

Public transit needs paramount: briefs **BIG BUSINESS, GREEN COALITION AGREE Hearings on Montreal transportation plan**

ALYCIA AMBROZIAK THE GAZETTE Thursday, September 06

They may not always see eye to eye, but the West Island Development Council and the Green Coalition do agree that public transportation in the West Island has to be vastly improved, and quickly.

In its brief presented Aug. 28 at the public hearings on Montreal's transportation plan, the West Island Business Development Council recommended that three transportation projects for the West Island should be given the go-ahead simply to make public transportation adequate.

"Transportation projects on the West Island should be given Montreal's highest priority in order to realize the economic growth potential of the fastestgrowing area of Montreal," WIBDC industrial commissioner Gerry Arsenault said.

"Public transportation poses the biggest single obstacle to sustaining economic growth on the West Island, a region that has led growth in Montreal and the province over the last three decades."

Arsenault said timing is critical. "If we are to sustain economic growth we need those projects now – not in 15 or 20 years," he told the public consultation. "We already have projects that are being delayed by transportation issues."

Arsenault said the three priorities for the West Island identified in Montreal's transportation plan, and supported by municipal council resolutions, are the extension of the Jacques Bizard corridor; construction of an urban boulevard on the existing A440 right of way and redesign of the Dorval Circle.

"All of these could have a significant impact in creating a new, highly integrated public transportation network on the West Island," Arsenault said, adding, however, that the effectiveness of the projects depends on the completion of an express shuttle connecting downtown to Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport.

"This shuttle must be designed and constructed to allow for full integration into the public transit system and for an eventual extension to Ste. Anne de Bellevue," he said.

Arsenault said completion of the Jacques Bizard corridor would relieve traffic on the three existing north-south arteries and allow for the installation of high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, which would connect to the shuttle service.

Construction of the urban boulevard on the A440 right of way would open up the northwest section of the West Island to development and also serve as another north-south artery, he said, adding that redesign of the Dorval Circle would ease access to and from the airport and would accommodate an intermodal terminal.

"Few people appreciate the obstacles to growth created by transportation issues," Arsenault said. "We have employers who cannot expand because they cannot fill vacant jobs; we have unemployed people who live on the West Island and others who live in Montreal who cannot access these jobs because of inadequate public transportation."

Arsenault said air quality is another concern.

"Of the 67,000 people from outside the West Island who come to work on the West Island, only 17 per cent use public transit," he said.

“This alone creates a huge and unnecessary environmental burden on our region. Then there are those who live on the West Island who drive to work because public transit is inadequate,” Arsenault said.

For its part the Green Coalition told the commission it wanted to see an integrated transport system and an improved public transit network.

“As a society we must encourage motorists out of their cars and into subways, trains and light rail vehicles,” according to Avrom David Shtern and Maxime Jalbert, authors of the report.

“But that cannot happen without massive investments in Montreal’s mass transit infrastructure.”

The coalition called for a moratorium on new road/highway construction until the current network is fixed, with the exception of the Cavendish extension and the conversion of the Highway 440 servitude into an urban boulevard.

“The designation of the 440 as a restricted access urban boulevard must be enshrined in perpetuity,” Shtern said.

“It must not be used as a tool for further development – and Morgan Road should never connect with Pierrefonds Blvd., as the integrity of the l’Anse à l’Orme and Île Bizard ecoterritories is paramount.”

Among other things, the coalition reiterated its recommendation for the inclusion of the old Doney Spur railway line in Pointe Claire as a future Light Rapid Surface Métro and said the CPR line, or something paralleling that line, should be used as the route for the airport shuttle.