

June 29, 2004

My name is Kristin Kopra, and I have been living in Montreal for one year now. I am currently employed as a research associate in forest science and conservation at McGill University. My interest in the new urban plan stems from my background in environmental conservation, my love for the natural environment, and from my love for cycling as a sport and as a mode of transportation. In reading through the new master urban plan, there are several concerns I want to raise here today.

### **Bicycling**

I do not own a car but, rather, I commute everywhere on my bike. While I use the extensive system of bike paths found on the perimeter of the island, I also use busy thoroughfares running through the middle of the city (i.e. Sherbrooke, Jean Talon, Parc). I have commuted in different cities for years, was a bike courier for one year, and am, therefore, more used to riding in severe traffic conditions than most. However, even with this additional experience, I find these routes to be dangerous and stressful to ride. I am forced to inhale large amounts of car exhaust, to dodge both huge potholes and car doors swung open suddenly by dazed car drivers, and to risk getting run into by car drivers not paying attention to the cyclist on the side of the road. These risks do not make for a safe—let alone pleasant—ride within the centre of Montreal.

I have looked at the map for proposed new bicycle routes, and there is a notably large gap in bike paths running east west through the centre of Montreal. While there is a new bike path proposed on Cavendish Blvd. running north-south, there are no bike paths between the perimeter (i.e. Gouin Blvd. and Maisonneuve/Lachine Canal) that will connect Cavendish with the centre. This lack of continuity has the potential to reduce the overall utility of the Cavendish bike path, as users will still be forced to ride on undesirable roads to get to the centre of town. Furthermore, as a resident of NDG (on Decarie Blvd. no less), I would like to point out that there are few bike routes that your average cyclist would want to take between NDG and the centre. The bike lane on Maisonneuve is nice, but it ends abruptly...with nothing but a small (and easily unnoticeable) sign. An unknowing cyclist quickly finds themselves facing head on traffic with a non-existent bike lane.

While I applaud the city's commitment to improving and building upon the existing network of bike paths, I have a few specific requests that I would like taken into consideration when finalizing the plans for new and/or existing routes. They are as follows:

- 1) The bike lane on Maisonneuve needs to have a larger, more visible sign marking the end of the lane so that riders are not suddenly thrown into head on traffic. The lane should also be extended to reach into the downtown centre core, continuing along Maisonneuve. Steps should be taken to ensure that the extension of the lane along Maisonneuve is wide enough for riders in both directions to have ample space. This is of great concern because Maisonneuve

is a one way heading westbound, meaning that riders going into the city will be forced to ride into head on traffic. This can be quite intimidating, but it doesn't have to be if necessary measures are taken to ensure that the bike lane is wide.

- 2) There should be consideration given to creating a bike lane and/or path on a road going east/west that would link the west part of the city (i.e. Decarie, NDG, Cote-des-Neiges, even St. Laurent) with downtown. Cycling commuters need fast, efficient, and safe ways to get to work if they are to be convinced that getting out of their cars and onto their bikes is worthwhile. I bike along Jean Talon frequently, and I propose this as a good potential site for a bike path. The road is wide in most places, making the possibility of adding a lane feasible. It would allow riders from Hampstead, NDG, St. Laurent, and Cote-des-Neiges to get easily to northern parts of the downtown centre (i.e. northern sections of Parc, St. Laurent, St. Denis), where they can then join up with existing and/or new bike lanes taking them directly into the heart of downtown.
- 3) I want to voice my support for the proposed route along what appears to be Parc and/or St. Laurent going from the north side of the island to the south. This would add an obvious linkage to those travelling on the Jean Talon route, and—even if the Jean Talon route were not considered—would allow cyclists easy and safe access across downtown.
- 4) When making bike lanes along side traffic, sewer grates should be taken into consideration. There is no reason why cyclists should have to endure the added bumps and potential hazards that sewer grates represent. I have passed several grates in Montreal that have not been screwed in properly and, therefore, have grates running the same way as bike tires. Cyclists with thin tires are prone to falling over should their tires hit in between the grates. Lanes should be made wide enough that cyclists can swerve out of the way of grates without fearing getting struck by a car.
- 5) More parking is needed throughout the downtown centre for bicycles. I have found myself more often than not forced to lock my bike to a parking meter because I could not find a bike rack.
- 6) In response to Mme. Chauvin's question at the public hearing, I want to suggest an education program be undertaken by the city. This program would be aimed at educating car drivers on bicycle safety. Bicycle safety for car drivers? YES! I think it should be a priority of the city to make cycling safe for those who choose to use this environmentally friendly, healthy, and 100% sustainable form of transportation. This includes minimizing encountered hazards—of which careless drivers are a primary one. Many times car drivers will open doors without checking in their mirror first, resulting in bicyclists getting thwacked by doors. In general, it has been my experience that most drivers have relegated bicyclists to second class transportation citizens, ignoring their presence when making turns, when coming to 4-way stops, and when pulling out of parking spaces. Making driver's aware of the presence (and the right to be there) of cyclists can only help improve cycling conditions in Montreal. I see this education being effectively transmitted via a series of

billboards (in metros, alongside roadways, on the sides of buses, etc...) with quick, catchy pictures and words—similar to the education that has, in recent years, been undertaken in many cities against drunk driving.

### **Public Transportation**

I support the city's commitment to reducing car traffic by supporting public transportation. I think this commitment would be aided by the consideration of bike racks on the fronts of buses. The addition of racks has proved successful in other large North American cities (i.e. Ottawa, Chicago, Seattle, Vancouver), and I don't see how it would be any different here in Montreal. The fact that bicycles are not allowed on the metro between rush hours means essentially that commuters wanting to use a combination of biking and public transport cannot do so unless they are doing so purely for recreation. Bicycle racks on busses provide transport for bicycles without taking up passenger room inside the bus. Thus, someone coming from, for example, Pt. Claire, could ride their bike to the nearest bus stop, take the bus into Lionel Groulx, and then ride specifically to wherever it was they needed to go downtown. This would appeal to many who do not want to make the long bike ride from Pt. Claire into downtown. It supports both modes of transportation—each of which is far better than the option of using a car to go downtown.

I also support the city's commitment to reducing parking spaces downtown. However, I think we have the opportunity to take traffic reduction a bit further. I think the city should add a pedestrian only core to the centre (perhaps between Sherbrooke and St. Catherine's street, running east west for several blocks). Studies conducted in other cities (i.e. Victoria, Boston) have shown that, while business owners often complain in the beginning when streets are turned into pedestrian only corridors, in the long run they inevitably appreciate it, as the slower and more enjoyable pace created by such corridors allows for more people to frequent shops along the route. Pedestrian only zones have the potential to create an enjoyable and safe area for, say, mothers with small children in strollers, to meander through the shops and cafes downtown. The pedestrian only streets on Duluth and Prince Arthur are good examples of how beautiful and community-enhancing these types of corridors can be. Pedestrian only streets would provide potential areas for more green space to be added to the downtown core as well. Big, circular roundabouts in intersections, planted with flowers and/or trees would only serve to complement the beauty found in the architecture downtown.

### **Tree planting**

I would like to voice my support for the idea of planting trees as a way of mitigating noise in areas that are unduly affected. Connecting this idea with the specific plan for the Cote-des-Neiges/NDG—which has as a focus cleaning up and making more bike and pedestrian friendly the area of Decarie Blvd. and west Jean Talon—I would like the city to consider planting such trees as a corridor along Decarie Blvd. This may require consideration of reducing Decarie Blvd. to one lane in each direction, or consideration of removing the on-street parking available on Decarie Blvd. I have seen many near-accidents with drivers who have parked on Decarie Blvd. anyhow...it may be possible to accommodate parking more safely—while allowing for a tree corridor on Decarie—on side streets running perpendicular to Decarie Blvd. A tree lined Decarie Blvd. has the

potential to: (a) make the strip more pleasing to walk and cycle on, (b) reduce noise from the expressway, and (c) reduce air pollution in the area.

### **Healthy Environments**

I would like to first address the wording found in objective 19 (Support the rehabilitation of contaminated sites). The objective begins by stating, "...the impacts of soil contamination in Montréal are primarily economic and financial..." As a person who is knowledgeable in both soil and environmental sciences, and, perhaps more importantly, as a concerned ecological advocate, I find this statement to be misleading and significant of 2 larger problems that our society has—that of compartmentalization and that of disassociation. Soil contamination has far reaching effects that move beyond the economic and financial realms of consideration. In even implying this, we compartmentalize soil as a something that exists without fundamental connections to other parts of the ecosystem that represents the island of Montreal. This ecosystem is intuitively and overtly connected to the aquatic ecosystems around us which are, in turn, connected to the terrestrial ecosystems found on the mainland. Contaminants in soils can be leached out (some quite easily) into surrounding waters, destroying aquatic habitat and rendering waters off limits to recreational usage. This, in turn, can have far reaching affects on terrestrial habitats on neighbouring shores. Soil contamination is also intertwined with human health, and can have deleterious effects on children, animals, and adults who unknowingly come in contact with it. While the plan does acknowledge the requirements for rehabilitating sites before residential areas are built near or on such sites, the wording of the objective seems to indicate that the link between soil rehabilitation and human health is not important—or at least not as much of a concern as the economic and financial considerations.

In light of these points, I respectfully request that the objective be reworded to illustrate a coherent understanding of the role of soils in the larger ecosystem picture—and to signify the recognition of the people of Montreal that we are fundamentally and closely connected to our non-human environment.