PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC TRANSIT:

An exploratory approach assessing variations across transit projects in Montréal, Canada

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INTRODUCTION

- Public opinion of public-transit infrastructure has been highlighted as an important driver of political action. However, limited comparative research has been conducted on public perceptions of new public-transit projects.
- The Réseau Express Métropolitain (REM) a new light-rail system - and the Pie-IX Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) are two new publictransit projects under construction in the Montréal region.

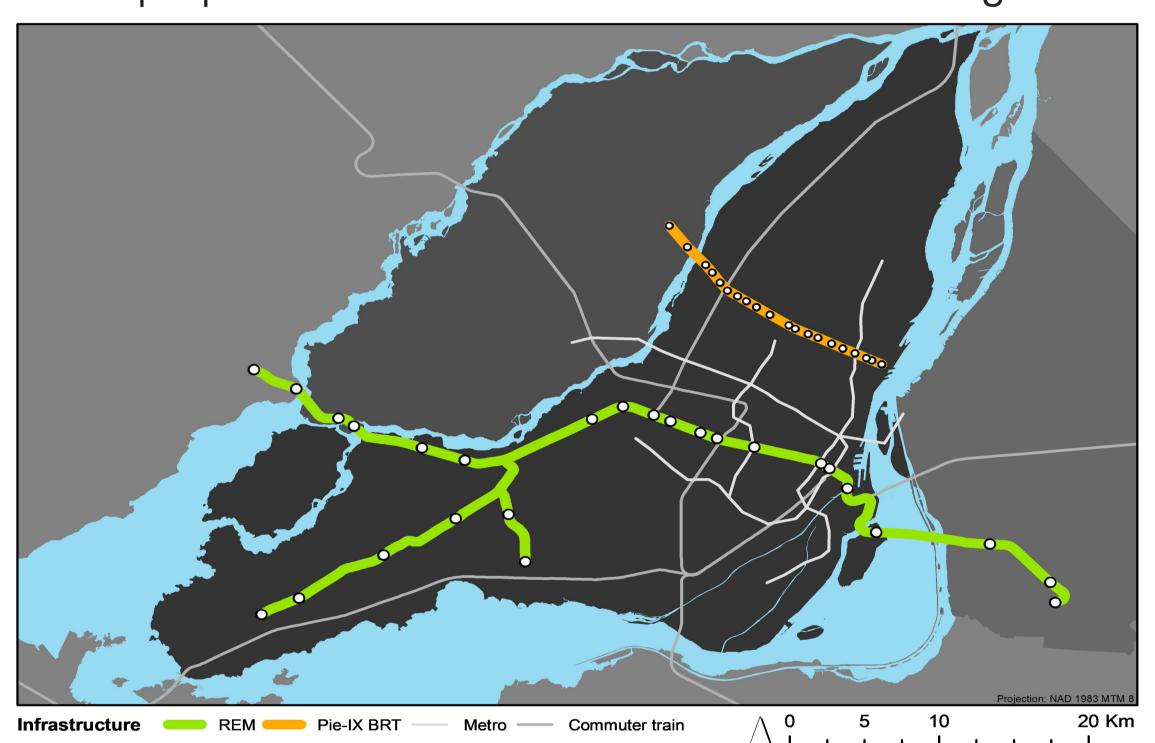


Figure 1 - Public transit infrastructure and operators in the Montréal Region

METHODS

Data from Montréal Mobility Survey Wave 2 (Fall 2021):

Quantiative Data: Agreement level (6 impact statements)

Pie-IX BRT N=2332

Qualitative Data: Open-ended questions

Pie-IX BRT N=200

Applied thematic analysis was used on the open-ended questions to categorize responses into relevant themes using an inductive approach.

ANALYSIS/RESULTS

Results

Table 1 - Distribution of agreement levels per question and transport project

Survey question	Response	REM	BRT
	Agree	80.35%	76.21%
When complete, the project will be a good thing for the greater Montréal area.	Neutral	12.28%	17.97%
	Disagree	7.36%	5.83%
When complete, the project will be a good thing for my neighborhood.	Agree	39.01%	29.76%
	Neutral	41.40%	51.03%
	Disagree	19.59%	19.21%
When complete, the project will be good for the environment.	Agree	71.68%	67.33%
	Neutral	20.29%	25.73%
	Neutral Disagree Agree	8.03%	6.95%
	Agree	59.71%	52.18%
When complete, the project will be good for businesses.	Neutral	31.28%	38.94%
	Disagree	80.35% 12.28% 2e 7.36% 39.01% 41.40% 2e 19.59% 71.68% 20.29% 2e 8.03% 59.71% 31.28% 2e 9.01% 42.66% 37.95% 2e 19.38% 16.91% 34.17%	8.88%
	Agree	42.66%	34.26%
When complete, the project will be good for Montréal's culture and heritage.	Neutral	37.95%	50.17%
iage.	Disagree	19.38%	15.57%
I am concerned about whether I will be able to remain in my neighborhood after the completion of the project due to rising housing costs.	Agree	16.91%	8.36%
	Neutral	34.17%	41.85%
	Disagree	48.92%	48.79%

Table 2 - Prevalence of themes mentioned in open-ended questions by project

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Section	Theme	REM	BRT		
	Need to be expanded	4.27%	5.00%		
	Inadequate choice of technology / mode	1.60%	21.00%		
Regional impacts	Competition with existing PT / end-of-service impacts	13.07%	2.50%		
	Increased accessibility to opportunities	7.20%	5.50%		
	Will lead to urban sprawl	4.27%	0.50%		
	Nuisance of construction	2.67%	13.50%		
Neighborhood	Construction / planning timeline	0.67%	19.50%		
	Quality of life impacts during operation	9.86%	0.00%		
	Favourable to the environment	2.93%	1.50%		
	Not favourable to the environment	7.73%	4.50%		
Environment	Modal shift / Decrease in car use	2.67%	0.50%		
	No modal shift / no decrease in car use	3.47%	4.00%		
	Parking removal / absence	10.13%	1.00%		
Culture	Visual aspect of infrastructure	18.80%	1.00%		
Gentrification	Gentrification, Increase in home values / rent	8.40%	2.00%		
Equity	Geographical distribution of benefits	6.13%	5.50%		
Governance	Lack of public consultation / acceptability	5.87%	0.00%		

Discussion

Regional impacts

The scale of a given project and its impact on overall public-transport services can play a role in influencing the social acceptability of transit projects at a regional level.

Neighborhood impacts

Respondents perceived the construction of the BRT and the extended timeline (13 years) as highly disruptive.

For both projects, respondents underscored the need for better public communication regarding the impacts of transit projects on local residents during construction and operation.

Environmental impacts

Concerns about project effects on wetlands (REM) and street vegetation (BRT) were numerous

Requests from suburbanites for added parking at stations raised doubts about the ability of the REM to spark a significant modal shift.

"As a West Island resident for whom money is not a concern, I essentially drive my car EVERYWHERE. Public transportation for those who have strong incomes is completely not viable out here. Period. [...] [F]or the REM to succeed in the West Island, it is imperative that the stations have ample parking available. It is pure folly, and regrettable ignorance, if organizers and central Montréal politicians believe that adult suburbanites will cycle or take buses to access the REM. This simply will not happen."

Impacts on culture and heritage

Strong negative perceptions of the REM's aerial structure could stem from the fact that such transit infrastructure is not common in the region.

Gentrification

More respondents were worried about being priced out of their neighborhoods due to the REM, which could be linked to project's scale and expected neighborhood changes.

Equity

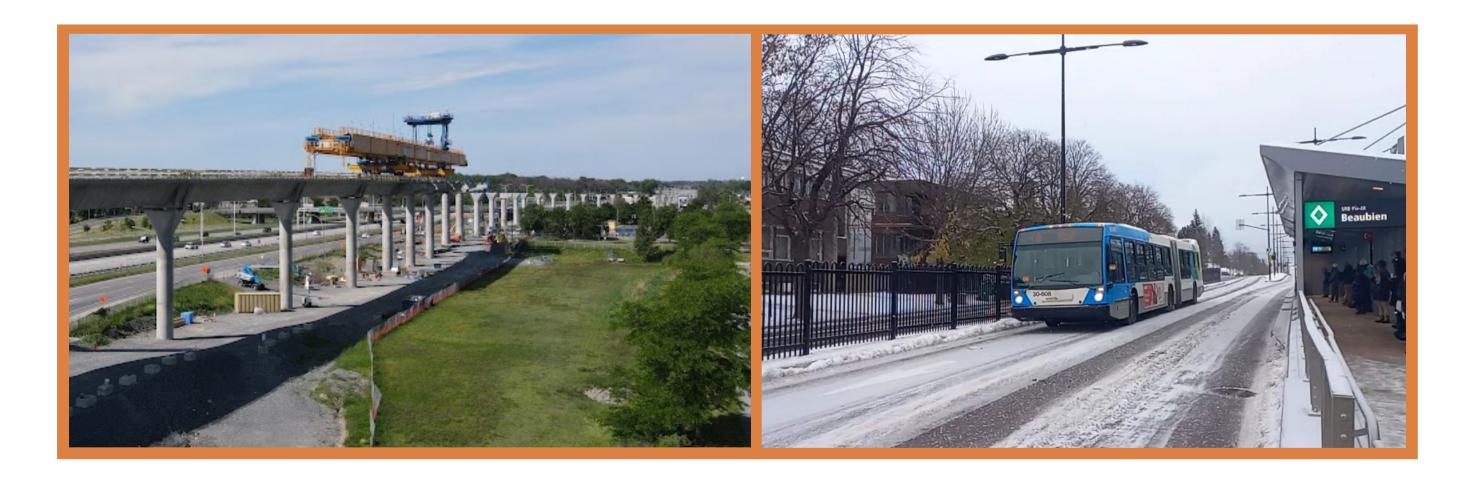
Perceptions that the REM will privilege wealthier suburban communities were often linked to concerns that it will neglect lower-income areas that would benefit more from new public-transit infrastructure.

Governance

Issues with Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) used for the REM and the lack of public consultation in its planning process. No such issues mentioned for the BRT which was praised for its inclusive planning process.

CONCLUSION

- Findings suggests that while more efficient implementation of public-transit projects is beneficial to support sustainabletransport transition, it should not come at the expense of meaningful public consultation.
- Focusing on smaller projects and providing continual improvements to public-transit systems could allow for a minimization of disruptions while allowing residents the opportunity to be involved throughout the planning process.
- Better communication and public outreach strategies could be devised to address misconceptions and ease resistance to new sustainable-transport projects.
- Suburban resistance to the REM might demonstrate limits to the "appeal to the wealthier to do the right thing" mantra when elaborating public-transit services.
- Need to prioritize equity when planning new public-transit systems to provide improved options to captive riders in underserved areas.



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