

Better bus service demands

Some changes on the way

The Westmount Examiner by Raffy Boudjikianian December 12nd 2007

It can take you 45 minutes to travel from de Salaberry near St. John's Boulevard to a street off Hymus by public transit. The same trip by car would take about 10 minutes.

There were a few unhappy voices at a public consultation held by the Société de Transport de Montréal (STM) last Wednesday night in Pointe Claire, despite the company's presentation on improved services.

"West Islanders have been paying for 40 years for metro services that they don't have," said David Fletcher of the Green Coalition. The Roxboro resident suggested converting the Donnie Spur train line, which crosses Sources Boulevard, Hymus and the TransCanada highway to end near St-John's, from a freight-dedicated line to one devoted to passengers.

Andrew Dawson, who lives in St. Laurent but frequently commutes to the West Island, is also an advocate of changing Donnie Spur. "It's a diamond in the rough," he told the STM commission.

Pointe Claire Mayor Bill McMurchie said he was apprehensive. "Donnie Spur has to be looked at realistically," he said. "Freight pays more than the riders," he explained, saying the cost to convert the line was prohibitive.

Marvin Rotrand, a Montreal city councillor who headed the STM commission, explained that a metro service in the West Island was unfeasible due to low population density. As for train services, they are run by the Agence Métropolitaine de Montréal (AMT). "We don't have any jurisdiction or authority there to even do a study," he said.

The STM's presentation focused on buses. Key goals include cutting down on waiting times between buses and trains in the West Island, and gradually decreasing Fairview Shopping Centre's importance as a terminal.

As of next March, the No. 209 bus, which links Dorval and Roxboro train stations, will run all day as opposed to rush hours, and in June, line 210, which goes to John Abbott College, will start making its run all year instead of just school days. "To stop people from making needless connections at Fairview, the 210 line will be prolonged to the east on Brunswick and Sources until Roxboro/Pierrefonds," said STM planning director François Pépin.

In two years, another compulsory Fairview connection might be stopped, as lines 207 and 208 are to be merged, allowing travellers to go from east to west on a single bus.

"It's a very positive first step," said Dawson, "but there is much more that needs to be done."

Sherry Blais, a Pierrefonds resident who lives in the Cloverdale area, took to the microphone with a shaky voice to ask how many people at the consultation took the bus to get there. A handful out of 50 raised their hands. None of the West Island's elected officials attending were among them. "I see none of the mayors took the bus to get here," she said. She maintained that the bad state of public transit in her area made lower-income residents feel like second or third-rate citizens.

"If I took the bus it would take me to two days to get here," replied Kirkland Mayor John Meaney. He criticized the STM's plan as ignorant of changes in the West Island. "We (in Kirkland) have got businesses that are working 24 hours a day, seven days a week," he said, explaining that it is a bad idea to only have buses run during rush hours.

"I would love to offer a service that's platinum for everybody at an ideal cost," said Rotrand. He said that the STM's services are still the cheapest in Quebec and compare very well to the rest of the country. The STM's budget for 2008 is \$938 million, with \$301.7 million supplied by the agglomeration council.