



# A Thousand and One Ways to Avoid Car Use

By **STÉPHANE GAGNÉ**

*This is the final part of a series on the place of the automobile in the city. We'd like to thank Environment Canada, Quebec Region, for their support.*

**M**ontréal is slowly being destroyed by the use of automobiles. Every day hundreds of thousands of suburban motorists drive in and out of Montréal without ever contributing to the costs of infrastructure maintenance. This maintenance costs Montrealers dearly and Mayor Bourque is trying to find ways for motorists from the surrounding areas to chip in. It is interesting to look at what other cities with the same problems have done.

At one time or another, every large city feels physically and economically stifled by cars. To solve this problem, many cities have come up with the same solution: restricting traffic in certain areas. There are various ways of doing this and they differ for each city.

In Italy, they have resorted to strong-arm tactics: there are about forty cities where access to cars is prohibited in historical districts. Only delivery trucks and residents can access these areas. The restrictions are not taken at face value, but they have brought such good results that French cities such as Strasbourg and Paris (in the Les Halles area) are doing the same thing. In France, many cities (Lyon and Angers for instance) have transformed main downtown streets into pedestrian zones while still allowing cars into the downtown area.

There are other ways of restricting traffic, such as prohibiting the construction of parking lots at the workplace (as in Zurich, Switzerland), strategically placing one way signs to make it difficult to reach the downtown area (as in Strasbourg, Berne or Gothenburg, Sweden), alternating access to cars with certain license plates and

other means (as in Athens, Mexico, or Santiago, Chili).

Encouraging car-pooling is another effective way to reduce traffic. An idea first thought of in Singapore allows motorists with two or more passengers in the car to be exempt from tolls. In the United States, cities such as Washington have followed this example.

Instead of restricting traffic or prohibiting the use of cars altogether, other cities have decided to reap profits from those who insist on driving. Whether it is by means of taxes or various tolls, here are some examples of the many ways to make money from motorists.

## Automobile Purchase Tax

In Hong Kong, a city that has become overrun by cars, the city has been successful in restricting their use by imposing a tax on motorists that adds up to be twice the cost of the car. A variation of this plan would be to make obtaining a driver's licence or registration more expensive (as we have done here in Quebec).

## Tolls

Among other taxes, tolls are the most popular and are used in many European, Asian and Japanese cities. And for very good reasons: expensive tolls lead to less traffic and therefore a reduction in noise and air pollution, a slowdown of damage to infrastructure and much revenue for the city (this money can then be put toward improving public transport systems).

Cities such as Oslo (Norway), Stockholm (Sweden), Tokyo or New York all require motorists to pay upon entering the city. In Tokyo, the tolls are increased in

order to reduce traffic congestion on the highways. In New York, you pay to get into Manhattan, but once you are there, you have access to the subway and tons of taxis.

The first city to have adapted the use of tolls was Singapore in 1976. This city-state sets a very good example for us since its population is comparable to that of Montréal and the surrounding suburban areas (3 million inhabitants).

In Singapore, car-owners must carry a daily or monthly permit if they intend to drive downtown between 7:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. on weekdays and 7:30 a.m. 3:00 p.m. on Sundays and holidays. The fee is equivalent to \$3.38 Canadian per day and \$67.62 per month. Companies are charged twice as much for company vehicles. To make things easier, the city is currently installing an avant-garde electronic toll. As with other means of discouraging car use, the city has slapped on very high taxes on car registration as well as an annual tax that varies depending on the size of the engine in your car.

These measures have certainly reduced the amount of motorized traffic (approximately 20% since their implementation) without preventing people from getting around. Singapore has a very efficient public transport system which is improved upon regularly. Since October 1993, the city has introduced special prices so that more people will make use of the eight parking lots situated near rapid train stations. For a mere \$79 per month, the motorist has a parking spot and can buy regularly-priced train tickets for \$33. All this to encourage the driver to use public transport.

Would tolls be able to rescue Montréal? Yves Bussières, a transport researcher at the National Institute of Scientific Research (NIRS - Urbanization) believes so and even asserts that sooner or later, they will be implemented. «In order for this measure to be equitable, tolls must be installed on all highways in the province and not only at the bridges surrounding the island of Montréal». Is the return of tolls a nightmare? Let's try to see it as more of a necessity than a bad dream. ♦



alités s'offrent aux décideurs comme au détriment des conducteurs seuls.  
toll booths for single-passenger cars.

ville a instauré une tarification spéciale pour accroître l'utilisation de ses huit stationnements incitatifs, tous situés près de stations de train rapide. Au prix de 79\$ le mois, l'automobiliste a droit à une place de stationnement et à 33\$ de billets au prix régulier. Tout cela pour l'inciter à prendre le transport en commun.

Le péage sera-t-il la solution pour renflouer Montréal? Yves Bussières, chercheur en transport à

l'Institut national de recherche scientifique (INRS-urbanisation), le croit et affirme même qu'il sera implanté tôt ou tard. «Pour que cette mesure soit équitable, on devra cependant l'implanter sur toutes les autoroutes de la province et non uniquement à l'entrée des ponts qui entourent l'île de Montréal.» Le retour des péages, un cauchemar? Voyons-le plutôt comme une nécessité. ♦

Opter pour l'autobus est la meilleure des astuces.

