

DEMOGRAPHIA



THE MONTREAL REGION: PLANNING AT PEACE WITH THE FUTURE RÉGION DE MONTRÉAL: LA PLANIFICATION EN PAIX AVEC L'AVENIR

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	3,426,000	Phoenix, Barcelona, Melbourne
Urbanized Area* Population	3,216,000	Porto Alegre, Atlanta, Sydney
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	671	Toronto, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Baltimore
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	1,738	
Population per Square Mile	4,800	Auckland, Las Vegas, Hamilton
Population per Square Kilometer	1,900	
Largest urbanized area in Quebec 2 nd largest urbanized area in Canada		
Urbanized Area Atlas: <i>Montreal et les environs: Guide routier</i> , Rand McNally, purchase at book stores.		
*Continuously built up area		

1 November 2003

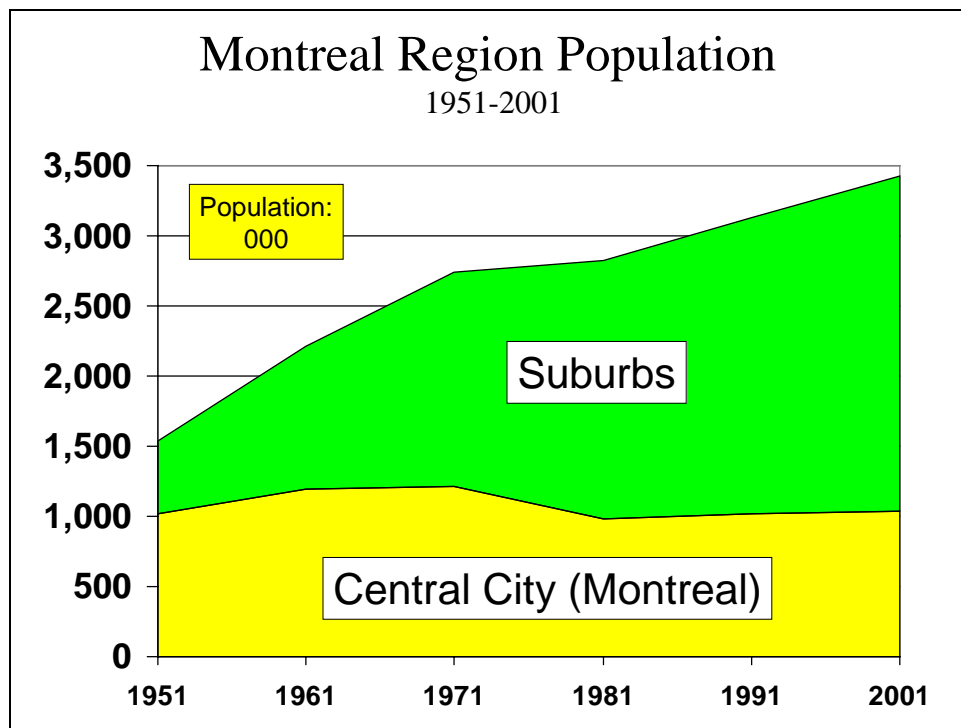
Montreal. Here is the largest French-speaking urban area outside Paris, with nearly three times the population of Lyon, Marseille or Lille. It has much of the charm that would be expected of an old North American city with a “French accent.”

There is the usual central business district of tall towers, limited to little more than their present height by an ordinance forbidding construction higher than the summit of Mont-Royal, the large hill (at least it looks like a hill to one who used to look at pre-eruption Mount St. Helens through the kitchen window) with the park designed by Frederick Law Olmstead (of Central Park, New York, fame). The hill rises immediately from the north side of downtown, providing a number of “end of street” vistas.

The historically English-speaking “West Island” area is somewhat more affluent than the historically French speaking areas to the east of the central business district. There are many single-family houses, but a large percentage of people live in multiple-unit buildings, from two-family houses to high-rise condominiums and apartments.

The central city of Montreal, itself, is on an island in the St. Lawrence River, which carries water from as far away as Lake Superior, through the other Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean. The St. Lawrence is no ordinary river. Among rivers north of the Amazon, only the Mississippi has more volume at its mouth. It is already wide at Montreal, but gets much wider immediately east of Montreal, where it flows through a lake. The river itself could be considered a fjord in its final few hundred miles, since the tides reach the provincial capital of Quebec, only 120 miles downriver from Montreal.

Population and Area: The city of Montreal now encompasses all of the island of Montreal, though this is a recent development. As late as the 2001 census, the municipality was only part of the island. In 2001, the now former city had 1,040,000 residents, down from its 1971 peak of 1,214,000, but up from its 1981 low point of 980,000. Nonetheless, virtually all of the growth in the last 50 years has occurred in the suburbs.



Today's Montreal --- the entire island --- has 1,800,000 residents. To the north is another island, across the Rivière des Prairies is Laval, itself another city with 355,000 residents. To the south, across the St. Lawrence, is Longueuil, with 386,000 residents. Another 873,000 residents live outside Montreal and these "first ring" suburbs. Over the past 20 years, one-quarter of the population growth has been in the inner ring suburbs and 2/3 of the growth has been in the outer ring suburbs.

METROPOLITAN AREA	1981	2001	Change	%	Share of Growth	Area (KM2)	Density (KM2)	Density (Sq.Mi)
Montreal (Pre-2002)	980,354	1,039,534	59,180	6.0%	10.5%	177	5,876	15,220
Balance: Montreal Island	779,768	772,589	-7,179	-0.9%	-1.3%	323	2,392	6,195
Central City								
Montreal (Current)	1,760,122	1,812,123	52,001	3.0%	9.2%	500	3,625	9,389
Inner Ring								
Longueuil	334,930	386,067	51,137	15.3%	9.1%	276	1,401	3,629
Laval	268,335	354,773	86,438	32.2%	15.3%	247	1,436	3,719
Total	603,265	740,840	137,575	47.5%	24.4%	523	1,418	3,672
Outer Ring	498,899	873,387	374,488	75.1%	66.4%			
Metropolitan Area	2,862,286	3,426,350	564,064	19.7%	100.0%			

The former city of Montreal is slightly less dense than San Francisco or the sprawling Los Angeles core, at 15,200 per square mile. The suburbs, however, are far less dense, at 3,600, less than Toronto (4,800) considerably less than Los Angeles (6,500). Montreal's suburban density, however, is higher than that of the entire Portland urban area (central city and suburbs), despite the public relations campaign that seeks to portray Portland as not sprawling.

URBANIZED AREA	Population	Area (KM2)	Density (KM2)	Density (Sq.Mi)
City (Pre-2002)	1,039,534	177	5,876	15,220
Suburbs	2,176,131	1,563	1,392	3,606
Urban Area	3,215,665	1,740	1,848	4,787

Like virtually all of the world's high-income urban areas, almost all population and employment growth is in the suburbs. From 1971 to 1995, overall employment in the Montreal urban area rose approximately 500,000, while downtown employment changed little. Today it is estimated that approximately 15 percent of employment in the Montreal region is downtown. Nonetheless, at approximately 225,000 employees, downtown Montreal is the largest in Canada and is larger than all north-of-Rio-Grande downtowns except for New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington.

Planning and Highways: At the same time, Montreal Island has a very effective, if aging, freeway (Autoroute) system. There are two east-west routes, and a number of north-south routes. The system was put in place 30 or more years ago and many segments appear to operate above their six to eight lane capacity. Still, few American urban areas can boast a core area freeway system as good.

But roads are much better in the suburbs. There will be found freeways with frontage roads, sometimes reaching 10 lanes (such as the cross-Laval Autoroute 440). There is a northern belt route, Autoroute 640, slightly north of the Rivière des Mille Îles, which separates the island and city of Laval from the second ring suburbs toward Mirabel Airport to the north. To the south, there is Autoroute 30, which traverses most of the western length of the urban area, through Longueuil and beyond. These two routes could be the basis of a belt route around the entire urban area, but would require expensive new crossings of the St. Lawrence (east and west) and the Rivière des Outaouais (Ottawa River).

As soon as the autoroutes leave Montreal Island, they get much wider. The Autoroute 15 toward Mirabel is an example, where current construction will add 50 to 100 percent to capacity. Similar expansions will be found on the Autoroute 40 leading north off the island toward Trois Rivières and Quebec. At the same time, virtually all of the suburban autoroutes have room to expand in the center, making additional right-of-way acquisitions largely unnecessary. The suburbs of Montreal are extremely well served by an autoroute system that is the best in Canada and compares favorably to that of almost any US urban area.

This effective system that represents the best in planning, whether intended or not. Here, planners have provided a system designed to do what urban planning should do --- make it easier for people to live their lives as they wish. Regrettably, much of today's urban planning involves copying Portland's dysfunctional model that seeks to tell people how to live, while destroying economic opportunity. Planning should liberate, not constrict, and what Montreal has accomplished is the former.

Moreover, there's no point fretting about the loss of agricultural land. Quebec has taken 23,000 square kilometers out of agricultural production since 1950. Today, the entire Montreal urban area is less than 1,800 square kilometers. It is improved productivity and a switch of agricultural production to elsewhere that is responsible for Quebec's lost farmland, not urbanization.

The result is an urban region (the terms "metropolitan area" and "urban area" may have outlived their usefulness --- perhaps they should all be called "urban regions," because that is what they are). Montreal is an urban region perhaps better poised for the growth that will occur by virtue of the fact that its infrastructure is up to the challenge. With wide freeways well out into and beyond the suburbs, and with plenty of room to expand, the Montreal region has the potential to grow much more than it is likely to, while traffic congestion outside the core remains relatively modest. Out in the greenfields that surround Montreal, Laval and Longueuil are large plots of land that have much of the new housing development and the commercial construction can be expected to follow. To the north, east and west are development after development of new single-family homes. What has been called the "American Dream" of home ownership has become the "Canadian Dream," the "Quebecois Dream," and for that matter the "Universal Dream." And, the Ste.-Julie housing development (south of Longueuil) I photographed contained designs more pleasing than what one usually finds in new American suburbs. But, architecture is about taste and like other preferences it should not be confused with principles (a common failing of some current urban doctrines).

It is notable that most of the new houses had only one-car garages, compared to the American standard of two (mine has three, one for each car --- the bicycle has to share). But no one should think that one-car garages mean one car per house. More often than not, the occupied houses had one (and up to three) additional vehicles parked outside. An interesting "twist" is the temporary tent-like structures seen in the city of Montreal for storing the car, snow free, in the driveway.

Montreal Island has a Metro, rubber tired like some of the Paris lines, and a public transport system that accounts for nearly 30 percent of travel. Overall, however, the public transport market share is lower, at 11 percent --- slightly less than Toronto, but higher than New York.

Montreal's JFK Airport: But it would be a mistake to not mention one of the world's greatest planning disasters. Back when governments knew much more about airports than they do today, the federal government decided to build Mirabel International Airport, inconveniently located well to the north of the city. For more than two decades, international air carriers were required to land there, rather than the much more conveniently located Dorval International Airport, close to the city center. Then, authorities allowed airlines to respond to the market instead of political dictat, and all but a few flights by a single carrier moved to Dorval. The airport is due to close to passenger traffic next year.

Signs displaying the number of free parking spaces on each deck of the parking show numbers up to 800. There is so little commerce that the moving sidewalks are turned off. This would be a great set for a hallucinatory futurist movie about airport life after the suburbs fall like Rome before the imagined Visigoths of bankrupt values, consumption and free will (called "happiness" in some circles).

And, indeed, Mirabel is a movie set --- perhaps the most expensive in the world. In October of 2003, there were signs all over the airport terminal explaining that it was being used as a set in a movie about New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK). Presumably the moving

sidewalks are turned on during filming (though out of order moving sidewalks are not at all unusual at the real JFK).

But Mirabel is the kind of mistake made by remote central government, and cannot be laid at the feet of local or provincial leaders.

At Peace with the Future: But, back to the Montreal region's secret weapon --- its roads. This superb system makes the suburbs even more livable and will continue to do so in the future.

One of the keys will be for the suburban communities to complement the freeway system with high capacity arterial streets. This appears to be happening, which is why drivers in Montreal are likely to be much less frustrated than drivers in arterial deprived Atlanta. All of this will allow the Montreal of the future to have much less severe traffic congestion and air pollution than would otherwise be the case (despite the fact-defying contemporary doctrines to the contrary). As Peter Gordon of the University of Southern California School of Metropolitan Planning has suggested, less dense (especially American) urban areas have avoided the severe traffic congestion typical of European areas because of their low-density development. Add Montreal to the list --- and high on the list, because of the quality of its freeway system and its low-density development. Here is a place with the infrastructure capable of attracting more residents and businesses.

Those preferring a higher density, traditional urban life-style can find it on Montreal Island. Others --- the market trends show them to be a huge majority --- will opt for the suburban life-style that accounts for virtually all growth in urban areas from Western Europe to North America and Japan. The difference is that in Montreal, the planners have removed, not erected barriers. The Montreal region is rare because it has made peace with the future.



Avenue McGill College Looking Toward Mont-Royal



Boulevard Rene Levesque



Downtown



Portable Snow-Shoveling Avoidance Garages: city of Montreal East Side



Single-Family Dwellings: city of Montreal East Side



Autoroute 20: Longueuil



Freeway Oriented Commercial Development: Longueuil



New Homes: Ste.-Julie



Quebecois Dream: Ste.-Julie



View to Montreal from Ste.-Julie



4 Cars, 1 Garage: Ste.-Julie



Cross-Laval Autoroute 440: 10 Lanes (6 primary, 4 frontage)



Road Expansion Autoroute 15: Ste-Thérèse (north of Laval)



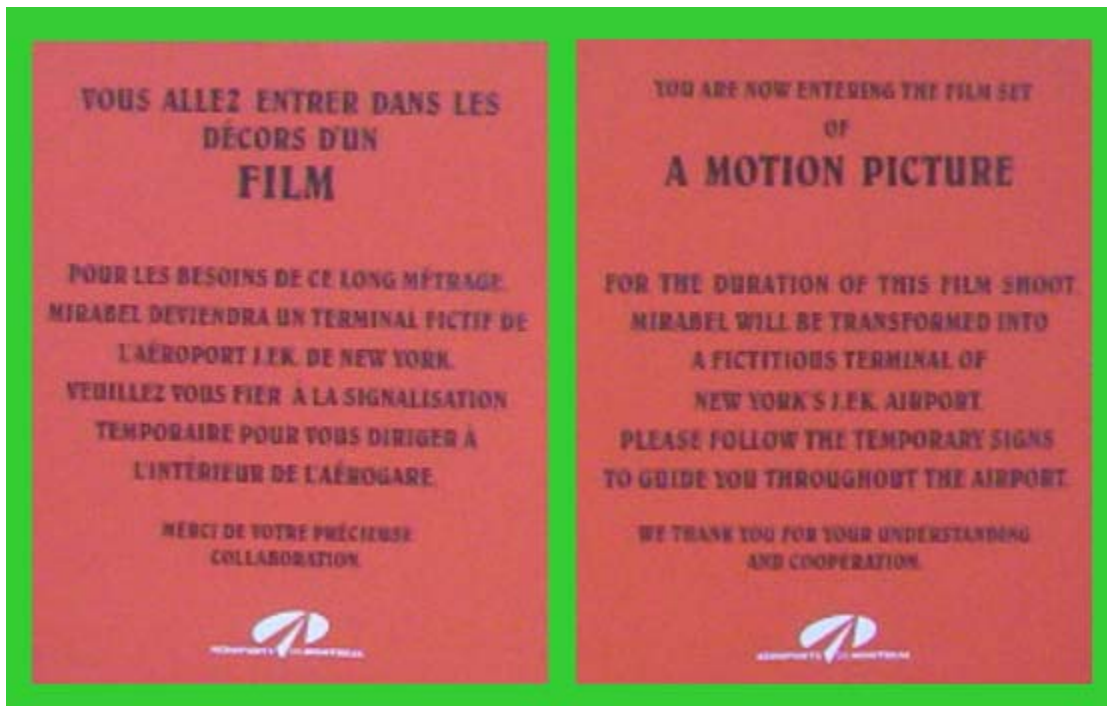
Mirabel International Airport



Mirabel Airport: Ticketing Area



Flight Information: Montreal's JFK Airport



JFK Signs

By Wendell Cox

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