

Book review: *Montréal at the Crossroads*, edited by Pierre Gauthier, Jochen Jaeger, and Jason Princer

Paul Anderson

École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne ^a

Montréal at the Crossroads

edited by Pierre Gauthier, Jochen Jaeger, and Jason Princer
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Montréal is at a potential turning point in its transportation policy, one that most North American cities will reach in the next decade or so. The Turcot Interchange, the busiest and most centrally located node in Montréal's freeway network, is in very poor condition. It is a maze of elevated ramps towering over the Lachine Canal and Canadian National rail yards. All stakeholders agree that the current interchange needs to be replaced, but the question has become: with what? The Ministère des Transports du Québec (MTQ) has developed a plan to fully rebuild the interchange, expanding capacity, lowering ramps and building some elevated sections on embankments in the process. Other groups have proposed alternate solutions, such as reinforcing the current structure in place, removing the Ville-Marie freeway which leaves the interchange to the east, and developing alternative routes by investing in public transit and bypasses for freight traffic. Although this book discusses issues specific to Montréal, the arguments are applicable to other North American cities. In a general sense, this book discusses whether it is appropriate to rebuild aging highway infrastructure or whether the need for highway infrastructure renewal should be an opportunity to make major changes in the urban transportation network. Each chapter was written by different authors and contributes a separate view of the Turcot Interchange and the proposals to rebuild it. The authors of this book range from students to experts in their fields and come from backgrounds in biology, environmental science, architecture, engineering, and planning. The book relies primarily on academic research but is written in such a way that the individual sections are accessible to readers without experience in the relevant field. It might appeal

to practitioners and neighborhood activists outside Montréal and could serve as an interesting case study for a transportation policy class.

In the 1960s, Montréal embarked on a huge building phase for its transportation network. Nine expressways were built in the region, the Autoroutes 10, 13, 15, 19, 20, 25, 40, 520, and 720. At the same time, the Montréal Metro was constructed, opening in 1966. Both of these projects had been in planning stages for years, but the impetus to complete them was the Montréal Expo in 1967. (The Turcot Interchange opened literally days before the Expo began.) Large and simultaneous investments in expressways and rapid transit have created equilibrium between highways and transit and the timing of the projects avoided an institutional preference of one mode over the other. Since the 1960s the regional government has shown a commitment to transit by extending metro lines and developing a commuter rail service in the 1990s and 2000s. However, the commuter rail service has been faulted for promoting the same kind of low-density suburban development associated with highways and Montréal has not expanded its rapid transit services in the same way that other Canadian cities have (most notably Vancouver) in the last decade. An argument against the MTQ plan for the Turcot interchange is that, while it would not change the balance between highway and transit infrastructure in the region, its budget of \$1.5 billion represents an opportunity cost that will serve to delay other worthy transportation projects.

The MTQ proposal for the Turcot Interchange, perceived as very auto-oriented, has triggered a backlash from the community. This reaction has led to the development of several alternative proposals. One of these agrees that the Turcot is a key node in Montréal's transportation network and pro-

^a paul.anderson@epfl.ch

poses to reduce its importance. Brisset and Moorman's proposal would combine the renewal of the highway interchange with transit improvements such as additional trips on commuter rail lines, reserved bus lanes on highways, and new transit lines to the airport and the City of Lachine. It would also remove some highway ramps to discourage short trips on the expressways. Sijpkes' proposal suggests that it would be cheaper to build a new steel support structure below the existing concrete overpasses and then replace the deck, as opposed to building entirely new overpasses. This could be done with no right-of-way acquisition and would leave the nearby Falaise Saint-Jacques and abandoned Turcot Rail Yards open for redevelopment as a park. (The MTQ proposal would rebuild the Autoroute 720 closer to the falaise to keep the road open during construction and open up the land under the current roadbed for redevelopment). A proposal by Larsen shows that truck traffic often uses the Turcot Interchange because it is the most logical east-west connection for through traffic across Montréal. He suggests that if autoroute connections were improved on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, it would reduce the number of through trucks using the Turcot Interchange.

One part of the MTQ proposal that is criticized throughout the book is the idea to rebuild parts of the interchange on embankments instead of the current elevated highway. From an engineering standpoint, this would reduce maintenance costs but it requires more right-of-way and from an urban design perspective serves to further fragment neighborhoods. Gauthier presents a detailed proposal to convert the Autoroute 15 to a tunnel in the Galt and Cabot neighborhoods south of the interchange. With the autoroute out of the picture, this area of the city would have significant redevelopment opportunities. (It should be noted that the chapters by Asch and Gauthier are entirely in French. A non-French speaker would miss the details of their proposals, but their main points on how the MTQ proposal impacts the surrounding neighborhoods appear in English chapters as well.)

Ghamoushi-Ramandi, Moorman, Brown, and von Rudloff develop a policy analysis that assesses the MTQ proposal and Brisset's transit-based proposal on how well they meet the stated goals of the current comprehensive plans for the region. All four are students in Environmental Impact Assessment at Concordia University. The analysis assigns a weight to various municipal, provincial, and federal plans in the categories of transport, noise, and socioeconomics. On a ± 30 point scale (10 for each category), the MTQ plan is assigned a value of -10.92 and the Brisset proposal a score of 14.01. This analysis is used to show that the MTQ plan does not support the goals

of any relevant plan, including those developed by the provincial government itself. Most of the goals have to do with increasing transportation options and improving quality of life in inner-city areas. On a related note, Ferguson, Moriarity, Gagnon, and McCavour (also students in Environmental Impact Assessment) present research showing the negative physical and psychological effects of living within 200m of an expressway.

In the final chapter, Lockwood and Mann, who are planning practitioners, look at other cities in an attempt to gauge trends in transportation policy. They present positive examples in Charlotte, which has tried to direct growth along high capacity transit corridors, Vancouver, which never built urban highways and is now developing a transit system, and Chicago, which is working on sustainability and livability through its Complete Streets program. As a negative example, they present Detroit, which built numerous urban highways that contributed to its loss of wealth and population over the last 50 years. In the conclusion, the editors add San Francisco and Copenhagen as positive examples since both have taken steps to remove cars and encourage the use of other modes.

Montréal at the Crossroads covers a broad swath of academic research concerning the Turcot Interchange in particular as well as the direction of transportation in Montréal as a whole. It is very critical of the Ministère des Transports du Québec at times, but this is a constructive criticism complete with many counterproposals that would address the problems with the former's plan. This work is, first and foremost, about Montréal, but it tackles issues that many cities in North America will face in the next decade or two as their highway infrastructure reaches the end of its useful life.