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Paper 2 – Urban Challenge

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A Tale of Two Cities:

Montreal, Côte Saint-Luc, and the Cavendish Boulevard Extension

Starting in the early 2010s, the city of Montreal, Quebec has been working to reclaim former industrial land in the city's West End as part of a transit-oriented development scheme (Montreal, 2021). In 2017 as part of the project, Montreal was ceded ownership of an abandoned horse racing track, the Hippodrome, by the provincial government with the goal of building a sustainable mixed-use neighborhood (Montreal, 2022a) (Bruemmer, 2021). The area under development, the Namur-Hippodrome district, straddles the border of Montreal and two small and independent enclaved suburbs, Côte Saint-Luc and the Town of Mount Royal. Although construction is progressing, the project is facing difficulties in achieving the "transit" aspect of transit-oriented development (Montreal, 2023b). One particular condition of the acquisition of the Hippodrome land was that Montreal must connect a major road called Cavendish Boulevard between itself and Côte Saint-Luc. Cavendish has remained unfinished for decades largely due to disputes between the two cities. If better transit links, especially the Cavendish connection, cannot be established, the renewal project's scope risks being reduced, including the elimination of planned social housing units.

Montreal's stated goals for the Namur-Hippodrome district are to create a carbon-neutral, and accessible community with access to transit and amenities (Montreal, 2019, p.3). While different reports offer different numbers, the progressive party in control of Montreal's government, Projet Montreal, is hoping to build several thousand new housing units on the Hippodrome portion of the land with a large number reserved for social housing (Bruemmer, 2021). The district is currently facing a challenge when it comes to transportation access. While there are already two subway stations nearby, highways and railroad tracks criss-cross the area and would hem in the neighbourhood. This would limit pedestrian accessibility. Furthermore, another renewal project occurring simultaneously on the Town of Mount Royal side of the municipal boundary, and out of Montreal's control, risks putting further burden on the existing

roadways and subway stations (Junca-Adenot, 2019, p.7-8). Building roads is complicated by both these physical and political barriers.

As previously mentioned, the Quebec government ceded the Hippodrome land to Montreal to develop but mandated that Cavendish Boulevard be completed as a new access point to the area. Currently, Cavendish Boulevard runs from the Montreal borough of Côte-des-Neiges-Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, a medium density mostly residential area, through the independent town of Côte Saint-Luc, a suburb of primarily single-family homes, where it ends at the same train tracks which surround the Hippodrome project site. The street then

picks up on the other side of the tracks where it runs through both industrial and residential zones in the Montreal borough of Saint-Laurent (see figure 1). The street varies in width between two to three lanes in both directions throughout its course. Some portions of the street have separated bike lanes.

Debate about extending and connecting Cavendish Boulevard has been ongoing since the late 1950s. During that time Montreal, Côte Saint-Luc and several other small municipalities were in discussion over the street. These discussions never came to a consensus and Côte Saint-Luc unilaterally extended the Cavendish through its territory by building an underpass to bypass yet another rail line. This allowed Côte Saint-Luc to develop a large amount of greenfield land in its territory starting in the late 1960s but left any unified plans for a street and highway system in the West End up in the air (Montreal Archives, p.88-92). Over time the project became more difficult to discuss, let alone complete. As more people settled around the Côte Saint-Luc section of Cavendish, NIMBY sentiment grew with fears over an increase in traffic (Montreal Archives, p.130). Animosity also began to brew between Montreal and the independent suburban enclaves due to incidents like land disputes and the failed municipal mergers of the early 2000s (Bérubé,

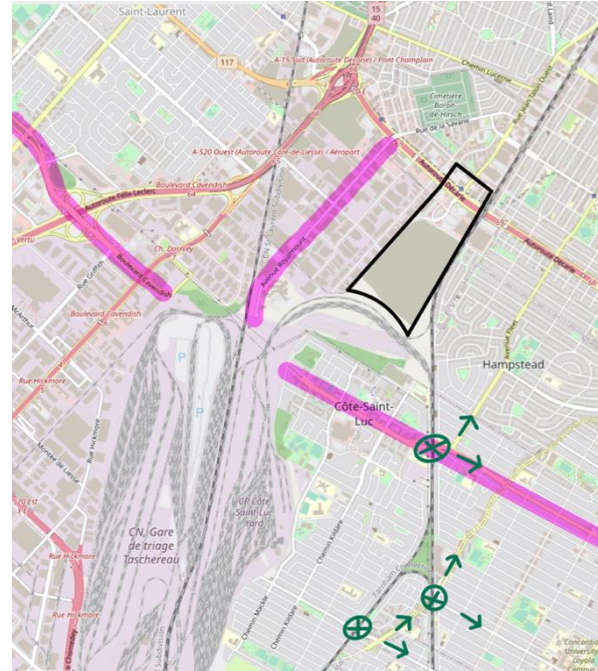


Figure 1: Cavendish Boulevard and Royalmount Avenue highlighting in pink. Cavendish could potentially be connected to Royalmount to serve the Hippodrome site (black outline top right). Côte Saint-Luc's current road outlets are indicated by green circles, bottom right. (Map from OpenStreetMaps.)

2020). It was from here that talks renewed in the late 2010s between Montreal and Côte Saint-Luc over the Cavendish extension in the context of the Hippodrome redevelopment.

Although Côte Saint-Luc's resolve against any form of road extension has weakened over the decades (Olson, 2018), the dialogue between the suburb and Montreal has become mired in the details. In keeping with its vision for sustainability on the Hippodrome project, Montreal's progressive party wants the Cavendish extension to be multimodal, with room for public transit, bikes, and pedestrian, and not just a highway. Contentiously, their vision only includes space for one lane of traffic in both directions for the approximately 1.25 kilometer stretch of new road (CBC News, 2022). Politicians in Côte Saint-Luc remain skeptical of the viability of public transportation in the area and want to see at least two lanes in both directions for car traffic. Both parties are in dire need for some plan to go through. Montreal must meet its obligation to the provincial government to finish the road or risk losing the chance to develop new housing. Côte Saint-Luc is desperate for more access routes in and out of the town. The development the town undertook in the 1960s and 1970s created a car-centric suburb that is itself surrounded by railway tracks with only two outlets and poor public transportation (see figure 1). Currently, Montreal has sent its plans for Cavendish Boulevard for an environmental assessment though those in Côte Saint-Luc, with backing from other suburbs and more conservative politicians in Montreal, are still calling for consensus (Gyulai, 2022).

The Cavendish Boulevard extension is a reminder of the ongoing tension that exists between Montreal and its suburbs and is representative of wider North American urban-suburban political interaction. While progress has lumbered back to life on the Cavendish project after half a century, the risk of a minority in the suburbs scuttling progress again is ever looming. This raises the question of how to get the suburbs to move in unison with the metropolitan government on issues of sustainability. On the technical side of the Cavendish connection, if it were to go through, consideration must be given in creating new connections without creating car traffic. Montreal must strongly contemplate how it will develop transit alternatives for both the Hippodrome district and suburbs. One can only hope that any action taken on these issues goes faster than the first 60 years.

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