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Paper 3 – Response to an Urban Challenge

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Two Halves can work together to make a Road Whole:

how Montreal and its suburbs can resolve the Cavendish Boulevard Extension conflict

Montreal, Quebec is currently planning the transit-oriented redevelopment of a former horseracing track, the Hippodrome, ceded to the city by the provincial government as part of a wider renewal project in the Namur-Hippodrome neighborhood of the city (Montreal, 2021) (Bruemmer, 2021). Sustainability is a key goal of the development with the neighbourhood planned to have greenspace, amenities, and social housing (Montreal, 2019, p.3) (Montreal, 2022). The Hippodrome sits along the political boundaries of Montreal and two independent enclaved suburbs, Côte Saint-Luc (CSL), and the Town of Mount Royal (TMR). The area is physically constrained and divided by highways and rail lines. The Quebec government made it a condition of the land cession that Montreal complete Cavendish Boulevard, an urban arterial road that has remained split in two by a railyard, and have the road be an access point to the area. Political conflict has been a major force in preventing Cavendish's completion over the course of some 60 years, as the road goes through both Montreal and Côte Saint-Luc's jurisdiction. More recently a dispute with a private developer whose land sits along a potential route for Cavendish has arisen to pose another roadblock to the project. Montreal is moving forward with plans to address the physical constraints of the Cavendish project, but political solutions are needed to abate this urban-suburban conflict.

The Island of Montreal is not one and the same with the City of Montreal. In addition to the city of the same name, it is also host to 15 small independent suburbs (shown in figure 1). These towns regained independence after an only partially successful merger attempt in the early 2000s. Socio-economic as well as linguistic differences create tension between the suburbs and Montreal (Whelan et al., 2004). An agglomeration council with representatives from all entities on the Island coordinates shared services, including

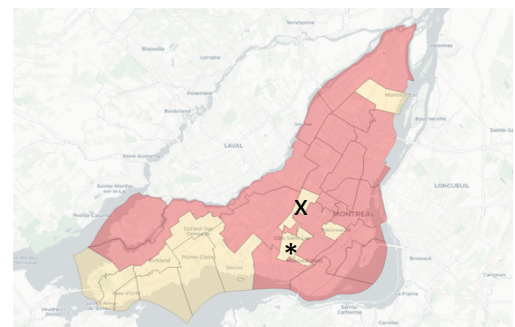
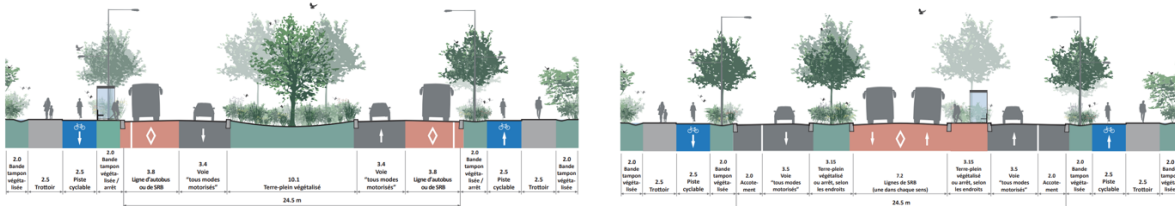


Figure 1: Montreal (red) and its suburbs with CSL(*) and TMR(x) emphasized. (Map from Montreal's OpenDataPortal)

For Montreal, that interest is dictated by the need to proceed with its neighborhood renewal project and therefore build the extension. The city has begun moving forward with its own plans for Cavendish with a desire to create a sustainable road and not just a thoroughfare for cars. In February 2022, the city submitted plans for several different configurations of a multimodal road to Quebec's office of environmental review (Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement, or BAPE) (Gyulai, Feb. 2022) (Montreal 2022b). Diagrams from those plans are shown in figure 2. The plans notably account for only one lane of car traffic in either direction alongside dedicated lanes for buses and cyclists. This is the main point of contention with Côte Saint-Luc, the entity which controls the next largest portion of the road.



Côte Saint-Luc is a mostly car dependent suburb with a large number of single-family homes. Like the Namur district, CSL's territory is itself divided by railways which make transit difficult. Currently there are only two roads, including the southern end of Cavendish, acting as outlets for the town. There is a need for more access routes (Olson, 2018) and the suburb has warmed over the decades to the completion of Cavendish to the north. Côte Saint-Luc is currently creating a master plan for the town with some provisions for densification. Desire has even been expressed for some form of electrified tram service running through the area or the addition of a new commuter rail station along the adjacent rail lines (Côte Saint-Luc, 2022a) (Côte Saint-Luc, 2022b, p.19). Despite this, they have pushed Montreal to provide for two or more lanes for car traffic in their Cavendish Extension proposals (CBC News, 2022). No formal political opposition has yet been raised to Montreal's call for the environmental assessment.

A new flashpoint in this planning process arose in November 2022, when a private developer's land was deemed to be in the way of a route under consideration for Cavendish. Montreal had relinquished its right to appropriate the land several years earlier. The property boundaries are split between Montreal and the Town of Mount Royal as shown in figure 3 (Gyulai, Nov. 2022). This stands to bring TMR into this conflict. The town was already renewing industrial land on its side of the municipal boundary near the Namur-Hippodrome site causing fears

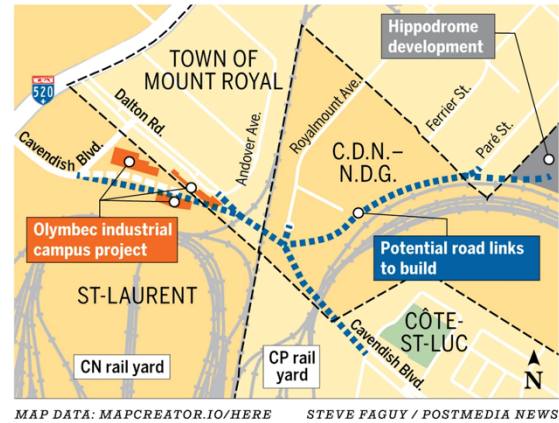


Figure 3: Municipal boundaries, the Cavendish route and the location of the private developer's land. (Gyulai, Nov. 2022)

that the local road and transit system could be overburdened (Lindeman, 2019). TMR is in the position to approve the private developer's plans with Montreal having no legal authority in the matter. This could add further delay to the Cavendish project. Appropriating the land now will be far more expensive and likely litigious (Gyulai, Nov. 2022). While no definitive route has been surveyed for Cavendish, settling for an alternate route could create a more circuitous and therefore more financially costly road.

Given the limited powers of the agglomeration council and the current motivations of these three cities, Montreal has chosen to set the pace and push ahead with its vision for the road. The suburbs are not actively challenging this plan for the time being and would stand to benefit from the increased connectivity created by Cavendish. Montreal leveraging the BAPE's environmental review process may also serve as a way around the conflicting municipal authorities. The BAPE is a non-partisan political authority whose review process allows for any individual or organization to submit feedback. Currently any road building is subject to environmental review however zoning changes for large scale sector redevelopment are not (LégisQuébec, 2022a). BAPE proposals are only recommendations to the Quebec legislature and not immediately binding (Quebec, 2022). A neighborhood plan created by a team of McGill University students under the name Oroboro (2019, p.44) as well as Florence Junca Adenot's Namur-De La Savane plan (2019, p.34) both suggest ameliorating the environmental assessment process to produce binding guidelines that all jurisdictions must follow. CSL, as well as other towns, have encouraged its citizens to participate in the review process through a post on its

website (Côte Saint-Luc, 2022c). While the BAPE is non-binding, its public nature and an increased environmental awareness among the public can still lend weight to the decisions it renders.

The Oroboro team and Junca Adenot make further proposals for either inter-jurisdictional planning or the imposition of a plan from the provincial government in order to avoid similar urban-suburban conflict. Both plans recommend that provincial approval should be sought in any project involving transit and building adjacent to highways citing the current physical and political barriers as too limiting (Oroboro, 2019, p.44) (Junca Adenot, 2019, p.33). For Cavendish, Montreal could also try seeking provincial help in fighting the land appropriation battle with the private developer. The Quebec legislature and provincial politicians have introduced bills in the past few years to accelerate land acquisition for major projects (Global News, 2020).

Similar jurisdictional drama plays out across North America from upstate complaints over New York City's congestion pricing program to the suburbs having a voting majority on Philadelphia's public transit authority's board of directors. State intervention could be one way to supersede conflicting municipal interests. One example is California's recently in effect Senate Bill 9 which creates a process for the building of multiple residential units on single family home lots in contravention of any local zoning code (Los Angeles City Planning, 2022). While it is too soon to determine the effects of this bill, statewide intervention was deemed necessary when local authorities were failing to amend zoning by-laws in a way to unlock housing production. In some cases, like the creation of Atlanta's MARTA transit system in the 1960s and 70s, state governments may step in to impose a solution but abandon it partway through. In this case, Georgia helped Atlanta fund the creation of a regional mass transit system through various ballot measures and taxes. Some jurisdictions were still able to opt out and the state would eventually side with suburban county voters in where the system's infrastructure would be built. The final route further marginalized minority communities and the state and city went on to neglect public transit development in favor of roads (Monroe, 2012).

Alongside resorting to higher authorities, a 2018 report from the Urban Institute on cooperation and competition in local economic development cites examples of regional solutions to regional problems. While the report talks about state intervention as a way to prevent towns from poaching businesses from each other (Randall et al., 2018, p. 21) it also discusses the idea

of local arrangements. This includes revenue sharing agreements, with Montgomery County, Ohio's opt-in disbursement program cited (p. 29), and the use of codes of ethics to promote cooperation like that of the Denver, Colorado metropolitan region (p. 35). The report concludes on several recommendations including emphasizing resource sharing and developing mechanisms to reward inter-jurisdictional collaboration (p.40).

The recommendations made by the above mentioned Oroboro and Junca Adenot reports advance similar frameworks for Montreal. A mix of both regional and provincial solutions will likely be needed. In the short term, Montreal should continue to set the tempo of the Cavendish process. This can prevent the project from stalling out as it did in previous decades when suburbs put up more resistance and regional institutions were weaker. Since the most recent crisis brought up the lack of planned route of the road, Montreal should study and publish several alternative routes to regain public trust in the headlines. Working with the Quebec government to appropriate the private developer's land straddling the TMR border will also be necessary. Since Quebec set Cavendish's construction as a condition for the Hippodrome's development, Quebec should avoid abandoning Montreal as Georgia wavered in its support for Atlanta's regional transit.

Further provincial support could be given in reforming the BAPE process to make their recommendations binding. Like California reforming housing legislation statewide, Quebec should intervene to course correct the failures in inter-municipal dialogue. BAPE recommendations could be made legally binding as advanced by the Oroboro plan. BAPE approval could also be expanded to be necessary for large renewal projects though. However, this should be done with caution as if a site is split between multiple small holders, as is the case with parts of the wider Namur district, it may stifle development with a high barrier of entry. Considering this, a reformed BAPE report could apply to an entire project area and be filed collectively in the spirit of its findings needing to apply to all stakeholders.

At a regional level, the agglomeration council already collects taxes from all member cities for use in regional services. "Liberalizing" this arrangement by making the council opt-in or changing the tax disbursements to give more back to the suburbs would likely lead to a breakdown of a "functioning enough" regional body and an unfair allocation of resources back to low density towns who are reliant on the central city. Consolidating more power in this council is also not an option given the recent failures of the municipal mergers of the early 2000s and the

perception of reducing local autonomy. Montreal or the towns could try to kickstart culture of trust and cooperation through better coordination of their local plans. This too was a concluding point in the Urban Institutes report (Randall et al., 2018, p.41).

Since CSL and TMR, in recognition of their geographically central location on the Island of Montreal, are interested in densifying their towns and working on master plans, Montreal could coordinate planning efforts with them. For example, Montreal could help CSL in its plans to have a new commuter rail station open in the suburb along an existing line (see figure 4).

Having Montreal's backing could help CSL petition the regional transit authority (Autorité régionale de transport métropolitaine, or ARTM) who controls the commuter rail system. It should be a shared objectives of all the cities to provide viable alternatives to car travel and induce housing production in areas close to downtown. Going forward there could be a more robust framework instituted for when one or a few of the suburban towns want to work with Montreal on issues affecting only their circumstances. A charter of sustainable values could be drafted to find common ground as a form of ethics code. This could erode the solidarity between the suburbs as a block and reorient them towards Montreal.



Figure 4: A diagram of CSL's proposal for a commuter rail station in the town. Montreal could assist the suburbs in projects involving mass transit. (Côte Saint-Luc, 2022d)

The means to measure the success of the Cavendish project and the recommendations of redesigning some of Montreal's power structures would by their nature be qualitative. If a multimodal road is built than vehicle count, transit ridership and pollution could be measured to assess its impact. The materialization of that road however would be the first sign of success. A similar discrete measure of materialization would be needed to access any large project or political change undertaken between Montreal and suburbs.

Each suburb as long as its independent should have the right to develop in its own territory just as every individual has a right to flourish. However, the suburbs need to recognize regional authorities especially when those plans can aid in their own internal development and central cities should conversely capitalize on suburban redevelopment plans to offer assistance

and a joint way forward. Montreal is in a somewhat advantageous situation compared to other large North American cities as its regional council has legal footing and the urban core is given a controlling share of power. This power still comes with limitations for which provincial intervention should be sought. Certain frameworks, like the environmental review process, could be transformed into new planning tools while political bodies can proactively seek grounds for collaboration. Each party envisions the Cavendish connection as more than just a road, but only if they dream together and act together can it be realized.

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