

## All Aboard!

### Summary of the position paper by the *Conseil des Montréalaises* on the accessibility of public transportation, and its impact on the quality of life of Montreal women.

November 2009

The present position paper is based on the understanding that **being mobile is essential for the social and economical integration of the individual in our society**. The consultation conducted by the *Conseil des Montréalaises* in 2005 revealed that urban transportation was second, after housing, among the top priorities of women's groups. In the light of this, the *Conseil* examined in more detail the question of access to public transportation services in Montreal, and its impact on Montreal women's quality of life. With this position paper, the *Conseil des Montréalaises* wishes to draw attention to **the correlation between low mobility and poverty** so that this aspect will be taken into consideration when examining the question of mass transit accessibility.

The first chapter presents reference material helpful to understanding the subject matter. Chapters Two and Three are dedicated to an analysis of the present situation in Montreal with regards to accessibility of mass transit from geographical and economical perspectives, as well as in terms of the universality of access. The summary also presents the position and contribution of the main actors in regard to this issue. The data was gathered through meetings with transportation experts and local actors<sup>1</sup>, and forums with concerned women. Montreal women from Saint-Michel, Saint-Laurent, Verdun and Pointe-aux-Trembles generously accepted to share their experience with us. The fourth chapter describes inspiring Canadian and international initiatives related to the improvement of mobility among underprivileged citizens. Finally, we submit the recommendations of the *Conseil des Montréalaises* to improve access to public transportation for women.

### Low mobility and poverty

Mobility is a determining factor in the citizen's process of social and economical integration. Among other things, being able to move about easily contributes to better access to employment, breaks social isolation, and eases the performance of daily obligations. However, the distances to access urban functions have become greater, and require greater mobility on the part of citizens. The capacity to be mobile is essential and yet increasingly complex because of the way our society has evolved. This is a source of social differentiation related to **economic situations**, and **psychomotor capacity** (physical capacities, handicaps), but mainly to **cognitive skills** and **education** (the ability to read and write, understanding a city plan, being understood when inquiring about directions). The **notion of motility**, that is to say "a set of factors that define the potential to be spatially mobile" implies the acquisition of a number of skills that may be more difficult to achieve for women as they devote more of their time between work and family. Therefore, the inability to be mobile becomes a factor of impoverishment and exclusion,

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<sup>1</sup>Participating groups: The Table régionale des organismes volontaires d'éducation populaire de Montréal (TROVEP), the Table régionale des centres de femmes du Montréal métropolitain-Laval (TRCFMML), the Centre 1, 2, 3 Go!, the Table de concertation des aînés de l'île de Montréal (TCAÎM), the Centre de lecture et d'écriture (CLÉ), the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale (CCLP), Transport 2000 and the Regroupement des usagers du transport adapté (RUTA).

producing a closed equation of psychological withdrawal. **Being able to move about easily means being able to fully enjoy all the opportunities that city life has to offer, and therefore promotes equal opportunity.**

### **Accessibility of Montreal's mass transit services**

**Statistical data** reveals that a large number of Montreal women face economic insecurity. Indeed, their capacity to move about is strongly linked to affordable transportation. Between 2000 and 2006, the price index for public transportation has risen “**twice as fast as the general index of consumer prices in Quebec (29.2% against 13.6%)**” (CCLP, 2008: 17). **Over half of the trips made by Montreal women are within their neighbourhood.** Finally, the means of transportation used by women involve more public transportation or active transport, regardless of their neighbourhood of residence, **making Montreal women bigger users of public transportation than Montreal men.**

In order to better understand user behaviours and to highlight the limits of the public transportation currently on offer, a **qualitative survey** of public transportation accessibility was carried out. Its main objective was to gather the perspectives of Montreal women on the issue, specifically low income women. In addition, the *Conseil des Montréalaises* interviewed major actors in the field of public transportation.

**Service, tariff structure, and quality of service** stood out as key issues.

**Insufficiency of service**, that is to say the lack of bus routes in some areas, is the main problem. These claims are based on the fact that routes and schedules in (non central) neighbourhoods are sometimes inconsistent with household activity requirements and access to services within the neighbourhood. According to the organisations who participated in the survey, routes and schedules should be designed to facilitate movements within and between neighbourhoods in order to provide better access to businesses and services. Presently, the STM (Société de transport de Montréal) targets its efforts on service improvement in the central district and its periphery, the sectors under development where there is a high volume of clientele. However, the STM does plan to look at the issue of service within and in between neighbourhoods.

Regarding **tariff structure**, participants and groups unanimously identified high and frequent toll increases and the limited possibilities of individual ticket usage (with or without OPUS card) as constituting major obstacles. **Because income has not kept up with the numerous toll increases, the current public transportation tariff structure limits the buying capacity of the most deprived.** Being unable to go back and forth on the same bus route within the validity period of the ticket, or to stop at the day-care centre between home and work were cited by many as an obstacle to their daily mobility.

On this issue, the position of consulted organisations is somewhat different. Some promote the reduction of tariffs; others promote tariff increases that are no higher than inflation. While some demand affordable tariffs for all, others promote a social tariff structure for low income people. **Everybody agrees that tariffs play a major part in access to a wide range of rights other than solely the right of mobility.**

**As a public transport organisation, the STM agrees that it has a social role to play.** It has therefore implemented some social tariffs for students and seniors, and more recently through its *Family Outings* program. Following the introduction of the OPUS card, new measures, were also

implemented, or are being explored, in order to avoid extra costs for parents and school boards when students participate in school field trips, or to further reduce the tariff for students. It seems difficult for the STM to offer a tariff structure based on clientele income. Such an initiative would be easier to set in place through municipal, provincial or federal initiatives.

Finally, in terms of **quality of service**, many obstacles were mentioned in relation to four aspects: universal access to the regular mass transit system (strollers, visually disabled users, etc.), security, comfort, and information.

Universal access to the regular mass transit system remains an important issue, although progress has been made. Eliminating steps in buses, improving door-opening systems, using double decker buses where the first deck would be reserved to the exclusive use of users with limited capacity, installing yellow stripes and adequate lighting in the subway stairways, and providing signage in big characters of contrasting colours are just a few of the suggestions for improvement that were mentioned. The organisations consulted stated that it was essential for the STM to keep in mind the principle of universal access in its efforts to improve services. On that matter, RUTA (the Regroupement des usagers du transport adapté et accessible de l'Île de Montréal) has stated that the STM has shown good faith when answering in part those demands and pursuing its efforts to improve service.

**Organisations that provided opinions on the matter have stated that it is essential for the STM and the City of Montreal to systematically apply the principles of safe design in all their projects.**

The issue of **security** was mentioned in relation to the clientele and design of some subway stations and bus stops. The STM and the City of Montreal are aware of this reality. The city administration is planning to add safety features in some subway stations. As for the STM, it is pursuing its efforts to acquire crime prevention equipment through Transit-Secure, a federal funding program. It can also count on the support of the recently set up Subway Unit of the Montreal police department.

In terms of **comfort** (or should we say discomfort) participants mentioned the absence of bus shelters or benches at some bus stops, as well as the rudeness or impatience of some drivers.

Finally, participants reported **inadequacies in terms of public information**. It appears that it is difficult to be adequately informed about the itinerary while underway, as well as where to stop or transfer/connect. On this issue, the STM is planning to improve the quality of information for its clientele, basing its efforts on defining precise standards, and on new technologies such as user-info in real time.

### **Offer of specialized transportation**

Two organisations have raised the issue of the **adequacy of the offer of specialized transportation** in relation to the **increasingly aging population**. It is anticipated that the offer will be insufficient, and existing alternatives will not be able to cope, considering they already have difficulties in meeting current demand. As for the lack of civility, some organisations wish to see a reinforcement of awareness campaigns on this issue throughout the public transit network. The STM regularly conducts campaigns to remind users of the importance of civic issues such as cleanliness. As a whole, the STM and the City of Montreal are showing some sensitivity towards this matter. The outlook is promising for universal access and improvement of access.

However, in terms of specialized transportation and tariffs, the outlook is not as promising. Moreover, the various actors have different views on the way these issues should be dealt with. Therefore, the *Conseil des Montréalaises* looked at different initiatives elsewhere in Canada and around the world. The following is a summary of those initiatives.

## **Inspiring initiatives, in Canada, and around the world**

### **France**

In terms of mobility, the approach is centered on “daily life”, targeting the **improvement of access to the city and its opportunities** for underprivileged groups. Tariff policies and the meshing of collective transit networks are the two main fields of intervention. The Taxibus initiative in Dunkerke, where the tariff is adjusted to the user resources, is one example. Also, the validity period of the user card (up to one year) allows for a social tariff structure “à la carte”.

### **Belgium**

Initiatives in terms of mobility in Belgium are **tools to promote participation in society** and, by extension, tools to prevent social exclusion. The initiatives mainly target tariffs and the creation of a tailored offer. A team of *Lijnspotters* has been created. Their mandate is to prevent assaults in buses, tramways and hubs. They also help users inform network operators of any technical problems.

### **United States**

Initiatives to promote mobility are essentially part of a **strategy to reduce mobility obstacles to employment**. In Boston, along with the existing bus and subway service, there is, for the same rate, a river shuttle service providing access to various boroughs, among which is Logan International Airport..

### **United Kingdom**

Initiatives in terms of mobility are mainly designed to **promote professional inclusion**. The initiatives consist in adapting existing public transit service by extending routes, modifying schedules or creating new routes to link high unemployment neighbourhoods with areas where jobs are more plentiful. The *Crosslink* service, in **Sheffield**, is an example of such an initiative.

### **Genoa (Italy)**

Along with its regular network of public transportation the [e](#) city offers a **service upon request** operating in areas where housing density and demand are low.

### **Canada**

The city of Calgary has a **policy of tariff discount** targeting low income users. Service is free for children under 6; tariffs are reduced for the elderly (over 65) and for users between 6 and 14 – and for those going to school up to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. A social tariff is offered to low income users as well. Besides, many postsecondary institutions have an agreement with the transit authority of Calgary that provides free and unlimited access to the transit network for students of those institutions.

In Halifax, a service similar to “Entre deux arrêts” in Montreal was launched by the *Metro Transit Safe Ride Committee*. It is, however, offered to a wider range of users: any person traveling

alone, mainly women, children and the elderly, and using the regular public transit network after 6 pm.

### **Trondheim (Norway)**

Various measures were implemented to **improve information for sightless, partially sighted or hearing impaired users**: the *Trondheim Traffic Company's* (TT) stations are automatically announced, schedules are displayed in big and bold characters, and Websites are specially designed for hearing impaired, partially sighted and sightless users.

It appears that, whatever the authority at the origin of those initiatives (governmental, regional, local), collaboration between multiple actors is essential and seems to be the means by which most of those initiatives have found their viability. All initiatives are not transferable to the context of Montreal, but they remain inspiring and demonstrate the feasibility of such transformations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

By being less mobile, people, especially when also encountering socio-economic difficulties, are at risk of not being able to fully enjoy social resources that could contribute to the betterment of their living conditions. As for women in Montreal, this position paper has revealed that their condition is influenced by the mass transit currently on offer. For the *Conseil des Montréalaises*, such an offer must provide a level of mobility that insures equal chances for all in terms of quality of life. Thus, it is essential to integrate improvements in that regard. As the aptitude for mobility is apprehended through the concept of motility<sup>2</sup>, the following recommendations are presented in view of its three components: Accessibility, Competency, and Appropriation. Our recommendations are also based on the observations submitted by Montreal women and stakeholders who participated in our consultations.

### ACCESSIBILITY

Although the STM is constantly trying to expand the network of its regular public transportation system, consulted women and stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the consequences of the inefficiency – or absence – of local service on the organization of their daily lives, as well as on access to urban resources. For example, some women can only travel to certain work districts with great difficulty, due to an excessively long travel-time caused by the inadequacy of local service. Thus, in regard to:

#### Public Transportation Regular Service

The *Conseil* recommends that:

- R1** service be examined in terms of local needs, taking in accounts women's particular profile in terms of mobility (that is to say a traveling area that is generally local with broken itinerary and means of transportation that are collective and active) when planning the development of the regular public transportation network;
- R2** service be more suitably adapted to sectors that are enclosed or of low density, following the example of the city of Genoa where an "on request" service was created to complete and, in some places, replace existing routes in areas of low density and low demand. This kind of initiative appears to be less costly and more efficient than expanding regular routes;
- R3** the STM pay attention to bus punctuality on routes that are less frequented, and evaluate the possibility to optimize connections between those routes in strategic intersections as a short term strategy to improve service between and within neighbourhoods and boroughs.

In order to achieve this goal, the *Conseil des Montréalaises* is inviting the STM to pursue its consultation efforts in the community, and integrate the point of view of users in their decision-making process, as was the case when it implemented the "Navette Or" Service. The *Conseil* wants to express its support for this initiative and hopes to see the service established elsewhere

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of motility is defined as follow: "Motility consists of the ensemble of factors defining the potentiality to be spatially mobile" (Smereka, 2007:8).

in the network. The *Conseil* also wishes to express its satisfaction regarding recent initiatives taken to improve the efficiency of the regular service, such as the reserved lanes and the articulated buses on high traffic routes. According to the women consulted, those initiatives may well improve their transportation circumstances and, as a result, facilitate their access to urban resources.

According to the women and stakeholders consulted, aside from local service, tariff rates appear to be a significant factor in enabling people to use public transportation. The impact of current tariffs is all the more important given the fact that it not only limits access to urban resources but also puts pressure on low income household budgets. For the *Conseil des Montréalaises*, the tariff issue must not be considered only from a progression standpoint but also in relation with the capacity and needs of users, man or woman. The *Conseil* shares this position with the *Association canadienne du transport urbain* (ACTU), as stated in its report: *La Vision 2040*. Thus, with regard to:

### **Public Transit Tariffs Structure**

The *Conseil* recommends that:

- R4** tariffs for public transportation do not increase more so than the general consumer price index;
- R5** a tariff for households living under the low income line (according to Statistic Canada) be established as part of a global strategy to fight poverty. Social tariffs implemented in Calgary and in Dunkerque, where ticket prices are adjusted to user income, are particularly inspiring;
- R6** the tariff structure associated with “Family Outings”, – a program supported by the *Conseil* – be reviewed to better answer the needs of families. For example:
  - by expanding the program to include weekdays, outside peak hours;
  - by offering free access, starting with the third child;
- R7** a daily fare of less than \$4 be established to allow an unlimited number of trips outside peak hours (that is to say from 9 am to 4 pm, and from 7pm to 6 am).

To these improvements, the *Conseil* wishes to add two additional recommendations. The first relates to the conditions under which a single ticket can be used. In view of their traveling needs, the women consulted believe that the implementation of the following recommendation would greatly improve their access to public transportation:

- R8** to allow the use of the same bus route in both directions within the period of validity of a single ticket.

The second recommendation relates to the conditions of access to reduced fares. There is only one point of service for registration into the Opus system, namely, the Métro McGill station where users have their pictures taken, fill out forms and pay the \$3 fee. For some women, this restriction is an additional obstacle to public transportation access. Therefore, the *Conseil* recommends:

- R9** to increase the number of points of service for registration into the Opus System.

In addition, we must not ignore the issue of universal access within the public transportation service. The *Conseil des Montréalaises* recognizes the STM's ongoing efforts to make its regular network more accessible to persons of reduced mobility. The *Conseil* supports the STM's approach to develop a universal access policy as well as its pursuit of a dialog with the community on this issue. Thus, with regard to:

### **Universal Access of Public Transit Regular Service**

The *Conseil* recommends the following:

- R10** If this newly adopted policy is to be followed by an action plan, the transit authority should map the latter in partnership with concerned groups, and include people traveling with a stroller;
- R11** Routes and schedules for new low-floor buses should be established according to demographics, favouring, for example, young families, the elderly, etc.

Finally, if we consider the access to specialized transportation, the CRÉ of Montreal and the TCAÎM have voiced preoccupations in regard to the ability of the service to answer the transportation needs of its users in the near future in view of the increasingly ageing population. The impact of the phenomenon on possible access to urban resources and social life is predictable and its arrival imminent. Thus, with regard to:

### **Access to Specialized Transportation**

The *Conseil des Montréalaises* recommends:

- R12** that the City of Montreal exhibit leadership by working together with the organizations and government bodies concerned about the problem, in such a way as to explore new avenues of meeting the needs, over and above the existing initiatives resulting from the partnership of the STM and the taxi industry.

Access to public transportation is certainly essential as regards matters of urban mobility, especially for the underprivileged, but also, as we have seen, the use of public transit also requires the ability and the appropriation of these means of transportation by the citizens. Furthermore, for the *Conseil des Montréalaises*, it is important that the City of Montreal and the STM intervene, in their efforts to improve the system, on these two other components of motility although they won't be able to solve the issue entirely.

### **COMPETENCIES**

By way of its various tools of communication and assistance for planning its routes, the STM already intervenes on this aspect of motility. But it remains that many users do not have access to such tools and information – like those on its Website – or still, do not have the necessary skills to understand and use them. Indeed, the *Conseil* heard, during the course of the group discussions, the many questions of participants (especially those who don't regularly use the public transportation system) regarding the use of the new Opus card and the changes that entails, and this, despite the considerable measures it took to ensure a smooth transition. The *Conseil des Montréalaises* therefore recommends:



**R13** that the STM pursue and increase its efforts to inform and instruct its clientele in such a way as to facilitate the acquisition of the skills needed to use public transit, especially with those who are new to the City and the elderly. More specifically, this means striving for a better understanding of:

- the proper use of the tools of mobility specific to public transportation, such as the Opus card, ticket and card machines, etc. As for the Opus card, the *Conseil* believes that it would be best to make the card more user-friendly, for example, by making it possible for users to know how many trips remain on the card;
- programs such as “Sorties en famille” and “Entre deux arrest” that the *Conseil* would like to see more widely promoted, more specifically in buses and bus shelters;
- the rules;
- the instructions given to bus drivers in regard to interventions with riders (that is to say, what the drivers can or cannot do). The *Conseil* further believes that STM staff members should be made more aware of the reality of the elderly and of people with toddlers in strollers, and that internal policies be realigned accordingly, perhaps with the support of the unions, in order to make public transportation more user-friendly for these people at all times;
- how best to orient oneself within the system.

To do so, the STM, in collaboration with the City of Montreal, could work with local organizations (community organizations, job centres, etc.) to develop, for example, projects like the mobility workshops offered in Saint-Nazaire by the *Fédération des Maisons de Quartier*. This would make reaching the users more likely in need of assistance far easier.

The *Conseil* would also like to express its support for recent initiatives launched by the STM that aim to inform its clientele in real time. It however recommends:

**R14** that the information systems developed be modified to better serve the hearing and visually impaired, following the example set by the city of Trondheim;

**R15** that the information systems developed inform riders of the possible solutions available to them during long metro stopovers.

Concurrent to the tools and measures undertaken to facilitate the learning of competency helpful in using public transportation, the STM and the City of Montreal could contribute to a concrete appropriation of its service by its users by enabling them to better learn how to use these tools and measures.

## **APPROPRIATION**

By developing initiatives that facilitate learning about the various tools required to use the public transit system, the STM will in turn facilitate the appropriation of its service by the general population, and thereby, contribute to their greater mobility with this means of transportation. To that end, the *Conseil des Montréalaises* recommends:

**R16** that communication campaigns be launched regularly, perhaps seasonally, throughout the public transit network, especially in buses. Following the example of the *lijnspotters*

in Flanders<sup>3</sup>, these campaigns would be led by teams trained to intervene with users on matters of information and civic mindedness or to offer assistance in learning the skills required to make better use of the transit system, or to help the more physically challenged.

By acting on the components of *competency and appropriation* of motility, the STM and the City of Montreal would also be acting on a variety of other problems mentioned by the women surveyed and linked to questions of quality of service, basically, issues of comfort and security. The *Conseil des Montréalaises* would nonetheless like to make a few complementary recommendations on these two last points:

## COMPLEMENTARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the initiatives launched by the STM and the City of Montreal dealing with security issues, women and stakeholders consulted mentioned the insecurity they experience in certain areas of the transit network and the consequences it engenders. On the issue of:

### Security

The *Conseil des Montréalaises* recommends:

- R17** that the STM and the City of Montreal ensure that the principles outlined in the *Guide d'aménagement pour un environnement urbain sécuritaire* (Guide for the development of a safe urban environment) be systematically applied in and around metro and commuter train stations, in the immediate vicinity of the network's major stations and along the pedestrian links to the network.

To do so, the *Conseil des Montréalaises* strongly suggests that the organization consult with users and STM employees to explore avenues that could enhance the feeling of security in these locations.

- R18** that the "Entre deux arrêts" program be expanded to include other groups (the elderly, passengers with strollers, etc.) following the example of the "Request Stop" service in Halifax<sup>4</sup>.

The Montreal woman surveyed also highlighted elements of daily unease in regard to bus shelters that constitute an additional impediment to the use of the public transit system. Consequently, in terms of:

### Comfort

The *Conseil des Montréalaises* recommends:

- R19** that the STM and the City of Montreal continue to build bus shelters, especially in openly windswept areas;

- R20** that the STM and the City of Montreal ensure that all bus shelters be provided with:

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

- trash bins;
- adequate lighting, by way of nearby street lighting or solar panels;
- with a “No Smoking” sign.

And that it study the possibility of heating the shelters by way of solar panels.

In closing, the *Conseil des Montréalaises* would like to express its support for the initiatives launched by the City of Montreal in order to obtain new sources of financing for the continued development of its public transportation service. In this perspective, it encourages the City to translate into concrete terms the savings and benefits that a quality public transit system can offer, were it only by its participation in the war on poverty.