

The end of Doney Spur?

By Kristin Morency, The Suburban West Island News 2007-06-06

Environmental activists say Pointe Claire has demonstrated a “lack of vision” by allegedly allowing a retail developer to build a Home Depot store that encroaches on vacant land near the Trans-Canada Highway.

For years, the Green Coalition has been hoping the land on the northeast corner of Holiday Road and St. John’s Blvd. surrounding the mostly abandoned Doney Spur rail line would be used for a mass public transit system — not for a big box store.

David Fletcher, a spokesperson for the Green Coalition, said he and others had been “reassured from a number of sources that this line would be reserved for the future as a potential line for public transit,” such as a high-speed rail line.

In Tremblay’s 2005 election campaign, he made “a promise to re-look at the whole possibility of a Doney Spur rail link,” said Montreal spokesperson Darren Becker.

“As far as the city’s concerned, the building that’s going up, the Home Depot, doesn’t infringe on the actual infrastructure that’s in place,” Becker said.

“Sometimes the Green Coalition has a tendency to maybe jump the gun.”

However, Becker said the city will send someone “from city services to examine it and take pictures... To make sure [the building] doesn’t block potential access” — even though Pointe Claire is a “reconstituted city” that has the authority to hand out permits to developers to build on commercial land.

“We’ll be watching it to make sure... It doesn’t encroach on the existing structure,” Becker said, adding the city is still looking into Doney Spur as “another link that’s definitely a viable alternative” for public transit in the West Island.

Pointe Claire Mayor Bill McMurchie could not be reached for comment by press time.

Fletcher said he was “very surprised” to discover about a month ago that the Home Depot store currently being built at the Pointe Claire Terrarium Mall has encroached on the land.

“We were sort of lulled into thinking the line was secure... We understood there would not be any intrusions,” when it was announced that the Home Depot, set to in September, was coming to the mall, Fletcher said.

When members of the Green Coalition voiced their concerns at last Thursday’s agglomeration council meeting, Fletcher said Montreal Mayor Gérald Tremblay expressed surprise at the news, but didn’t have much to say on the topic.

“They should understand that this is not in keeping with the principles of sustainable development,” Fletcher said.

“In terms of the next generation being able to undo this... It would come at a great expense. Long after the politicians are dead, the results of that will be felt in the community.”

The Green Coalition see the land, vacant for nearly 20 years, as being used as a main terminus for a tram or above-ground metro that would link several West Island stops with St. Laurent’s Côte Vertu metro station.

(The Doney Spur line, which ran from the Lakeshore General Hospital to the Two Mountains train line at the underpass for Highway 13, is still occasionally used to ship freight even though some of the tracks have been lifted.)

Sylvia Oljemark of the Green Coalition said “we’re choking ourselves to death” with the traffic caused by vehicles on the Trans-Canada.

“And sadly, very few public transit initiatives have been brought in place for the West Island,” she said.

Oljemark said she has seen “lots of buildings demolished in recent times” so it shouldn’t be difficult to undo the damage already done by construction.

“That was my question to Mayor Tremblay [at the council meeting]: ‘Can you get that construction off that right of way?’ And he smiled and was very pleasant, and he didn’t say he’d fix it,” she said.

Beaconsfield Mayor Bob Benedetti said “the Spur is not really viable for public transit” and that the property “is extremely valuable for the city of Pointe Claire.

“I applaud the Green Coalition for pushing this alternative, but it doesn’t really bring much to the mix as far as we can see, overall, to the public transit in the West Island. It’s an awkward spot,” Benedetti said.

“Whereas if we can devote our efforts to building... an airport shuttle in conjunction with the public transit, it’s where our efforts should be put and the Green Coalition should be working with us,” he said.



Photo by Martin Chamberland, The Suburban

Environmentalists say Pointe Claire is selling out on the Doney Spur rail line.



Photo by Suburban file photo

David Fletcher explains the benefits of using the Doney Spur rail line for public transportation.