



REPORT

BY THE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE

EXAMINING THE APPROPRIATENESS OF BUILDING A BRIDGE

CONNECTING THE TWO SHORES OF THE

VERDUN BOROUGH

tabled at the

regular Borough Council meeting

held at Borough Hall on July 2, 2008

FOREWORD

As the Mayor mentioned, as a reminder, in his report presented at the Council meeting on February 5, 2008, traffic at the entrances and exits of the L'Île-des-Sœurs neighbourhood, in the Verdun Borough, has given rise to numerous—and at times stormy—discussions, and particularly last fall. Consequently, an increasing number of residents from all over L'Île-des-Sœurs have once again taken up the idea of building a bridge between the L'Île-des-Sœurs neighbourhood and Verdun's mainland area.

The Council members therefore agreed to set up "a special committee to examine, if possible, without any strong feelings or any ambitions other than all Verdunites' best interests, whether it would be appropriate to build a new bridge and the conditions under which such a project could be carried out". It was also agreed "that one of the conditions of carrying out such a project, if need be, had to be that the Verdun residents must consent to it".

THE COMMITTEE

Made up of Verdunites representing residents living on both sides of Verdun's shores as well as Borough officials, the Committee held three meetings between March 9 and June 9, 2008. Each of the Committee members then had a chance to comment on the final version of this report and approved the contents and findings.

The Mayor and Borough Council wish to thank the following people for their involvement in the Committee's proceedings and for their interest in the Borough's affairs:

Gilles Baril, *Borough Manager*

Paul Beaupré, *Borough Councillor*

André Desmarais, *Resident, President of SDC-Wellington*

Hellen Dionne, *Resident, representative of APRIDS**

Raymond Fréchette, *Engineer, Technical Services*

Jacques Larose, *Resident*

Luc Maurice, *Resident*

Claude Ravary, *Resident*

Marc Touchette, *Borough Councillor*

Claude Trudel, *Mayor*

Francine Morin, *Protocol and Public Relations Officer, as an observer*

* *Association des propriétaires et résidents de L'Île-des-Sœurs* (Nuns' Island Owners and Residents' Association)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Committee notes that the project to build a bridge connecting the mainland to the island is already included in Chapter 24 – Verdun Borough of Part II of Montréal's 2005 Master Plan. The objective is worded as follows:

"Objective 16 – Redesign access to the Île des Soeurs district"

"Action

"16.2 Complete pre-feasibility studies on the construction of a bridge between L'Île-des-Soeurs district and the Wellington-De l'Église district, designed primarily for pedestrians and cyclists, and evaluate the possibility of constructing it so that it could bear occasional emergency vehicle traffic when necessary."

In order to better understand the issues and shed light on their reflection, the Committee members had access to all the relevant information available to the Borough.

They were also provided with explanations regarding the work under way at the entrances and exits of the L'Île-des-Sœurs neighbourhood. They came to the conclusion that this project should improve the flow of traffic in this area.

Historical background – Planning reconfiguration work at L'Île-des-Sœurs entrances and exits (1967-2003):

- The plan prepared by the BBL consulting firm **in 1967** called for a bridge to be built directly in line with *rue Galt* and *boulevard Marguerite-Bourgeoys*.
- A new Master Plan, prepared by Lavalin **in 1988**, provided—in one of the scenarios—for a bridge that would run directly in the same line. Another scenario provided for a bridge directly in line with *chemin du Golf* (via 800 chemin du Golf) and the back of Mgr-Richard high school.
- The latest Master Plan, dating back to **2003**, didn't call for the need to have a bridge directly in line with *Galt* and *Marguerite-Bourgeoys* because it was expected that the population of L'Île-des-Soeurs would diminish at the end of the island's development, from 45,000 to 23,000 residents. The reconfiguration work at the entrances and exits of the L'Île-des-Sœurs neighbourhood, which is under way at the present time, is in keeping with this plan.

Contextual elements – Exits and entrances of L'Île-des-Sœurs (2007-2008)

- The Committee members examined and received explanations of the problems that had occurred in late 2007, and more precisely on October 30 and 31 as well as on December 17, and the heavy congestion that resulted.
- They also read and discussed the mitigation measures implemented to minimize the impacts of any given incident.
- And lastly, they discussed the impacts of a population that will increase from approximately 17,000 people in 2008 to 23,000, once the housing development provided for in the Borough's Planning Program is completed.

MATTERS ADDRESSED BY THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

In addition to examining whether it would be appropriate and timely to build a bridge, and while considering both the positive and negative impacts, the Committee members mainly focused on the following considerations, which they discussed among themselves:

- The impact of improvements to the entrances and exits of L'Île-des-Sœurs and the reconfiguration of the road system in the Pointe-Nord area of the island, in terms of increasing the feeling of safety and security and improving the flow of traffic
- The repercussions on L'Île-des-Sœurs' road system of the announced reconstruction of the Turcot Exchange, of L'Île-des-Sœurs bridge and the eventual reconstruction of the Champlain Bridge
- The concerns regarding the very frequent congestion on the highway system in the surrounding area (Bonaventure, Autoroute 15, Champlain Bridge), a blockage on the upper highway system, generally causing congestion at the L'Île-des-Sœurs exit
- The advantages of faster access to De-l'Église metro station, via a more direct public transit service
- The impact of the arrival of Bell Canada employees in the Pointe-Nord area
- The purpose of the bridge. Should preference be given to the construction of only a service bridge, i.e., a structure reserved solely for public transit vehicles, Urgence-santé services, police and firefighters, bicycles and pedestrians? Or instead, should a bridge that is open to "all-vehicle" traffic be built? If the latter solution is selected, should the bridge be accessible to local traffic only? And if so, as in the case of a service bridge only, how would access be controlled?
- Determination of the bridge's specifications (width, length) and its use in 5, 10 or 15 years
- The impacts on residents of the eventual construction of a bridge directly in line with rue Galt and boulevard Marguerite-Bourgeoys.
- The costs associated with building such a bridge and its financing

All throughout their deliberations, the Committee members reflected on the following aspects, which greatly helped them better understand the issues:

- The importance of fast access to Verdun Hospital, and particularly for the increasing number of seniors on the island
- Prioritization of safety and security in case of emergency evacuation of IDS residents and the comings and goings of emergency vehicles at all times

- Advantages and consequences of the possible construction of a bridge, from an environmental standpoint, and on traffic all over the Borough
- The costs and environmental impacts associated with construction along a route other than the one that is in line with Galt/Marguerite-Bourgeois

BRIDGE SPECIFICATIONS

The Committee is of the opinion that if the Borough were to be in favour of the construction of a bridge, it should be built according to both present and future needs. The standard proposed by Ville de Montréal's *Division des ponts et tunnels* advocates a structure that has 18 metres of usable width, and the Committee members agree with such a standard.

SURVEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The Committee members perused part of an opinion poll (before it was published) that the Verdun Borough had conducted in May 2008 among 900 Verdunites, equally distributed in each of the three neighbourhoods on its territory.

One of the segments of the survey dealt with questions relating to the possible construction of a bridge. The following questions were asked:

1. *In order to improve traffic and safety at the entrances and exits of the L'Île-des-Sœurs neighbourhood, would you agree to the construction of a bridge between L'Île-des-Sœurs and the mainland...*

A..... that would be open to all types of vehicles?

B.....that would be solely reserved for public transit, pedestrians, cyclists and emergency vehicles?

2. *Would you agree to an increase in your taxes to provide for the cost of building this bridge?*

As for the respondents in the L'Île-des-Sœurs neighbourhood, 47% of them are in favour of building an all-purpose bridge and 74% are in favour of building a bridge reserved for buses, bicycles, pedestrians and emergency vehicles.

As for Verdunites as a whole, 41% and 71% respectively are in favour of these two options.

With regard to assuming the costs by means of a tax increase, this percentage drops to 39% for all Verdunites and to 44% in the L'Île-des-Sœurs neighbourhood alone.

The Committee members note that nearly three Verdunites out of four—all neighbourhoods combined—are in favour of building a service bridge between the two shores of the Borough, and that 39%--all neighbourhoods combined—don't want to pay the cost through a special tax.

AN ESSENTIAL STEP

Within a risks coverage analysis, the Montréal Agglomeration's *Service des incendies* (SIM) is presently examining various scenarios to better serve the L'Île-des-Sœurs area. The Committee members were interested to note that a link between the L'Île-des-Sœurs neighbourhood and the island of Montréal is part of this analysis.

In fact, SIM informed Borough Management that it was getting ready to soon ask the *Division des ponts et tunnels* of the *Service Infrastructures, transport et environnement* to conduct a pre-feasibility study on construction of a bridge. The committee is of the opinion that this study is necessary and that it should be carried out as quickly as possible.

OTHER ISSUES

Should the bridge project be carried out, the Committee is of the opinion that certain issues should first be dealt with, and in particular, the following ones:

- ***The route***
Most of the Committee members are in favour of the route provided for in the 2003 Master Plan (*rue Galt and boulevard Marguerite-Bourgeoys*); nevertheless, the findings of SIM's study should be awaited before reaching a decision on this matter once and for all.
- ***Funding sources***
The Committee is of the opinion that the Borough must quickly examine the various funding source options, other than taxation, to carry out the construction of a bridge, if need be.
- ***Environmental impacts***
The Committee is aware of the strong possibility that the *Ministère du Développement durable, de l'environnement et des parcs* will be conducting environmental impact analyses before granting its approval to a bridge construction project.
- ***Architectural design***
The Committee is encouraging the Verdun Borough to examine the architectural design of a future bridge to ensure that it is in keeping with the distinct nature of the two neighbourhoods that it will be linking.

RECOMMENDATION

The members of the special committee are unanimously recommending to the Verdun Borough that a service bridge be built, and in particular, for emergency and maintenance vehicles, buses, bicycles and pedestrians, provided that it is accepted by the majority of Verdunites and that it is financed by an authority other than the Borough.

Verdun, June 30, 2008