



**Chambre de commerce  
du Montréal métropolitain**  
**Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal**

June 19, 2009

Michel Germain  
Commission Chairman  
Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement  
Lomer-Gouin Building  
575 Saint-Amable Street, Suite 2.10  
Québec City, Quebec G1R 6A6

**Subject:** Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal brief concerning the project to rebuild the Turcot Interchange

Dear Mr. Germain:

The project to rebuild the Turcot Interchange is of great interest to the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal and as such, we would like to submit our comments in this regard.

This transportation infrastructure links a number of major roadways and plays a key role in the mobility of people and the transportation of goods across Quebec. The Turcot Interchange connects to various infrastructures such as the Montréal-Trudeau airport, large distribution centres and the Port of Montréal, all high-traffic sites.

The Board of Trade's opinion is based on a salient fact that is of great concern to the metropolitan business community, namely, the socioeconomic cost of traffic congestion in Montréal, estimated at \$1.4 billion a year. Few would disagree that such a cost seriously hinders the city's development.<sup>1</sup>

The Board of Trade's position may be summarized as follows:

1. Since user safety is at play and given the extreme importance of the Turcot Interchange to the Montréal economy, the reconstruction project must begin and be completed as soon as possible.
2. The Turcot Interchange is a pivotal part of the city's transportation network and as such, it is important to keep traffic flowing as smoothly as possible during the work.
3. The following three main principles should guide the project's design and execution, in order of priority:
  - First, it must keep local and transitory traffic flowing smoothly, taking into account the city's current and future volume;

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<sup>1</sup> Ministère des Transports du Québec, *Évaluation des coûts de la congestion routière dans la région de Montréal pour les conditions de référence de 2003*, page 6, 2009

- Second, it must include carpooling and public transit lanes as well as accommodate rail transportation;
- Third, it must enhance Montréal's signature as a UNESCO City of Design both in terms of its appearance and its impact on the accessibility and quality of life in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

4. The project must respect the public partners' budget and not result in cost overruns.

### **1. TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE**

Given that the interchange, built in the 1960s, is now crumbling, we support the Ministère des Transports du Québec's (MTQ) desire to begin rebuilding as soon as possible. We must avoid concrete accidents that could jeopardize user safety and cause ramp closures, completely shutting down the interchange to traffic.

Moreover, given that it will inject massive funds into the metropolitan economy and with the many suppliers involved generate much-needed economic spinoffs in many areas of Quebec, hastening the project's launch would certainly help the economic recovery.

### **2. KEEP TRAFFIC FLOWING DURING THE WORK**

The largest hub in Quebec and Eastern Canada, the Turcot Interchange is a vital link to the U.S., the Maritimes and Ontario. In many respects, this interchange is essential for the mobility of people and goods transportation, particularly as regards exports by road and access to railway, port and air cargo facilities. Greater Montréal is the point of origin for 70% of Quebec's exports, and some 280,000 vehicles use the interchange every day. Of this number, 5% to 9% are trucks.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a great deal of merchandise to and from the Quebec's regions is transported over the metropolitan road network.

The MTQ hopes to carry out the reconstruction without affecting traffic. This is crucial since any serious reduction in mobility at the interchange would cripple trade with some partners, with potentially serious consequences for the development of Montréal and Quebec as a whole.

We see that the MTQ has tried to find creative technical solutions to rebuild the interchange without unduly disrupting traffic. Managing the worksite will require just as much diligence, and stiff fines should be contemplated to prevent poor work organization that results in traffic tie-ups.

On another front, the rebuilding of the Turcot Interchange provides an excellent opportunity to promote modal transfer. We should follow the example of the Quartier international de Montréal, whose project managers found a number of strategies to encourage public transit use during the roadwork. This approach, which went a long way to reducing the traffic snarls that are part and parcel of road construction, also had long-term benefits, namely, many

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<sup>2</sup> Ministère des Transports, *Projet de reconstruction du complexe Turcot, Étude d'impact sur l'environnement, Rapport principal*, 2008, page 164.

commuters who switched to public transportation during the construction continued to use the system after the project was finished, resulting in less traffic in the area.

In many respects the situation is the same for motorists who use the interchange. If a viable public transit option is put in place before the work begins, we may see many of them switch over. And in the longer term, if these commuters are satisfied with the quality, frequency and reliability of the services, they will be less inclined to go back to driving their car to work once the construction is over.

### 3. **ADOPT A CONCEPT THAT RESPECTS THREE PRIORITIES: FLUIDITY, INTEGRATION AND DESIGN**

Because this vital metropolitan link has an economic impact that transcends the city's borders, we would like to make two important observations: Quebec needs this roadway to prosper, and it must be seamlessly integrated into the road network. In this respect, we are troubled by the Quebec auditor general's recently expressed concerns on transportation planning in the metropolitan region. The issue goes beyond the Turcot Interchange project; however, since this infrastructure will be the cornerstone of the provincial and metropolitan road network, we believe that mobilizing and obtaining the backing of Quebec's other transportation stakeholders will go a long way to ensuring the project's success.

#### PRINCIPLE NO. 1: GUARANTEE LONG-TERM TRAFFIC FLUIDITY

In our view, the principles that should govern the decision to proceed with this reconstruction should be prioritized. As such, the first principle should be to maintain traffic fluidity. In other words, a highway that leads to a city should be just that, a highway. We must avoid the temptation to convert part of it into an urban boulevard and then turn it back into a highway outside the city. As well, the number of lanes for passenger and merchandise traffic should not be reduced. The project should be aligned with other MTQ initiatives that will have a direct impact on provincial traffic flow, for example, the completion of highway 30, the modernization of Notre-Dame Street and the future upgrading of the Metropolitan Autoroute.

#### PRINCIPLE NO. 2: PLAN TO INTEGRATE OTHER TRANSPORTATION METHODS

The second principle calls for a visionary project that includes room for reserved carpool, bus lanes, and a rail link. It means being creative to define a project that creates an improved interchange that is part of an integrated transportation network. In our view, the Turcot Interchange is an integrated, fundamental part of Greater Montréal's transportation network. Although the area's many other transportation infrastructures belong to different administrative units, bringing them all together makes perfect sense.

The MTQ has stated that it is currently studying the possibility of reserved lanes for buses. We believe *all* forms of public transportation must be an integral part of the project design. This approach would be a very effective way to reduce the number of vehicles travelling through the interchange and encouraging motorists to switch to public transit.

The Board of Trade is of the view that the public transit elements must be planned and justified in the same way as the road components, i.e. from a broad perspective and mindful

to optimize the return on investment. The public transit method selected, particularly in the east-west direction of the interchange, must consider existing transportation infrastructures as well as the needs of current and future users.

A study conducted by the Board of Trade showed that public transportation generates \$1.3 billion in economic spinoffs every year and that every 2% increase in the modal share of public transit would result in 19 million fewer car trips in the Montréal area. Such a modal transfer would translate into substantial annual economic spinoffs of over \$150 million for the Montréal region,<sup>3</sup> a figure that would grow even higher if the Turcot project would make public transit a priority.

#### PRINCIPLE NO. 3: COME UP WITH AN INNOVATIVE, STRIKING DESIGN

This last principle involves coming up with a creative and bold architectural design befitting a city that has become a UNESCO City of Design and that wishes to stand out as a creative city. Moreover, the rebuilding of the interchange will affect a number of neighbourhoods, areas that are now cut up and isolated by the existing roadways and industrial activities alongside the interchange.

This project is a good opportunity to breathe new life into these areas by improving the quality of life of the residential neighbourhoods and enhancing the riverfront industrial areas of certain sections. Companies that require easy highway access close to downtown may see great value in this land. The Board of Trade understands that these types of mandates are beyond the MTQ's jurisdiction. However, the MTQ can certainly take the lead by showing a willingness to work with the local organizations and bodies responsible for such mandates.

The same is true for the Turcot Yards, which belong the MTQ and which will be the site of the reconstruction. We see good development potential for this land, located so close to downtown and already served by urban and transportation infrastructures. The development of this land will beautify the city entrance from the west.

We would therefore like to see special attention paid to the architectural quality of the new interchange. We must call upon our best and brightest to give this project a genuine Montréal signature.

#### 4. RESPECT THE FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

Given that some sections of the Turcot Interchange are crumbling and considering that Montréal absolutely must have unfettered access to an efficient infrastructure, the time for this project is now. As well, this structuring project should be part of a broader initiative to upgrade the metropolitan area's major roadways.

The Quebec government seems to be leaning towards a public-private partnership (PPP) for the Turcot reconstruction. While there are advantages to a PPP, notably, spreading out the public investment over many years and timely road maintenance, the Board of Trade

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<sup>3</sup> Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal, *Public transit: a powerful economic-development engine for the metropolitan region*, 2004.

believes the government should proceed with caution since rebuilding the interchange is extremely complex, entailing a very high level of risk for the private partners.

In this context, the Board of Trade would like to see the MTQ find a way to quickly get the project off the ground and leave sufficient leeway to easily adjust and expand the scope of the work if necessary. Also, the project risks must be carefully weighed and the budgets respected. Finally, in light of these uncertain economic times, the financing method selected should be the one that gets the project off the ground the fastest so as to help kick-start Montréal's economic recovery.

#### CONCLUSION

In closing, the Board of Trade reiterates the importance of the Turcot Interchange to the economic development of both Greater Montréal and Québec as a whole, hence the need to proceed as soon as possible. Since a project of this magnitude is bound to have a disruptive effect on the metropolitan transportation network, steps must be taken to keep traffic moving as smoothly as possible during the roadwork. As well, the three major principles—fluidity, integration and design—must be an integral part of all the project phases, from conception to implementation. Most importantly, the project must be completed on budget.

Please be assured of the Board of Trade's full co-operation in contributing to the development of Greater Montréal.

Sincerely,

Michel Leblanc  
President and CEO