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Brief from the City of Montreal

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**House of Commons Committee on
Transport, Infrastructure and
Communities | Study on High Frequency
Rail (HFR)**

Montréal 

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Introduction

The High Frequency Rail (HFR) project is still in the early stages, but it promises to yield major benefits for Eastern Canada. The City of Montreal would like this project to be an efficient, pivotal mode of transportation, similar to High Speed Rail (HSR), at least between urban centres. Therefore, this brief presents the advantages of such a project in terms of mobility and addresses the City's concerns about train speeds and the connection to the airport. It also discusses the economic impact this type of project would have on the metropolitan area. It lists the points to be considered in terms of urban integration, particularly in the Montreal area, and highlights the issue of access to downtown. Lastly, it stresses the importance of having clear governance, where the City has a defined role to play.

An asset for mobility

Having an efficient, HSR-type heavy-haul transportation system would benefit Montreal's business community, downtown and the entire metropolitan region by providing convenient connections to major cities in Eastern Canada.

In terms of mobility, a project like this one would have the following advantages for residents of Montreal and those travelling to and from the metropolitan area:

- It would link the following major cities in Eastern Canada: Toronto, Peterborough, Ottawa, Montreal, Laval, Trois-Rivières and Quebec City;
- It would eliminate track-sharing conflicts with freight trains along most of the route, thanks to dedicated tracks for the entire route, with the possibility of sharing tracks where trains enter the city;
- It would promote service reliability by improving punctuality;
- It would contribute to reducing GHG emissions from the transport industry;
- It would increase the number of trains running, giving users greater flexibility;
- It could encourage people to take the train instead of driving; and
- It would greatly reduce travel time compared to the current situation, and HFR would be real competition for driving or flying, in terms of efficiency, comfort and speed.

On this last point, the project office must consider not only train frequency, as suggested by HFR, but also train speed and travel times. Taking the train must be seen as a viable alternative to driving or flying. It needs to be comfortable enough that people can get work done during the trip—something that they cannot do while driving a car—and it needs to get them to their destination as quickly as possible. The City of Montreal would like the project office to consider options that emphasize speed, equivalent to HSR, in order to meet the needs of users who want the most efficient mode of transportation possible to get to their destination. Having fast trains that compete with driving and flying is the most likely way to encourage people to shift toward rail transport along this service corridor.

Recommendation #1

Offer a mode of transportation similar to HSR to ensure a reliable, fast and efficient system that encourages people to switch to taking the train along the Quebec City–Toronto corridor.

Prioritizing access to the city centre

One of the issues at this stage of the project is access to downtown. Given the scale of the project, it must reach the most people possible, providing easy, direct access to downtown and the rest of the city by public transit, such as the metro lines.

Downtown Montreal is the economic, cultural and tourist hub of Quebec. In addition to attracting the most business and creating the most jobs, the city is also a destination for international visitors. Having a high-speed train go right to downtown Montreal would contribute significantly to the city's recovery, influence and long-term resilience. Internationally, experience has shown that having a high-speed train station leads to real estate modernization, attracts head offices and generates significant private investment. This rail infrastructure would bring more people to the downtown area by increasing its potential for attracting business and leisure tourism, while fostering stronger ties between companies and head offices in different cities.

The city therefore expects the rail project to include a stop in the city centre. The project should take into account mobility analyses and future challenges in terms of urban integration, the environment and social acceptability if new rail infrastructures are required or existing ones need to be adapted:

- Facilities and infrastructure providing access to the city centre via either the existing Central Station or a new station; and
- Potential addition of dedicated tracks to access the western (Toronto) and eastern (Quebec City) portions of the route, with a view to incorporating new infrastructure, particularly tunnels.
 - The City believes that new infrastructure could be shared with other rail transportation modes serving the City and metropolitan area.

Recommendation #2

Establish a stop in downtown Montreal to boost the city's economy, raise its international profile and stimulate tourism.

Connection to the Montreal airport

The City would also like a study to be conducted on having a connection near the Montréal-Trudeau international airport, in particular Dorval Station, which is due to be redeveloped soon. This hub is set to undergo a major transformation with the redevelopment of the bus terminal as well as the exo and VIA Rail stations, and a nearby REM de l'Ouest station located directly on the airport grounds. The access points and positions of these infrastructures will change

due to the Dorval roundabout redesign. Not to mention that a major public transit project to serve the greater southwest Montreal area and link it to downtown, currently under study by the ARTM, could be added to this sector in the future.

Recommendation #3

Assess having a stop near the airport to connect this major transportation hub with the metropolitan area.

A driver for economic development

As Canada is the only G7 country that does not yet have an HSR system, adding one could contribute significantly to the economic and cultural development of major cities along this corridor, including Montreal.

A high-speed train would make it more efficient to travel and would make Montreal a more attractive destination, strengthening its economic, cultural, commercial and tourist links with other cities. A number of studies have shown that HSR could have considerable socio-economic benefits for the cities along this corridor, particularly by improving labour productivity through more efficient travel and by helping to modernize neighbourhoods near stations.

Recommendation #4

Support implementing HSR based on economic, cultural, commercial and tourism development.

Integration must be harmonious

The prospect of having an efficient link between the major cities of Eastern Canada offers a significant competitive advantage for Montreal. Although the Plan métropolitain de développement et d'aménagement (PMAD) stresses the importance of improving and optimizing the use of the rail network in the greater Montreal area, the rail network is also seen as being a source of noise and vibration that can affect the health, safety and well-being of nearby communities.

For the project to play a significant role in the region's economy and development, it must be designed in a way that minimizes potential negative impacts on the area and on local residents, and must not, in the long term, create friction within the city. Urban integration, including where and how the tracks are laid, must be analyzed rigorously, taking into account the specific characteristics of the neighbourhoods in question.

To ensure that the service quality outlined in the project is met, major investments are required in rail infrastructure (including level crossings) and equipment such as VIA Rail's maintenance centres and stations. These investments will help reduce bottlenecks and improve the fluidity and connectivity of the rail network.

Considering that work would have to be done on the rail network for it to accommodate high-

speed trains, any modification of this rail network within the limits of the City of Montreal should consider minimizing the impacts relating to:

- mobility and safety (road closures and detours for all modes of transportation);
- urban integration, heritage and quality of life (built environment, demolitions and urban landscape); and
- social acceptability.

As a result, the City must analyze all proposals for adjustments to the rail network, particularly in relation to level crossings located within city limits, to ensure they are integrated harmoniously, while minimizing the impact on local residents' quality of life. The project will have to be added to a built environment that considerably limits the possibilities for integration and development, but it will also have to take into account the history of the areas crossed, urban dynamics and the communities' capacity for resilience.

Recommendation #5

Ensure that the project and its infrastructure take into account the areas the tracks will go through, making an effort to limit negative impacts on residential areas and on economic development as much as possible.

The importance of effective governance

The project must have a clear governance structure that takes the role of the City into consideration: its involvement in the process is necessary to ensure that the issues and interests it defends are taken into account. A detailed project timetable in which the City's role and responsibilities are well defined is necessary to clearly identify the appropriate involvement at the expected times. In this way, the City can provide the necessary resources to support the project office. To this end, an agreement on the adequate funding of these resources should be drawn up.

It is also important to have effective channels of communication between the various stakeholders to ensure that this large-scale project can move forward. A support and involvement structure will need to be put in place for the various political, administrative and technical stakeholders.

Elected officials must be kept informed as the project progresses. They should be able to ask questions and share their views on the various issues that concern the City of Montreal. The City must be involved in the decision making and management of the project, particularly for the Montreal portion.

Recommendation #6

Rapidly set up project governance for coordinated decision-making, enabling effective communication and collaboration between the City and the project office.

Conclusion

This major transportation project will bring its share of benefits for users, reducing GHG emissions and improving reliability compared to the current situation. However, the city is asking that speed be taken into consideration, so that the system is equivalent to HSR along the Quebec City–Toronto corridor. It would have major economic, cultural, commercial and tourist benefits, while contributing to the revitalization of the downtown core.

The City also would like to see stops near the airport and in the city centre, which would be the most useful for residents. The City is also aware that new infrastructure may be required. As such, it wants planning to take into account mobility analyses and to pay particular attention to urban integration, as well as environmental and social impacts, in order to limit new conflicts within the city.

Lastly, it is essential that a project governance structure be established as soon as possible to ensure that the project runs smoothly. The City wishes to be a key partner in the development of this major project, which will give Montreal residents better mobility options.

List of recommendations

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Recommendation #2

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