotas can be boosted to somewhat over only 6% of the territory, falling well short of the international standard of 8%. With such spaces being finite in number and disappearing fast, the Green Coalition continues to insist that Meadowbrook and its

Little Saint-Pierre River be included as an ecoterritory (endorsed by the Office de consultation publique de Montréal).

Québec must make sustainable development a reality in Montreal - where people live

Montreal's efforts to become a bona fide "Sustainable Development City" are worthy of support from the Québec government! Benefits that accrue from a one-time investment in urban natural spaces are permanent and perennial. Vital green space biomass mitigates the effects of urban pollution on air, soil and water - moderates ambient temperatures and global warming; sweeps particulate matter and greenhouse gas emissions; and sequesters carbon, etc. Green spaces provide recreational potential for the physical and mental well-being of urban dwellers, diminishing health care costs. And other economic spin-offs are compelling – the natural attributes of the Island Metropolis are not only "Récréo-Touristique" attractions, but green landscapes also enhance the city's quality of life that attracts people, economic investment and enterprise.

GREEN COALITION REQUESTS

Sustainable Development rhetoric abounds at all levels of government in 2005! Green Coalition calls for action now on the following measures:

Matching Green Space dollars are needed now

The Green Coalition continues to press the Québec Government for a one-time injection of dedicated funds of at least \$40 million, over 3 years, to match the City of Montreal contribution according to the city's new Natural Spaces Policy. The Coalition seeks an equal contribution from the Federal Government. The \$40 million set aside by the City for the program is insufficient. Mayor Gerald Tremblay has stated that between \$100 and \$200 million will be needed to save the natural heritage of all Montrealers.

The MUC Green Space Program collapsed in 1992 due to the lack of financial support from the superior governments – at the same time that downloading was draining city coffers. Note that the Federal Government has made no contribution to green space spending in Montreal – ever. Between 1979 and 1992, the MUC invested close to \$200 million in the acquisition and management of its Nature-Parks. The total sum contributed by the Québec Government is \$12.5 million - in two installments back in 1979 and 1981.

Montrealers deserve better!!

Landbanking and swapping - make these proposals a reality now

The Green Coalition urges the three levels of government to collaborate now to set up a landbank of surplus Federal and Québec properties that can be swapped for natural spaces owned by developers, as well as trading revitalized brownfields for greenfields. Contaminated lands, or brownfields, once rehabilitated through "The National Brownfield Redevelopment Strategy" and Québec's Revi-sols Program, offer exceptional economic opportunities for redevelopment or re-greening to boost the city's depleted biomass. Montreal has no lack of such land – namely 4,800 hectares, threefold the amount of land currently protected.

Green Coalition calls for BAPE (Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement) hearings on Montreal's "ecoterritories"

BAPE hearings are needed on major projects that could impact heavily on two ecoterritories, identified in Montreal's Natural Spaces Policy. The two ecoterritories are the Cheval Blanc Rapids Ecoterritory and the Rivière-à-l'Orme Ecoforest Corridor, two of the most sensitive and important eco-systems remaining on the Island of Montreal.

BAPE – re: Cheval Blanc Rapids Ecoterritory: Controversy swirls over the colossal, Miami Beach style project proposed for the rare shoreline Cheval Blanc Ecoterritory in Pierrefonds. Twenty substantial structures

including five condo towers could loom over Cheval Blanc West. Most of Cheval Blanc East has been lost to development since 2002.

BAPE – re: Rivière-à-l’Orme Ecoforest Corridor: A major artery is planned that will cut through the Anse-à-l’Orme Corridor, through rare forest, beaver marsh, deer yards and the river course. Because of the configuration of the L-shaped ecocorridor and the curving road, the highway would carve through the greenbelt not once but twice. Road building is not the only threat to the corridor; many new housing projects are planned within the ecoterritory. *“The forest corridor bordering Rivière-à-l’Orme serves as a strategic link for the fauna and flora of the three neighbouring nature parks (Anse-à-l’Orme, Bois-de-la-Roche, and Cap-Saint-Jacques)”*.
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BAPE – re: Basic premise of conservation strategy for ecoterritories needs scrutiny:

The BAPE must scrutinize the basic premise behind the Montreal’s conservation strategy. The City intends to permit building in the “protected” ecoterritories. Acquisition through outright purchase is to be used to secure desirable parklands only as a last resort, according to the policy. Instead, bargaining with landowners - in most cases real estate developers - is to determine whether lands will be saved or not. The limited funds for the purchase of Montreal’s last green spaces has fuelled fears that this new policy will be weighted in favour of the interests of real estate development and real estate developers – fears that encroachment through building will despoil much of the remaining natural sites. **Montreal’s Master Plan adopted in November 2004 fails to protect even one square metre of these ecoterritories: all these lands are zoned for development** (except for portions in established Nature Parks and small remnants of the farm zone).

A considerable body of opinion exists that development should be kept outside the limits of the ecoterritories; that building in natural spaces is no way to protect them. This opinion, garnered at public hearings in all corners of the city during the months of March, April and May 2004, was summarized in the Office de consultation publique de Montréal report - **“Moreover, to reduce current pressures on certain areas targeted by the policy, the Commission recognizes the necessity of imposing a moratorium on all development projects in the ecoterritories natural spaces and buffer zones.”** (communiqué OCPM).

Interim Control Bylaws; Moratorium; Inventories; Protection Policies

Interim Control Bylaws: In 2003, the Communauté Métropolitaine de Montréal (CMM) adopted a number of Interim Control Bylaws, designed to temporarily freeze development in some natural spaces across its territory. The Québec Government blocked the coming into force of the controls. Green Coalition urges the government to unclog this block! Such measures can ward off rampant development until funding and other mechanisms can be secured to acquire or protect desirable parkland. The MUC used Interim Controls very effectively in the 1980s.

A Moratorium on construction in wetlands and natural green spaces, like that imposed in Longueuil, in tandem with requirements for exhaustive inventories of wetland attributes – bogs, marshes, floodplains and forested lands, should be extended to Montreal, Montérégie, Laval and the North-Shore. Such inventories of the region’s rich natural biodiversity, coupled with public hearings, can facilitate shaping policies for the conservation of required quotas of natural areas in all communities, towns, boroughs, merged or not. The entrenchment and implementation of such policies must have the force of law and be enforced. To ensure that communities especially endowed with green spaces save their natural areas, a system of “eco-credit” trading with have-not areas in a given region can be promoted. These measures should be carried out in all regions of Québec.

**Green Coalition Proposal – Lake of Two Mountains National Park-
Phase I of Green Belt Plan**

The Green Coalition has proposed that a Lake of Two Mountains National Park be created to encompass Paul Sauvé Park, Oka, Hudson, Vaudreuil, Dorion, Île Perrot shoreline parks and the Islets. In addition, the plan would include protection for the Lake itself and, in a first for Québec, National Park status would be extended to at least two important natural areas on the Island of Montreal – Cap-Saint-Jacques and the Rivière-à-l’Orme Ecoforest Corridor. The Lake Park is envisaged as Phase I in a Green Belt Plan to englobe the Montreal Archipelago and waterways. The scheme has enormous “Récréo-Touristique” potential while conserving natural milieux.

The kernel of the idea for this initiative came from MNA Geoff Kelley, during discussion on the possibility of creating Québec Parks on Montreal Island.

More inspiration comes from the Ontario Plan to establish a 720,000 hectare Green Belt. Let’s not be shy to borrow a good idea! Let’s remember that Montreal is woefully deficient in protected natural space. In a study by the National Post in 2002, in a field of fourteen Canadian cities, Montreal was dead last for green space quotas.³

Guarantees, Guarantors for Natural Spaces Policy

The Green Coalition requests a guarantee from the Québec Government that Montreal’s Natural Spaces Policy and its funding would survive a municipal administration change and that the Government would stand as a guarantor that the program would continue. The Coalition urges the City of Montreal to help secure such guarantees from the superior governments and to formally entrench these guarantees in the Natural Spaces Policy.

COMMENTS, RECOMMENDATIONS

La politique de protection des rives, du littoral et des plaines inondables

Tighten up rules: apply forcefully

For long decades in Québec, there has been a prevalent culture of landfilling and building close to riverfront shores round our urban centres. Consult old and new topography maps to see drastic changes in “before and after” images of shoreline profiles! In 2005, we know that shorelines, floodplains, bogs, marshlands, creeks are aquatic milieux burgeoning with flora and fauna that offer the richest biodiversity of all natural areas.

These waterside milieux are also the most fragile and sensitive. And they are the most vulnerable and coveted by real-estate developers. The construction of “chateaux” and condo towers deluxe command premium waterfront vistas and big profits. In 2005, it appears that it is still far too easy for builders, motivated by the bottom line and assisted by compliant municipal officials, to find loopholes in environmental regulations and to secure permits. The tradition continues – marshlands are drained and filled, streams diverted and capped, floodplain zoning is shuffled off and suburbs bulge. Taxpayers are the losers, paying out substantial yearly sums claimed for flood-damaged properties. And Québec loses wetland habitats, its irreplaceable repositories of biodiversity.

La politique de protection des rives, du littoral et des plaines inondables should be legislated into law. The City of Montreal has requested that 10 and 15 meter shoreline setbacks stipulated in the politique be increased to 30 meters. Given climate-change and the probability of severe weather events, the Green Coalition proposes 50 meter setbacks be the rule. Beefing up this politique and the *Politique des debits reserves ecologiques pour la protection du poisson et ses habitats* is desirable. But above all, the Coalition urges that these and other

measures that protect Québec's wetlands and other ecologically valuable spaces be most rigorously and scrupulously applied!

Québec Law on Setbacks is needed for Sustainable Development

Mr. Avrom Shtern, of Les Amis de Meadowbrook, a Green Coalition member-group contributes the following comment:

Cities have encroached up to the limits of industrial installations and railway yards, which have had pre-existing rights, without regard for the need of safe distance setbacks. A balance must be struck between the conflicting needs of viable economic activities and healthy residential communities.

Class 3 industries such as railway yards and the recently cancelled Asphalt/Soil Decontamination plants in Lachine must have setbacks of at least 300 meters from future residential developments to avoid/ mitigate technological risk and conflicting land uses.

Such setbacks apply in Ontario under the aegis of the Ministry of the Environment. Technological risks to sensitive lands and ecologically important green spaces are recognized in the *Ontario Municipal Guidelines on Compatibility Between Industrial Facilities and Sensitive Land Uses*. The guideline is "intended to be applied in the land use planning process to prevent or minimize future land use problems due to the encroachment of sensitive land uses and industrial land uses on one another."

Meadowbrook Golf Course located in Côte-St-Luc-Hampstead, Montreal West and Lachine Boroughs could not be built on or developed if such guidelines were applicable here in Québec.

The Québec Government is urged to adopt setback standards – equivalent to those in force in Ontario – for future industrial and residential development, railway rights-of-way, as well as for green spaces and shorelines.

Agricultural land and Québec's Sustainable Development Plan

Ms. Alison Hackney, proprietor of La Ferme du Fort Senneville and Green Coalition member offers the following comment:

It is absolutely essential for the Québec government to act immediately and decisively to protect farmland particularly in the urban shadow. Protection of agricultural land supports every one of the fourteen principles for sustainable development in the draft plan. Careless use of agricultural land leading to erosion, mineral depletion, or urban sprawl has led to the decline of several civilizations (Wright, 2004) and is a grave threat to sustainable development.

Besides producing food, agricultural land provides many benefits: source water protection, recreation, attractive landscape, air quality, wildlife habitat, buffer between inhabited areas and nature preserves (Peterson in Farmland Preservation Conference: Protecting Farmland for Farmers. June 28-29, 2004, Guelph, Ontario ; Barr 2003).

However, Canadian agriculture is in a crisis: "Towns and cities occupied more than 7% of Canada's best agricultural land" and "consumed 7,400 square kilometers" between 1951 and 2001; dependable farmland declined by 4% (Statistics Canada 2005). This is drastic when we consider that arable land is less than 3% of Canada's land mass.

Urban encroachment is especially significant for crops that have a limited ability to grow in Canada, as in the Niagara and Okanagan areas, and in areas such as Montreal, which have very favorable microclimates.

In spite of Québec's Law to Protect Agricultural Land (1978) which was supposed to maintain the "Permanent Agricultural Zone", farmland has decreased yearly since the adoption of the Law. The Commission that administers the Law « doit négocier avec une pression pour le dézonage toujours constante » (Mercier, 2005).

In 1991, at the request of the MUC, the Québec government de-zoned 700 hectares of Montreal's "Permanent" Agricultural Zone – some of the best farmland in Québec. This action reversed a long-standing commitment by the MUC to protect the urban farm zone. In its recently adopted Urban Plan, the City of Montreal stated its intention to maintain the "Permanent Agricultural Zone". However, it is worrisome that in the very next line of section 11.4 of the Plan, it is stated that land *could be excluded* from the farm zone. Ironically, on December 13th 2004, the City voted to adopt its *Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels* the very same night it voted to de-zone farmland in its Pierrefonds/Senneville borough.

Unfortunately, the attitude persists that farmland and natural habitat are a reserve of cheap empty space that highway engineers or real estate developers can use for roads or houses when convenient. Sometimes the characteristics that make land good for farming also make it easy and inexpensive to build on. This must never be an excuse for developing agricultural land. The president of the Commission pour la Protection du Territoire Agricole du Québec has said that 30,000 hectares of land are available in the "zone blanche", that is, non-agricultural land, in the Montreal Metropolitan Community. The government must see to it that vacant non-agricultural land is used, and never good farmland. The Québec government must absolutely protect agricultural land.

Even if a farm business is not viable under current circumstances, the land is still too valuable to the community to allow it to be sold to an industrial or residential user, as noted above. However, farmers in the urban shadow may lose a huge opportunity cost: they should not have to shoulder the financial burden of preserving farmland for the public good. Often their farm is their pension plan. "It may be prudent public policy to compensate even if [the government] can't compensate entirely for that lost cost" (Peterson 2004). Nonetheless, small farms in the urban setting can be viable. Research has proven small diversified farms to be more efficient than large industrialized operations (National Farmers' Union 2003). As well, of course, they are much more desirable neighbours.

As agricultural land is eaten up by expanding suburbs, food supplies come from farther and farther away. Land also becomes more and more expensive, and farming infrastructure (machinery dealers, equipment suppliers) less dependable: it becomes more difficult for farmers to make a living. As the cost of producing rises, more farms go out of business. The cycle is self-perpetuating. In the context of dwindling supplies of petroleum, this situation is even more acute.

Ultimately this is a great loss for consumers. Although shoppers may not immediately pay more at the cash, there are many hidden costs: food trucked from afar is certainly less fresh and likely to be less nutritious and less appetizing. Much more energy is expended to deliver it, with all the attendant results of greenhouse gases, pollution, and traffic (Barr 2003). As well as providing a buffer between residential and natural spaces, local farms are important reservoirs of wild and domestic biodiversity. Typically farms have at least some natural land on their property. Crops and livestock are likely to be adapted to local conditions, especially if the farm is organic or non-industrial.

References⁴

Stronger Statutes are needed for Montreal's Nature-Parks

The Green Coalition requests the Government of Québec to entrench rigorous statutes for the protection of Montreal's Nature-Parks. These parks are constantly threatened by development pressures and their statutes are extremely weak. Portions of the nature-parks, if not whole parks, can be leased, sold or rezoned. Only one of the nine nature-parks, Parc-nature du Bois-de-Saraguay has a special level of protection under the aegis of the Ministère des affaires culturelles as an Arrondissement naturel. All the Nature-Parks and the natural areas that will be protected by the new Natural Spaces Policy must have at least equivalent statutes to the Bois-de-Saraguay, where no trees may be cut.

TRANSPORTATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Autoroute 25 is incompatible with the Sustainable Development Plan

The Green Coalition is vehemently opposed to the construction of Autoroute 25 and the bridge to Laval. New roads spawn more cars and greenhouse gases. Upon the very coming into force of the Kyoto Protocol, it is unconscionable for the Québec Government to turn its back on public-transport initiatives. The \$800 million investment for the extension of the Metro to Laval will be undermined by the new autoroute. More automobile drivers will be encouraged to use their vehicles instead of the Metro. This is incoherent planning and inconsistent and incompatible with the notion that sustainable development is the guiding principle of the government.

Autoroute 25 and the Laval Bridge would serve to exacerbate traffic congestion on the Island of Montreal and promote off-island urban sprawl and the loss of more prime farmland. For the eco-disadvantaged East-end, the Autoroute would compromise the sensitive Islands Rochon, Boutin, Lapierre and Gagné and add stresses to the Ruisseau de Montigny Basin.

Discussion of Autoroute 25 has revived talk of building its mirror image in West Island, the 440 Autoroute to Laval. The 440 is equally unacceptable for many of the same reasons. Its construction would be an ecological disaster in idyllic Île-Bizard.

In the City of Montreal's Master Plan (Chapter 2.2) it was stated *"The City believes that it would be appropriate for the Québec government to rethink its priorities and to use grants from the federal government's Canadian Strategic Infrastructure Fund for public transportation instead of road building."* The Green Coalition concurs!

Major new road through Anse-à-l'Orme Ecoterritory - unacceptable

"Green Spaces come before roads," declared Montreal officials in response to upset citizens. In 2002, a controversial plan for a "spaghetti network" of new roads threatened to destroy nature parks and green spaces in the West Island. As a result of the public outcry, de Salaberry Boulevard planned for decades to slice through the Bois-Franc Forest in the Bois-de-Liesse Nature-Park was erased from the Master Plan adopted in November, 2004. But now, a new road plan threatens the Anse-à-l'Orme Ecoterritory.

Pierrefonds Boulevard to cut through Ecoterritory: An ill-conceived plan to extend the major artery through the Anse-à-l'Orme Ecoterritory (also called the Rivière-à-l'Orme Ecoforest Corridor) has been retained in the Master Plan. This high-speed road is designed so that commuters from the 6000 unit housing development planned for Western Pierrefonds may drive *west* to Morgan road and Beaurepaire station in order to take a train *east* into the city. Will commuters really want to make a detour in the opposite direction from their destination in order to take a train?

Ecological Impact of Pierrefonds Boulevard²

Extending this artery while preserving the ecological integrity of Anse-à-l'Orme Écoterritory is wishful thinking: it is an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. And once the sensitive zone is breached, more development alongside the road will surely follow. The hydrology of sensitive forested areas will be disrupted. The viability of the deer yards and a beaver marsh that provides habitat for migratory water fowl will be rendered impossible. Traffic will disturb the tranquil conditions for wildlife in the corridor as well as for people looking for a rare and peaceful retreat from the noise, smell and bustle of urban life.

The road plan is inconsistent with the City of Montreal's trumpeted commitment to both the Kyoto Protocol and to its sustainable development strategy. It is also incompatible with the City of Montreal's new Natural Spaces Policy: the most sensitive ecoterritory of all could be destroyed.

There are alternatives: Significant public transit services are essential for the area. Also, the same commuter traffic that would use the Pierrefonds Boulevard extension could be more easily channeled towards the Trans Canada Highway via the planned access road between Gouin Boulevard and Highway 40 along the servitude reserved for Autoroute 440. Note that the Green Coalition in no way advocates the completion of the 440 to Laval.

Integrated mass transit strategies needed to reduce traffic; GHGs

The Green Coalition continues to press for coherent integrated mass transit strategies to reduce vehicular traffic – car-pooling, dedicated lanes for filled vehicles, stiff fees for downtown parking, express-bus convoys, Park and Ride and shuttle bus services; off-island beltways to eliminate through trucking and light rail systems like Green Coalition's Doney Spur Proposal for a new Central West-Island/ Downtown service.

The *Doney Spur Light Rail Line* is the keystone piece of the Green Coalition's integrated mass transit strategies (first proposed by the Coalition in 1989). The old Spur has the potential to become a new Surface Metro for central West Island. Operating on a schedule comparable to existing Metro lines, the Doney Spur service can be linked at Bois-Franc Station to the entire Metro system, once the planned extension of the Orange Line from Côte Vertu to Bois-Franc Station is complete.

Kyoto means it's time to curb conspicuous consumption, waste

Canada's Automotive Industry must come on line to meet new stiff exhaust-emission standards, boosting fuel efficiency. Compliance is unavoidable and will be voluntary or, of necessity, obligatory. Loopholes that permit giant personal vehicles to be classed as trucks, thus bypassing standards for passenger cars, must be closed.

Political leaders are urged to curb voluntary consumer excesses! Luxury and consumption taxes on monster personal vehicles are a necessity, coupled with breaks for drivers of fuel efficient vehicles. And, at the pump, gas prices must be permitted to rise. Above all, major investments must be made in efficient, user-friendly public transit – NOT ROAD BUILDING! Let's encourage people to leave their cars at home.

CONCLUSION

The Green Coalition is proud to make some contribution to shaping Québec's Sustainable Development. We extend thanks to all who have made our participation possible.

Citizen volunteers in the Green Coalition are gratified that all levels of government are grappling with sustainable development issues. How exciting that the City of Montreal will host the *World Conference on Climate Change* in the fall! The World looks to Canada for ethical leadership. The World will look to Canada

for setting the bar high, not just on climate-change goals, but for standards of sustainable development and the protection of environmental integrity and biodiversity. Central and intrinsic to these challenges is the conservation of urban forests and natural milieux.

The World spotlight will shine on Québec's Metropolis - Montreal. Exceptional efforts will be demanded of political leaders to balance the region's considerable deficit in protected natural green space, to boost quotas to accepted international norms. Montrealers, Québécois and Canadians deserve no less!

FOOTNOTES:

¹References

Vice President Al Gore, "Earth in the Balance, Ecology and the Human Spirit", p. 190

"OUR COMMON FUTURE", WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT, Oxford New York, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1987, (Chap.6) SPECIES AND ECOSYSTEMS: RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENT, p. 148

²Rivière-à-l'Orme Ecoforest Corridor

Ecological Profile

This corridor comprises five distinct natural areas of considerable biodiversity: Angell Woods south of Autoroute 40; Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Woods west of Rivière-à-l'Orme; the two mature forest stands at each end of l'Anse-à-l'Orme Nature Park; and, the lowland area at the mouth of Rivière-à-l'Orme. Each of these areas is characterized by a mosaic of vegetation comprising mixed stands of young and mature forest growth, unimproved land, marshland, bogs and waterways. These natural areas are home to a number of rare species of plants and constitute potential habitat for three endangered species of animal life, namely, the red-shouldered hawk, Coopers hawk, and brown snake. The size of the mature wooded areas combined with the proximity of open land favours the presence of populations of birds of prey. Veronica anagallis-aquatic or American speedwell, and aquatic plant, particularly rare in Québec, can be found in the vicinity of Rivière-à-l'Orme. This ecoterritory encompasses the entirety of Rivière-à-l'Orme and its principal tributaries. The forest corridor bordering Rivière-à-l'Orme serves (as) a strategic link for the fauna and flora of the three neighbouring nature parks (l'Anse-à-l'Orme, Bois-de-la-Roche, and Cap-St.-Jacques).

excerpt - Policy on the Protection and Enhancement of Natural Habitats

City of Montreal, December 2004

³"The Intangibles that Define a Community" by Anne Marie Owens and Mary Vallis, National Post, Thursday October 17, 2002

⁴References

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