

Overcoming “Bikelash”: Successful Implementation of an Urban Bicycle Highway in Montréal

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Abstract

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Among the leading factors that frustrate bike lane development is the phenomenon known as “bikelash,” which is the organised opposition to bike lane development, usually categorised by heated emotion. The presence of bikelash can make bike lane developments politically toxic in the public discourse, often leading to the failure to build the bike lane. The Saint-Denis Réseau Express Vélo (REV) is one artery of the “bike highway” of Montréal that managed to be built despite the presence of bikelash from merchants, politicians and select members of the public. This thesis uses the Saint-Denis REV as a case study to understand why bikelash did not overwhelm this bike lane, despite the intense opposition to this development. Using political communication strategies and merchant subsidy programs, the municipal administration of Montréal was able to overcome bikelash and see the bike lane successfully installed. This thesis will examine the history of this bike lane, the bikelash in response to the development, and how this project managed to survive.

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Table of content

| | | |
|------|---|----|
| 1 | Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.1 | What is a bike lane? | 1 |
| 1.2 | Why Is There Opposition to Bike Lanes? | 2 |
| 1.3 | Case Study: The Saint-Denis REV axis in Montréal, Québec | 3 |
| 1.4 | Where is Rue Saint-Denis in Montréal, Québec | 3 |
| 1.5 | What was Rue Saint-Denis like prior to the REV? | 5 |
| 1.6 | The Saint-Denis REV axis | 6 |
| 1.7 | The Revitalization Plan of Rue Saint-Denis | 8 |
| 1.8 | The Political Landscape of Montréal | 8 |
| 1.9 | Research Question | 9 |
| 2 | Literature Review..... | 11 |
| 2.1 | Introduction..... | 11 |
| 2.2 | What is the emotional response in opposing bike lanes? | 12 |
| 2.3 | Defining “bikelash” | 13 |
| 2.4 | Who participates in bikelash? | 14 |
| 2.5 | How to address, mitigate and overcome bikelash..... | 17 |
| 2.6 | Literature Review Conclusion | 20 |
| 3 | Methodology | 21 |
| 4 | Analysis..... | 22 |
| 4.1 | Bikelash over the Saint-Denis REV | 22 |
| 4.2 | Participants of bikelash: Politicians | 24 |
| 4.3 | Participants in bikelash: Merchants | 29 |
| 4.4 | Participants in bikelash: Members of the public | 31 |
| 4.5 | Strategies Used to Overcome the Bikelash of The Saint-Denis REV | 33 |
| 4.6 | Timeline of the Saint-Denis REV | 39 |
| 4.7 | The Réseau Express Vélo | 41 |
| 4.8 | Public Consultations | 45 |
| 4.9 | Constructing the Saint-Denis REV | 48 |
| 4.10 | How many people use the Saint-Denis bike lane? | 52 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 4.11 How has traffic changed?..... | 53 |
| 4.12 Economic Impact of the Saint-Denis REV | 55 |
| 4.13 Conclusion | 55 |
| 5 Discussion | 56 |
| 5.1 Why did the Saint-Denis REV prevail? | 56 |
| 5.2 Can Saint-Denis be Replicated?..... | 58 |
| 5.3 Lessons to take away from Saint-Denis..... | 59 |
| 6 Conclusion | 61 |
| 6.1 Concluding Thoughts..... | 61 |
| Bibliography | 63 |

1 Introduction

1.1 What is a bike lane?

There are many types of infrastructure built to facilitate transportation in urban areas. Perhaps the most recognizable type in a Canadian city is the road, typically paved with asphalt and divided into lanes for car traffic. Without any type of dividing infrastructure, all vehicles, including buses and bicycles, must compete for space with cars on the road. This is a dangerous arrangement for cyclists, given the vulnerability of cyclists compared to the heavy metal structure and speed of a car.

One type of a simple design of a bike lane is a division in the road that separates cyclists from cars using a painted line as a demarcation between the two modes of vehicle. While this does provide a reserved space for cyclists, this is only a marginal improvement on safety. The painted line as a divider relies on drivers not to cross it by accident or use it as a passing lane or street side parking. Bike lanes with only a painted line to divide the space between cars and bicycles did not provide the level of safety that encourages cycling on busy streets (Beck et al., 2019).

A protected bike lane (also known as a “segregated bike lane”) is a lane on a road reserved for cyclists that has been separated from car traffic using permanent infrastructure, such as a concrete divider. This provides security and safety for cyclists who use the bike lane, as they are protected from cars travelling at higher speeds and greater weights than they are. The added safety feature encourages more cycling activity (Clifton et al., 2014). More cycling activity, in turn, reduces the carbon footprint of a city, adds activity to sedentary lifestyles and increases mobility options for everyone.

Scholars have found that people are much more likely to cycle when their bike routes are separated from traffic, as fear for personal safety is a major deterrent to cycling (Willis et al., 2015). Protected bike lanes “unquestionably” make cycling more attractive to non-cyclists, which is a critical factor in increasing the cycling rates of a city (Pucher et al., 2011). The supply of bike lanes has a positive correlation to cycling levels in a city, showing a positive result from investing in more bike lane infrastructure throughout city streets (Buehler et al., 2012). Separated bike lane

infrastructure is especially important to vulnerable and risk-averse demographics, such as women, children, and seniors, whom scholars have found are hesitant to share the road with road vehicles due to fear of danger (Pucher et al., 2017).

1.2 Why Is There Opposition to Bike Lanes?

The controversy over bike lanes starts with the actual physical space of the road and the allotment of use. Roads are typically built to accommodate car traffic and sometimes, curbside parking (Field et al., 2018). To create space for bicycles, space for cars must be reduced, either through the elimination of streetside parking or the removal of a traffic lane (Field et al., 2018). This removal is at times seen as a loss for car drivers and for people that see themselves as dependent on car traffic (Wild et al., 2017). This can lead to resentment that builds to opposition against the bike lane (Wild et al., 2017; Field et al., 2018; Malmo-Laycock, 2017; Vangstrup, 2020). This is a common reaction that has been observed by scholars (Wild et al., 2017; Field et al., 2018; Malmo-Laycock, 2017; Vangstrup, 2020). who have studied the reaction to bike lane proposals and development. This reaction has been labelled as “bikelash” by scholars who study bike lane development and will be more thoroughly discussed and defined in Chapter Two: Literature Review. Bikelash has been identified by scholars as being a leading reason for why bike lanes projects are sometimes stopped before implementation, or even removed after being created as Bikelash turns the public discourse surrounding the bike lane so politically toxic, the bike lane project is abandoned (Wilson et al., 2020, Vangstrup, 2020).

Negative public opinion has proven to be a difficult hurdle to overcome for bike lanes, as scholars who study bike lanes have placed public opposition in the top three reasons why bike lane proposals fail (Wilson and Mitra, 2020). This public opposition is difficult to overcome when proposing bike lanes in a community; residents, merchants and political advocates can band together to reject infrastructure projects, leaving a community unmoored from the cycling network the city is trying to develop. This power to prohibit bike lane infrastructure is especially onerous as it puts cyclists in jeopardy when they ride beside cars. There also continues to be detrimental effects from designing roads solely for the benefit of cars even for non-cyclists, including pollution, traffic congestion and health risks from sedentary lifestyles (Malmo-Laycock, 2017).

1.3 Case Study: The Saint-Denis REV axis in Montréal, Québec

This thesis is a case study in which bikelash was overcome and the bike lane was successfully installed. My positionality statement is: by analyzing the critical factors that led to bikelash being overcome, I would be able to provide a Canadian example of a success in the creation of new cycling infrastructure despite the presence of bikelash throughout the development of the project.

The protected bike lane on rue Saint-Denis in Montréal, Québec appealed to me because it was the first of five axes of a much larger, ambitious project of a “bike highway” known as the Réseau Express Vélo (“Express Bike Network” in English), which is shortened to “the REV” (Ville de Montreal 2019). As a fun fact, the word “REV” is a homophone of the word “dream” in French (“rêve”). I also found the history of the Saint-Denis REV axis thought-provoking because the City of Montreal combined plans to revitalize an economically struggling commercial street with the development of a bike lane. My decision was also influenced by the fact that the Saint-Denis REV was able to overcome the bikelash that threatened to halt the project and managed to be installed despite the intense opposition. I was curious about why bikelash did not doom this project.

1.4 Where is Rue Saint-Denis in Montréal, Québec

The City of Montreal is Canada’s second most populous city in Canada, with 1.8 million inhabitants in 2021, at the center of a Census Metropolitan Area that had 4.3 million inhabitants in 2021 (Statistics Canada). The City of Montreal covers most of the Island of Montreal which is located at the confluence of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers.

Rue Saint-Denis is a major North-South thoroughfare in Montréal, Québec, spanning about 11 kilometres between rue Saint-Antoine and rue Sommerville. The street travels across several different boroughs (neighbourhoods) including Ville-Marie, Le Plateau Mont-Royal, Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie, Villeray–Saint-Michel–Parc-Extension, and Ahuntsic-Cartierville. The city of Montréal is built on a slight axis, so what Montréalers call “north” is actually “northwest”.

The Saint-Denis REV

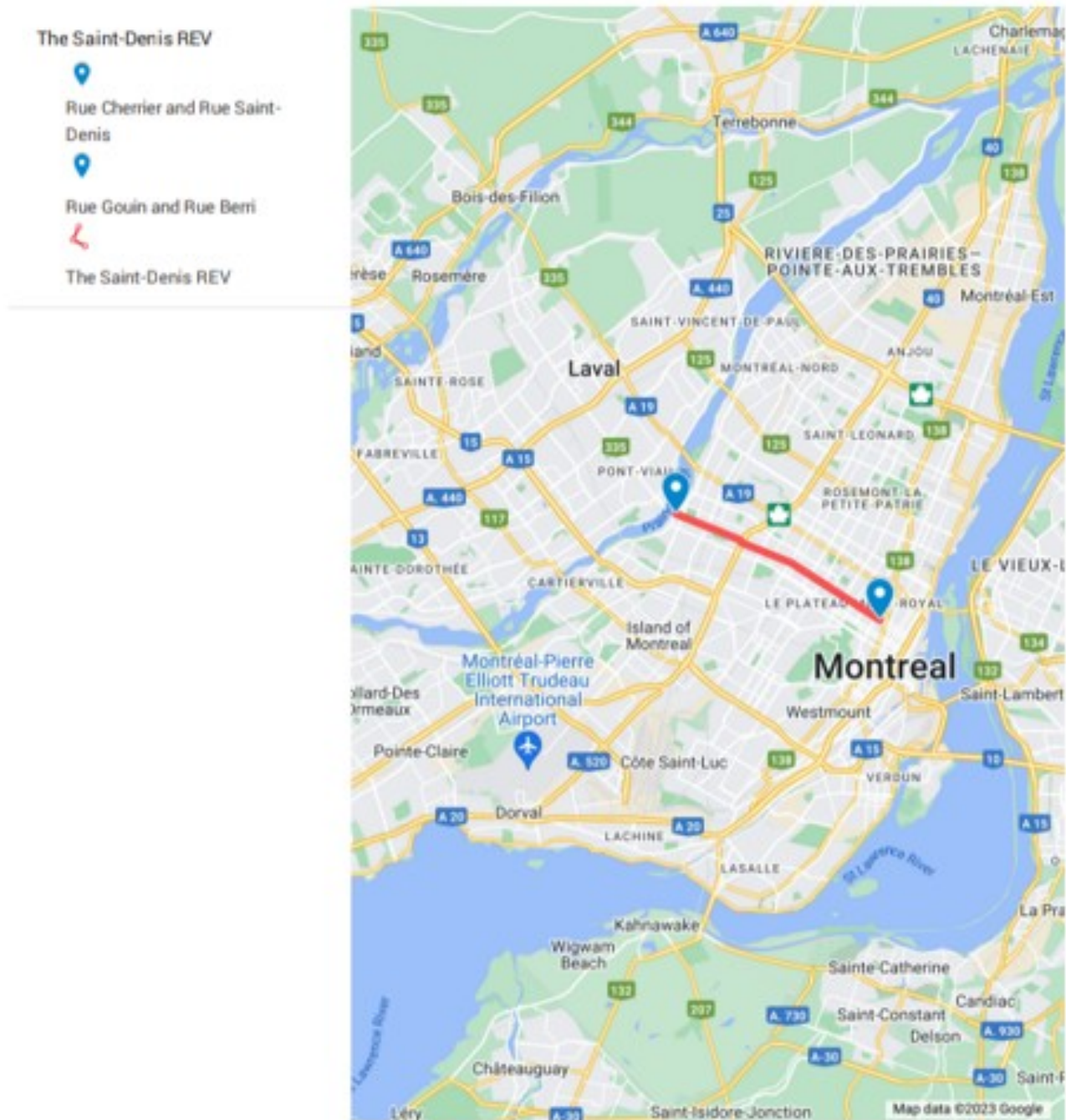


Figure 1. Saint-Denis REV Source: Base map from Google Maps

1.5 What was Rue Saint-Denis like prior to the REV?

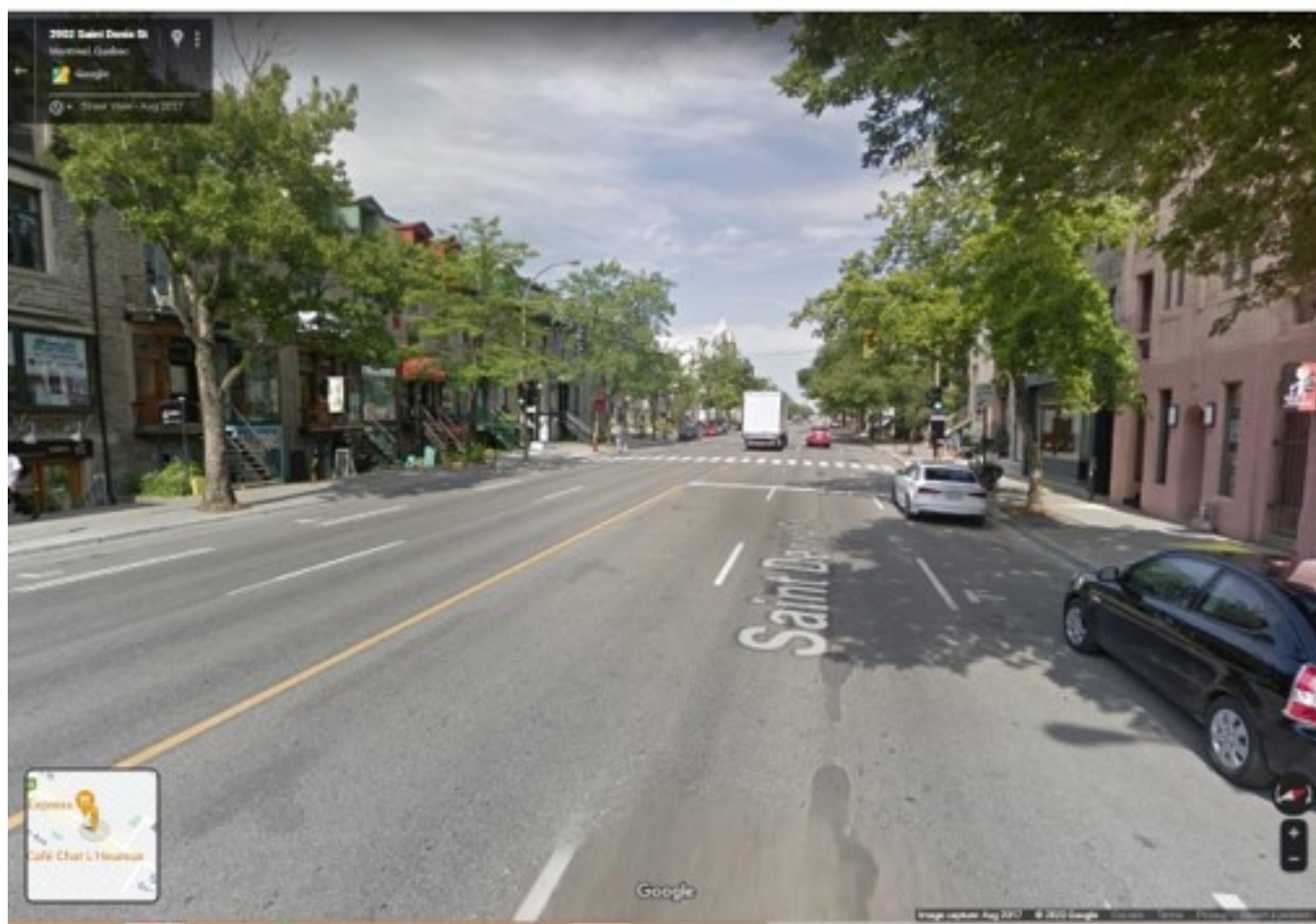


Figure 2. Google Street View of rue Saint-Denis 2017

Prior to the construction of the REV, Saint-Denis had six lanes of bi-directional traffic, with one of either side of the road dedicated to street side parking. There was a sidewalk on either side of the road, for pedestrians, but not a dedicated lane for cyclists, who were forced to share the road with cars. Between the years of 2014 and 2015, two cyclists were struck by cars on Rue Saint-Denis and were killed (Montreal CBC, 2014, Montreal CTV, 2015). Between 2014 and 2020, there were more than 300 collisions involving cyclists and pedestrians.

Starting on October 17th, 2016, construction work to replace the sewer and water pipes was begun, as this infrastructure was over 100 years old (the sewer was built in 1899 and the aqueduct was built in 1912) (CBC, 2018). The construction was disruptive to the street and only

allowed one lane of car traffic travelling North. Merchants on the street expressed worries in an interview with CBC that their businesses were being disrupted and foot traffic was down as a result from the construction (CBC, 2018). The construction was finished on November 30th, 2019.

The economic trouble for rue Saint-Denis started before the construction to replace the sewerage began. By October 2014, the *Montréal Gazette* was reporting that many businesses on Rue Saint-Denis were closing, with 11% vacancy rate for businesses as quoted by Olivier Gougeon, the president of the merchant's association of Rue Saint-Denis (Friede, 2014). The next year, in March 2019, the *Montréal Gazette* reported that Rue Saint-Denis had a 23% vacancy rate on storefronts on Rue Saint-Denis (Ravary, 2019). By April of 2020, *The City Mag*, a digital publication by Concordia University journalists, was reporting that rue Saint-Denis had a commercial vacancy rate of 26% (Turriciano, 2020).

1.6 The Saint-Denis REV axis

In 2017, *Projet Montréal*, a municipal political party won a majority of seats on city council and its leader, Valerie Plante, became the Mayor of Montreal. In their campaign promises, the party had committed to holding public consultations on a “bike highway” that would provide direct routes through the city of Montréal (*Projet Montréal*, 2017). This project was eventually named the Réseau Express Vélo. On May 27, 2019, Mayor Valérie Plante announced the first five axes of the REV, the first of which would be located on Rue Saint-Denis (Laframboise, 2019). The stretch of road between Rue Guin and Boulevard de Maisonneuve was announced to be “axis 1” of the project and was the first major installment of the REV (Laframboise, 2019).

This would connect the segregated paths of Montréal’s bike lanes and connect the northern part of the island to its centre.



Figure 3. Rendering of the REV. Source: Montréal (2019).

In her announcement, Mayor Plante expressed the hope that a protected bike network that was separated by a concrete median or metal bollards would encourage more Montréalers and tourists to use their bikes to get around the city (Laframboise, 2019). As seen in the renderings provided by the City of Montréal, the REV was always designed to be a protected bike lane, which had a greater appeal for a wider skill set of cyclists who had safety concerns about cycling next to cars. (Jadah, 2019).

The Saint-Denis REV is an excellent bike lane for cyclists of all skills, due to its width on either side of the bike lane. It is a “dual lane” type of bike lane, meaning there are two bike lanes that run on either side of the road, following the direction of traffic. Each side of the bike lane is 2 meters in width, allowing cyclists to pass each other without crossing into opposing traffic. The metal bollards are 8 meters apart along the bike lane, protecting cyclists from traffic. At each intersection, there is a 5-meter-long concrete island for further protection of the cyclists. There is bus stop carve outs for buses to stop adjacent to the Saint-Denis REV. The Saint-Denis REV is cleared of snow regularly during the winter months, which allows cyclists to use it safely year-round.

1.7 The Revitalization Plan of Rue Saint-Denis

The Saint-Denis REV was one aspect of the revitalization plan of rue Saint-Denis. In summer of 2019, the borough of Plateau-Mont-Royal, through which rue Saint-Denis passes, published “Un plan d’action complet pour la rue Saint-Denis” (English: A complete action plan for Saint Denis Street) to revitalise the street (Ville de Montréal, 2019). Aspects of the plan included tax relief for non-residential buildings, a zoning review to simplify the process of obtaining a permit and adding traffic lights to help pedestrians cross the street to visit more shops (Ville de Montréal, 2019). The Saint-Denis REV axis is listed among the action plans, and while it lists comfortable and safe bike lanes, it also mentioned the benefits of reducing noise and the speed of cars (Ville de Montréal, 2019). This action plan also takes care to say that curbside parking would remain available on both sides of the street (Ville de Montréal, 2019).

1.8 The Political Landscape of Montréal

In the 2017 municipal election, there were two major parties running for the majority of seats: Projet Montréal and Équipe Denis Coderre. Équipe Denis Coderre was the incumbent party, having won 26 seats in the 2013 election and succeeding Mayor Gérald Tremblay from Union Montréal (Quebec, 2013). Denis Coderre, a former Member of Canada Parliament (1997-2004) and federal Cabinet minister was the leader of the party and the elected mayor from the 2013 election (Quebec, 2013). Projet Montréal had won 20 seats in 2013 and became the official opposition under the leadership of Richard Bergeron (Quebec, 2013).

Following the election, Bergeron announced his resignation and stepped down in November of 2014 (Global News, 2013). Borough Mayor of Le Plateau-Mont-Royal Luc Ferrandez served as interim leader from 2014 until 2016, when Valérie Plante won the leadership election in December of 2016 (CBC, 2014).

Projet Montréal was founded in May of 2004 by Richard Bergeron, who had a vision of “sustainable urbanism” in the city and advocated for the return of streetcars (Steins, 2004). Their vision of sustainable urbanism was centred around building light rail to reduce car traffic, reverse urban sprawl and give more room to pedestrians and cyclists (Steins, 2004). When Valérie Plante won leadership in 2016, the campaign platform included advocating for an express bike network for cyclists to access downtown Montréal more easily (Projet Montreal, 2017).

Projet Montréal won in 2017 with 34 seats, giving them the majority for City Council (Quebec, 2017). Équipe Denis Coderre won 25 seats, making the party the official opposition (Quebec, 2017). Denis Coderre left municipal politics and the party changed their name to Ensemble Montréal (Daily Hive, 2017).

1.9 Research Question

When conducting research into the history of the Saint-Denis REV, I was curious about why bikelash did not defeat this project. This led to my main question: How did the Saint-Denis REV manage to withstand bikelash in the form of organised opposition from merchants and politicians, and public scrutiny throughout the proposal and construction of the project?

My sub questions to my research topic include:

1) Who was participating in the bikelash effort to oppose the Saint-Denis REV? 2) What strateg(ies) was used by the City of Montréal to counter the Saint-Denis REV bikelash successfully?

This thesis is a case study on bikelash and the successful implementation of a bike lane in Montréal, Québec. Using archived material from the City of Montréal (including transcripts of City Council meetings, construction contracts, and public consultation reports), news articles from this time, and statements from key figures of the Saint-Denis REV, I used a social constructivist perspective to analyse what were the crucial factors that led to the successful installation of the bike lane.

I chose social constructivism because I understand the meaning of the Saint-Denis REV arose from interactions from diverse groups of people, and each group of people (such as the merchants, the politicians, and the public) all related to the Saint-Denis REV from stances that were informed from their unique relationship with this street. This leads me to question the conversation surrounding bike lanes to be about our personal relationship with mobility and the street, which informed my analysis of bikelash and how it was overcome in this case.

I specifically wanted to study why the Saint-Denis REV did not fail in the face of bikelash, as scholars posit that the presence of bikelash poses an existential threat to the bike lane project. This allowed me to delve very deeply into the history of this particular project and was helpful in assisting me to form my own conclusions around the theory of bikelash and how to overcome it.

Case studies as a method for academic research can identify conditions, including combinations of conditions, which was the case in this thesis as I was able to identify the conditions for bikelash.

I will acknowledge there are several limitations to both my thesis and the case study format. This thesis focuses solely on the development of one bike lane in one city. With a solitary case study, it is hard to estimate if this bike lane succeeded due to an unobservable factor that would have been made clear by observing multiple Canadian cities who were developing similar projects.

Despite these limitations, I still think it was worth it to study the Saint-Denis REV as a solitary case study to examine the effects of bikelash and how, in this specific instance, it was overcome. As seen in Chapter 2: Literature Review, bikelash is a phenomenon studied internationally, but there is scant research from a Canadian perspective. I think adding one academic paper to the literature of bike lane development is a worthy endeavour.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review will provide an overview into what is referred to as “the bike lane debate” and examine the opposition known as “bikelash.” My first section will begin by examining the emotional response to bike lanes and question why there is an emotional outburst regarding this particular type of transportation infrastructure. The second portion of this literature review will define bikelash and further delve into the research surrounding this phenomenon and lay out the framework of the current state of research into bikelash. In the third portion of this Literature Review, I will discuss who are the participants in bikelash and their motivations for their participation. This will segue into the fourth portion, in which I will describe strategies for mitigation and overcoming bikelash as studied by scholars in this field. In order to write this literature review, I used the search engines JSTOR and Google Scholar, and first began looking at articles about “bike lanes” to understand more about the infrastructure itself. Through reading through the search engine results, I noticed there were a variety of articles discussing bike lane removals despite their varied benefits to cities and residents. This led to Field and Wild’s work on “bikelash” as a term to describe opposition to bike lanes. Once I started looking more deeply into this field, I found articles using this term specifically to describe heated emotional bike lane opposition written by Julia Malmo-Laycock, Adrian Field, Kristy Wild, Alistair Woodward and Caroline Vangstrup. Ultimately, these four articles (Field, A., Wild, K., Woodward, A., Macmillan, A., & Mackie, H. (2018). *Encountering bikelash: Experiences and lessons from New Zealand communities*, Malmo-Laycock, J. (2017, April). *Bypassing the Bikelash: Strategies for addressing opposition to bicycle infrastructure projects in Washington, D.C.*, Vangstrup, Linné C. T. (2020). *Testing Bikelash: A phenomenological approach to community opposition of bicycle infrastructure development* (Dissertation), Wild, K., Woodward, A., Field, A., & Macmillan, A. (2017). *Beyond “bikelash”: engaging with community opposition to cycle lanes.*) informed the bulk of my literature review on bikelash, its participants and strategies on how to overcome it.

Ultimately, these four articles informed the bulk of my literature review on opposition to cycling lanes, its participants and strategies on how to overcome it. While the benefits of investing in protected bike lane infrastructure are clear, the question of how to manage this emotional

opposition is a new field of study, yet critical in aiding the expansion of cycling infrastructure (Wild et al., 2017). Some scholars have presented strategies in overcoming bikelash, such as detailed communication strategies from politicians that present and highlight the need for expanded cycling infrastructure to the public (Malmo-Laycock, 2017). Other scholars suggest engaging with communities by hosting family cycling events to normalise cycling as an everyday activity as a way of persuasion (Field et al., 2018). There is a consensus among scholars that persuasion is an effective strategy in combating bikelash, which requires a certain level of engagement between the two opposing parties. Throughout this thesis, I am embarking on a journey of understanding the process through which bicycle lane infrastructure moves from the stage of proposal to the stage of construction until it concludes at its inauguration.

2.2 What is the emotional response in opposing bike lanes?

Numerous scholars have sought to understand why people oppose bicycle lane infrastructure (Field et al, 2018; Malmo Laycock 2017). In analysing the discourse of why bike lanes are such a contentious topic, the actual physical space that bike lanes exist in must be understood. The road is a precious piece of public space, and bike lanes fundamentally alter the allocation of who gets to use that space (Field et al., 2018). Protected bike lanes on roads represent a re-prioritization of road space in their acknowledgement of the needs of cyclists at the expense of other road users, especially car drivers (Field et al., 2018).

Bike lanes are typically constructed when the number of cyclists on local streets are relatively small, in anticipation of more cyclists arriving once the lanes have been installed, creating a sense of “outsiders” disrupting existing transportation patterns (Field et al., 2018). To re-orient this road space, actors from government institutions, planners and community advocates must collaborate and compromise at multiple levels, and it is within this space that opposition to bike lanes emerges (Field et al., 2018).

Despite the benefits of increased cycling rates, bike lane proposals attract fierce critics in opposition of the project (Malmo-Laycock, 2017). Scholars posit that the principal reason to oppose bike lanes is that the bicycle is a “political symbol of opposition to automobility,” and their encroaching existence threatens a particular way of life (Malmo-Laycock, 2017, p. 12). Bike lanes challenge the power relations of traffic in cities, and as such, should be recognized as more than

physical infrastructure, but part of a “highly social element of the city landscape” (Vangstrup, 2020). This is the important emotional context to consider when introducing bike lanes in a community, as mobility is a deeply personal experience, and changes are felt acutely across a vast emotional spectrum (Vangstrup, 2020).

Bike lanes represent the disruption of the order within the existing streetscape which, for some groups of people, provides exciting new opportunities, while others experience a sense of loss (Wild et al., 2017). The automobile is so much more than just a vehicle that makes trips, it is an emblem of lifestyles and social values that are hegemonic in Western societies, and cycling infrastructure is often considered in direct conflict with automobility and its values (Wilson and Mitra, 2020). Automobility is deeply embedded into Western culture, perception and politics, and municipal officials are acutely aware of the divisiveness of cycling infrastructure (Wilson and Mitra, 2020). Scholars argue that this emotionally tinged opposition must be expected and mitigated if bicycle infrastructure is to be successfully implemented (Vangstrup, 2020).

Despite the oppositional outrage, cycling is increasingly recognized for improving the environmental sustainability of urban transportation patterns while also providing a variety of other benefits (Siemiatycki, 2014). These benefits include improved access to destinations for people who do not drive, traffic calming and a reduced carbon footprint (Pucher and Buehler 2005). Automobility, and thus, the car and all its required infrastructure, represents values of freedom, autonomy, individualism, and unfettered mobility, which as Wilson notes, are also values of the classic liberalism that underpins the morals of most Canadian society (Wilson and Mitra, 2020). These values lead us to the political views and social values that emphasise family and individualised responsibility and link the association that the automobile is an important way to protect one’s family (Wilson and Mitra, 2020). Yet, automobility creates the political demand for policies that ingrain it further in our public space, and securing road space for cycling can be seen as antagonistic to automobility and its overarching political system (Wilson and Mitra, 2020).

2.3 Defining “bikelash”

The burst of “angry” community opposition to bike lanes was coined as “bikelash” during the frenzy of media attention in 2013 as New York City attempted their bike lane rollout (Wild et

al., 2017). This emotional reaction has been described by journalists as “near hysterical,” yet has been reported similarly in cities throughout the world, such as Toronto, London, Sydney, and Auckland as these cities attempt to install bike lanes in their urban centres (Wild et al., 2017). This phenomenon can lead to critical consequences to bike lanes, such as the abandonment of a proposal or in some cases, the removal of a bike lane (Wild et al., 2017).

Typically, bikelash motivates a group of organised opposition to develop campaigns to have bike lanes removed and is characterised by a “severe” emotional tone (Wild et al., 2017). While bikelash is a recent and emerging area of study, this phenomenon is increasingly noticed as cities have turned to cycling initiatives to address concerns of air pollution and inactive lifestyles (Field et al., 2018).

The socio-political foundation of this “seemingly exaggerated” response to bike lanes often limits what new cycling infrastructure can be added to communities (Ferster et al., 2021). In some cases, bikelash leads to the abandonment of new cycling infrastructure and the removal of bike lanes (Wild et al., 2017). Bikelash has been identified as a top barrier to cycling investment, emphasising the importance of mitigating this heated opposition to implement cycling infrastructure (Wilson and Mitra, 2020). Without mitigation, bikelash creates huge challenges in the planning and development of cycling infrastructure, leading to the abandonment or removal of bike lane projects (Vangstrup, 2020). If bikelash blocks the development of cycling infrastructure, this harms the totality of a comprehensive bike lane network in cities and continues societies down the path of automobile dependency (Vangstrup, 2020). Bikelash is a significant issue that poses a substantial obstacle to the development and promotion of cycling (Vangstrup, 2020).

2.4 Who participates in bikelash?

In earnestly studying bikelash, two studies of opposition to bike lanes identify four groups opposed: merchants, anti-gentrification activists, “vehicular cyclists” and conservative voters (Wild et al., 2017, Ferster et al., 2021). While all four of these groups are opposed to bike lanes, their objections are varied, such as the merchant’s objection to the physical displacement of parking and the impact on their business, compared to the conservative voter who is concerned about the challenge of existing cultural privilege within the city (Wild et al., 2017). This next

section of this literature review will examine the objections of each group, as each criticism will require its own deliberate strategy in addressing it.

To begin with the types of bikelash, we can begin with “merchants (who are located on the route of the proposed change) who provide among the most influential objections to bike lane projects due to their status as “small businesses” (Wild et al., 2017). This group of people tend to be especially distressed with the potential economic consequences of a reduction in customer parking spaces, along with drop off spaces for inventory (Wild et al., 2017). This opposition to bike lanes from the business community potentially stems from the belief that their business model is wholly dependent on a car-oriented customer base (Ferster et al., 2021). This group of influential voices within the community can be effective at influencing public policies.

The second type of group that opposes bike lanes is anti-gentrification activists. For some high-income communities, bicycles can signal sustainability and an active lifestyle, while in neighbourhoods with a lower socio-economic status, bicycles are seen as proof of someone’s inability to afford a car (Moran, 2021). As such, cycling advocates must avoid the temptation to label car dependency as “old fashioned or backward,” given the aspirational nature of car ownership within many low-income communities (Wild et al., 2017). The underlying reason for the opposition of anti-gentrification activists to bike lanes seems to be that they are seen as a cause or predictor of gentrification (Wild et al., 2017). This is a particularly contentious topic, as gentrification is the result of many distinct factors and can appear in divergent ways in various communities, so it is unclear if bike lanes cause gentrification or are the result of it or have a different relationship altogether with it. In *Bike Lanes are White Lanes: Bicycle Advocacy and Urban Planning*, Hoffman (2016) explores how the relationship between community, race and gentrification is a complex topic in which the bicycle emerges as a symbol of incoming white, upwardly mobile cyclists. Hoffman (2016) acknowledges the complicated nature of gentrification but highlights the concerns of low-income communities that bicycle lanes herald gentrification and the eventual displacement of long-time residents (Hoffman 2016). As a result, evaluating the best strategy on how to address anti-gentrification fears is crucial for the successful implementation of bike lanes.

The third group is a particularly surprising group of people to participate in bikelash, which are the certain types of cyclists themselves (Wild et al., 2017). Despite the ostensible benefit for cyclists, protected bike lanes have a complicated relationship with cyclists, and this complication

can at times morph into active opposition (Wild et al., 2017). Cyclists themselves can participate in bikelash when poor design and lack of consultation have produced bike lanes (Wild et al., 2017). Some cyclists, such as “vehicular cyclists”, who are confident and move at faster speeds, tend to act as cars themselves, and object to being cleared out of car lanes and relegated to the side of the road (Wild et al., 2017) “Vehicular Cycling” was a cycling movement championed by John Forester in California, USA starting in the 1970s, when bike lanes (“bikeways” as per Forester) were being installed next to roads, and Forester, an avid cyclist himself, feared their construction meant their use would be mandatory for cyclists (Reid, 2020). The “vehicular cycling” movement in particular advocates for a rejection of special infrastructure for cyclists and instead argues that cyclists should be able to use roads the same way that cars do (Wild et al., 2017). Forester had multiple criticisms of bike lanes, chief among them challenging what he called “Cyclist Inferiority Phobia,” which argued that cyclists should be relegated to the side of the road (Forester, 2012). Forester instead argued that cyclists should take the centre of the road lane, just as cars do, and argued that cyclists should be viewed with the same level of importance as cars on roads (Forester 2012). Vehicular cyclists are especially vehement against the idea that cyclists should be “required” to use bike lanes, and strongly prefer to use fast, direct routes over specific cycling infrastructure (Wild et al., 2017). This particular type of bikelash is vexing, as one would assume that cyclists themselves are all in a united stance in favour of bike lanes, but it is not the case. As such, learning how to deal with this puzzling part of bikelash will be another critical factor in the implementation of bike lanes.

The fourth group of people who tend to participate in bikelash are conservative voters whose objection to bike infrastructure is ideological (Wild et al., 2017). Wild describes conservative bikelash as being especially “angry” in tone and commonly portrays cyclists as menacing “outsiders” seeking to “invade” a cherished lifestyle (Wild et al., 2017). This expression of outrage is described by Vreugdenhil and Williams (2013) in “White Line Fever: a sociotechnical perspective on the contested implementation of an urban bike lane network”, in which they describe the emotional outrage of having space allotted to bicycles when they had previously been for cars (Vreugdenhil and Williams, 2013). In their study done on bike lanes installed in Tasmania, Australia, Vreugdenhil and Williams (2013) note the deeply personal relationship people have with roads, calling it “part of the security that makes up their life” (Vreugdenhil and Williams, 2013). As such, any traffic intervention is met, at times, with “hot” emotion, rather than a rational

indifference. This bikelash is likely to express angry public opposition to the concept of road reallocation as a type of pillaging from existing entitlements, specifically control over road space (Wild et al., 2017). Scholars caution us not to dismiss conservative bikelash as superficial opposition due to their “heavily fortified opposition” and access to wealth and litigation powers, making them a serious contender in the debate over bike infrastructure (Wild et al., 2017). Within this ideology, cars play a vital role in their extension of the “private sphere” that protects both them and their families from the “dangers” (such as panhandlers, solicitations, or other intrusions) of city life, and thus connect car travel to an important way of providing for your family (Wild et al., 2017). As a result, cycling and bike lanes come to represent a critical threat to the automobility at the centre of conservative value systems, often associated with broader city plans that diminish the segregation of home and work that strikes as the suburban ideal (Wild et al., 2017). This group of people is particularly difficult in discussing ways to mitigate bikelash, but no less important to strategize against in the pursuit of implementing bike lanes.

2.5 How to address, mitigate and overcome bikelash.

With the four groups of bikelash participants identified, this literature review will now move onto potential strategies proposed by scholars on how to address, mitigate and eventually overcome bikelash in the quest to install more bike infrastructure.

Vangstrup and Williams (2020) posit that on-street interviews to discuss the bike lane proposals is a viable approach to create a collaborative bike lane planning process that can prevent opposition. This type of engagement approaches residents in a local, informal environment and includes several perspectives and opinions that can later be used as part of a public participation strategy (Vangstrup and Williams, 2020). They argue that understanding social dimensions is a key factor in a key factor in fostering support of cycling infrastructure, and this knowledge can be unlocked by engaging and empowering residents in local questions and issues in ways that are relevant and accessible for them (Vangstrup, 2020). Once this information has been gathered, publishing and displaying local opinions will serve as a signal that communicates to the public that local concerns have been considered (Vangstrup, 2020). However, it is imperative for planners not to take a side, but instead attempt to understand and collect different perspectives through collaborative planning (Vangstrup, 2020). In sum, Vangstrup appears to argue that bikelash can

be prevented through active engagement, participation, and collaboration with the targeted community.

In his study on bike lane acceptance on Twitter, Ferster followed the journey of bike lane acceptance on Twitter over a period. When Edmonton, Alberta opened a network of bike lanes in the downtown core, politicians and urban planners alike had to contend with negativity on the social media site even before they were built, but acceptance eventually grew in the form of positive “tweets” and less negative statements directed at local politicians (Ferster et al., 2021). Ferster notes that planners and policymakers utilised personal Twitter accounts and city government Twitter accounts to play an active role in conversations about bike lanes on the social media site and theorises this may have influenced public discussion (Ferster et al., 2021). Ferster’s theory is particularly intriguing, as it is in opposition to Vangstrup’s recommendation for planners to remain neutral on this contentious topic and signals that if these projects are to be sustained for a long time, planners and politicians need to engage with the public on the positives of bike lanes to see success.

In her article studying bikelash in Washington, DC, Malmo-Laycock identifies three different strategies to utilise in the planning stage to mitigate bikelash; (1) engaging early with communities to build trust and support, (2) educate key stakeholders and the public on transportation challenges and objectives, and (3) carry out comprehensive studies on corridors where projects are taking place to provide background data (Malmo-Laycock, 2017). Malmo Laycock stresses that communication is key when dealing with the public and that data and policy goals need to be communicated effectively (Malmo-Laycock, 2017). She recommends that the education of the public must happen early in the process, along with a well-crafted communication strategy even with budget constraints and a small communications team (Malmo-Laycock, 2017). This strategy has similarities to both Vangstrup and Ferster, paralleling Vangstrup’s belief that the public can be communicated with and Ferster’s recommendation that residents can be educated on these topics and come to a positive agreement.

Field acknowledges that bike lanes are unique challenges to local planners but encourages us not to equalise bikelash with defeat (Field et al., 2018). Field cites carefully planned and tailored engagement, and active leadership are tools that can be used to improve streets for all users (Field et al., 2018). However, Field cautions against a local-only approach to dealing with bikelash, arguing that action at national levels are needed to reduce the intensity and impact on bikelash due

to the disruption of transportation modalities and hierarchies (Field et al., 2018). This recommendation appears to also contradict Vangstrup's guidance of neutrality, joining Malmo Laycock and Ferster that planners and policy makers need to actively promote bike lanes to counter bikelash.

In terms of tailoring strategies to deal with specific cohorts of bikelash, Wild et al., offers several action plans that targets specific concerns regarding bike lanes. To address retailers' concerns over bike infrastructure impeding business, Wild et al., 2017 recommends emphasizing the conclusions of studies that found that businesses that had negligible effects from a loss of car parking, and instead pressed for more bike parking once the bike lanes were constructed (Wild et al., 2017). Providing the results of studies that show positive outcomes for retailers may prove useful in engaging retailer objections to bike lanes, although Wild et al. 2017, cautions that these studies must be presented in accessible and easily digestible ways to combat anti bike lane material (Wild et al., 2017). The goal, Wild et al. 2017, posits, is to "win hearts and minds" and this must be done in an accessible and engaging manner to be successful.

In strategizing how to address the concerns of anti-gentrification activists, Wild advocates for an acknowledgement of residents' experiences with unemployment and housing insecurity to engage effectively with them (Wild et al., 2017). Taking steps to address the broader issues that act as barriers to cycling such as street harassment, crime, and sexual solicitations that they may experience when on bike lanes can make cycling more appealing to these communities (Wild et al., 2017). In terms of dealing with "vehicular cyclists," Wild et al. 2017, recommends that engagement with them needs to assure them that the bike lanes will not be mandatory for cyclists to use, and that they will not be relegated to special infrastructure that may slow them down.

This brings us to the elephant in the room, which is how to deal with conservatives who are ideologically opposed to bike lanes. Wild et al. 2017, suggests taking a "moral high road" as much as possible and to challenge the idea of cyclists as menacing outsiders by displaying images of cycling as part of "everyday" life in the city (Wild et al., 2017). In appealing to the family values of conservatives, the authors suggest holding riding events in the bike lanes with children and families, to show that cyclists are only regular people (Wild et al., 2017). Organising bike lane promotional activities that involve schools may also be an important way to tap into the family

values of conservatives, and these types of “media friendly” events provide evidence of support for bike lanes, which helps thwart the idea that bikelash is endemic (Wild et al., 2017).

2.6 Literature Review Conclusion

Several scholars posit their own theories of how to mitigate and overcome bikelash, each tailored to different participatory parties of bikelash. Despite the emotional connection between the parties regarding the anger over bike lanes, it is important to separate different communication strategies based on the motivations and beliefs surrounding the bike lane. Understanding the details behind the negative attitude toward the bike lane allows for more tailored strategies to combat bikelash, giving the bike lane a chance to succeed in getting constructed and used by the community.

3 Methodology

In order to understand how the Saint-Denis REV project proceeded within City Hall, I went through three years of Montréal city council meeting minutes starting from January 10th, 2018, to April 19, 2021, and searched for all the times the Saint-Denis bike lane or the REV was mentioned, then translated the comments from French to English. I created a spreadsheet of all the times it was mentioned, by which party and to whom the comment/question was directed at.

Once I had created a spreadsheet of all the dates that Saint-Denis was discussed, I went to the City of Montréal's YouTube page where they have archived all their meetings and had organised them into yearly playlists. I downloaded meetings from June 15, 2020, to October 19, 2020, as these were the dates in which the Saint Denis bike lane was most discussed by city council according to my reading of the council meeting minutes. Afterwards, I used an AI transcription tool (Sonix.ai) to transcribe the meeting for me.

After that, I would read the document entirely to see how many times and how positively or negatively, the Saint-Denis REV was discussed either by city councillors or by members of the public during the question period. I added this information to my spreadsheet, which gave me a clear timeline of how the discussion of Saint-Denis progressed throughout the year of 2020.

From here, I had a promising idea of who the opposition was to the Saint-Denis bike lane and who was defending it in meetings. I emailed all the city councillors and borough mayors whose territory connected with the Saint-Denis REV. Eventually, city councillors Marianne Giguère and Alex Norris agreed to participate in my research. After filling out the consent forms, I sent them both a Google Form that had been written in French asking them to detail their thoughts and experiences with the Saint-Denis bike lane.

I was in contact with the communications department of Ensemble Montréal and Projet Montréal to ask about their party stances on the Saint-Denis REV. Projet Montréal provided a statement on their stance.

I was also in contact with The Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (National Library and Archives of Quebec), who helped me locate the public community consultation survey findings for the REV, as well as the merchant consultation survey findings for the revitalization for Saint-Denis.

I filed several requests for information from Service du Greffe (Registry Service) for assistance in finding construction contract details, official maps of Montréal, and statistics on Rue Saint-Denis.

1. I emailed city councillors in Montreal to ask questions about the Saint-Denis REV, then sent surveys in order to collect statements on their role with the project to understand their perspective on the process of the development of the Saint-Denis REV. I emailed requests to 22 city councillors, and four responded to me: Marianne Giguère, Luc Rabouin's office, Alex Norris, and the Projet Montreal Communications department.
2. I downloaded videos of City Council meetings from their publicly available YouTube channel in the year 2020 leading up the opening of the Saint Denis REV axis and used transcription software to download the transcription, then translated the document from French to English. I then analysed the transcript to understand how the Saint-Denis REV was discussed and voted on in City Council meetings.
3. I received the 2018 REV public consultation findings and requested them from The Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec and analysed the REV public consultation findings and the 2019 Saint-Denis merchant St-Denis revitalization consultation findings to understand what the public and merchants had said was important about the Saint-Denis REV project.

4 Analysis

4.1 Bikelash over the Saint-Denis REV

The opposition to the REV axis on Saint-Denis was intense and heated, encompassing groups of merchants, political figures, and members of the public participated in efforts to halt or undo the Saint-Denis REV. In this section, I will briefly summarise the main arguments of each group to highlight their positions. In this chapter, I will more deeply analyse their positions and strategies, as well as how the municipal administration Montréal, and Projet Montréal specifically, was able to counter them with their own strategies to save the Saint-Denis REV.

The main group of politicians opposed to the Saint-Denis REV were members of Ensemble Montréal, which is a municipal political party within Montréal. This party became the official opposition to Projet Montréal in City Hall and would often critique the governance style of Projet Montréal. Their main argument that they pursued in six months of city hall discussions was that the Saint-Denis REV was harming merchants, and that the current administration was ignoring their woes. Their status as the official opposition makes me unsure if all these politicians were personally opposed to the project, or if it was part of a wider political strategy. I am not sure why the opposition to this project was so concentrated in the political party of Ensemble Montréal, but they were certainly united in their drive to defeat this project.

The second group to oppose the Saint-Denis bike lane was a minority group of vocal merchants along Saint-Denis Street. This group was particularly important, as the Saint-Denis artery of Montréal is largely a commercial district of small businesses, so this group represented (superficially at least) the face of Saint-Denis. Their argument was that there had been a lack of consultation on the Saint-Denis REV project, and that the bike lane would discourage car-driving customers to frequent their shop. Some merchants made their opposition to the Saint-Denis REV known through media interviews, an open letter published in *La Presse* (a newspaper publication in Montréal, Québec), a survey conducted among fellow merchants, and a formal notice addressed to Mayor Valérie Plante herself to stop the work on the REV. In the open letter published in *La Presse* which decried the Saint-Denis REV, there were 60 signatories, which represented 22% of the 270 merchants on Rue Saint-Denis (as per the Société de Développement Commercial (SDC), a merchant association). A web survey was conducted by the consulting service agency (TACT) at the request of Coalition Accès Saint-Denis, an organization run by a group of merchants. They surveyed 65 merchants, and 40 of them (62%) indicated that they opposed the REV, which was 14% of all total merchants on Rue Saint-Denis. The cease-and-desist letter that was addressed personally to Mayor Valérie Plante was sent by a Cain Lamarre, a law firm representing three merchants on Rue Saint-Denis.

The third group of people opposed to the Saint-Denis REV were members of the public who submitted questions for the public question period of city hall meetings. Some of these questions were critical of the Saint-Denis REV and sceptical of the benefits that it would provide. The

arguments from this group varied from complaints that the Saint-Denis REV was further bias against the needs of residents who live outside the central boroughs, that it discriminated against non-cyclists, and that it was a further sign to Mayor Plante’s plan waste taxpayer dollars to promote environmentalism at a high financial cost. This is a group that has some overlap with the merchants who opposed the Saint-Denis REV, although non-merchant members of the public also had critiques of the project.

4.2 Participants of bikelash: Politicians

. The following three sections will analyse their positions and arguments in greater detail, beginning with this section that examines the politicians who were against the Saint-Denis REV.

The first group I will analyse are the political opponents of the Saint-Denis REV, which are mostly members of Ensemble Montréal, but also councillor Marvin Rotrand, who had been elected with the party Coalition Montréal, but had since become independent. The politicians who spoke most vociferously were:

- 1) City Councillor Aref Salem (Ensemble Montréal City Councillor of the district Norman-Mclaren in the Saint-Laurent borough. Also, Vice-Chair of Montréal’s Transport and Public Works Commission, and former member of the Montréal Executive Committee who was responsible for transport)
- 2) City Councillor Francesco Miele (Ensemble Montréal City Councillor for the district Côte-de-Liesse in the borough Saint-Laurent)
- 3) City Councillor Marvin Rotrand (Independent City Councillor for Snowdon, in the Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce borough)
- 4) City Councillor Karine Boivin Roy for (Ensemble Montréal City Councilor of the Louis-Riel district in Mercier-Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. Also, House Leader for the Opposition in City Hall).
- 5) City Councillor Chantal Rossie (Ensemble Montréal City Councillor for the Ovide Clermont district of Montréal-Nord borough)

The discussions in the Montréal monthly city hall meeting were fascinating to read, because they gave a certain theatrical performance to the Saint Denis bike lane debate. As mentioned previously in this thesis, Ensemble Montréal was united in their front to defeat the bike path, while Projet Montréal had to defend it in debates preceding votes to award construction contracts.

From my spreadsheet that analysed the meeting minutes of Montréal's city hall meetings, I saw that conversation about Saint-Denis occurred predominantly between May and October of 2020. This makes sense, as the project was first announced at the end of March 2020, but people were distracted by the Covid-19 pandemic which was just beginning. Indeed, the April and May city council meetings were dedicated to the pandemic and providing financial relief, not about discussing the Saint-Denis REV.

The discussion over the Saint-Denis REV artery was first initiated by City Councillor Aref Salem on May 25, 2020, . He begins by calling Mayor Valérie Plante an “opportunist”) using the COVID-19 pandemic to put in place proposals that were aligned with Projet Montréal's political objectives. He puts forth the claim that there was a lack of consultation regarding the removal of “half” the traffic lanes on Saint-Denis Street. He concludes by asking if these projects will be adhered to if consultation was not completed.

Salem's lead up to his question is striking because it does two things. First, he uses the fact that governments were encouraged to finish traffic projects while the Covid-19 pandemic was keeping people at home as a negative action that Project Montréal and Mayor Valérie Plante is doing. The second thing he does is argue there was no consultation for this project. This is a curious argument by Salem, as there had been consultations both on the REV and the Rue Saint-Denis merchants with their results publicly available for the several months. These reports had concluded favourably for the Saint-Denis project, so I am curious why Salem is arguing that more consultation needs to be done to justify this project. It is possible that with more consultation, it could have delayed the project until it was closer to another election cycle, which may put the Saint-Denis project in danger if Projet Montréal lost their majority. Alex Norris, city councillor for Projet Montreal for Jeanne-Mance borough in Le Plateau-Mont-Royal, also agrees with this line of thinking, as per his statement to me.

The next time that the Saint-Denis project was discussed was June 16th, 2020. City Councillor Francesco Miele noted the SDC of Saint-Denis had asked the city to consider postponing for a year. He takes care to say this is not a request for cancellation, but rather a postponement to give the merchants a break. He continues by stating that 71 merchants responded to the SDC, and only 23 were in favour of building the bike lane while 48 said they were against it.

Miele continues to invoke the merchants in a more dramatic fashion, stating that the construction on Saint-Denis was “mettre des bâtons dans les roues” (In English: “putting a spoke in the wheel”) of the merchants. He then derides the administration for starting construction in the north, which would allow the merchants to have a break over the summer. This is not enough time, he argues, stating it should be delayed for a year, and questions how the government will justify ignoring the requests of merchants.

Miele continues from Salem’s attack that the Saint-Denis REV artery is anti-merchant, and that the merchants are against it. I was not able to see the survey that the SDC did for the merchants, but I am curious how the question was framed and proposed to the clients. It is also a little confusing that he invoked the merchants who say they want to enjoy their summer and asks for a postponement, but when Project Montréal accommodates that, he argues that instead, a one-year postponement would be better. This appears to be another stalling tactic, like Salem’s proposal for more consultations. This is intriguing, because instead of arguing against the bike lane on its merits, both members of Ensemble Montréal choose tactics that would delay the project as much as possible.

The August 25 2020 meeting was provocative in a specific way, as this was the morning that La Presse published the article “La rue Saint-Denis à Montréal, vous connaissez?” (In English: “Do you know Saint-Denis Street?”), which was written and signed by 60 merchants of Saint Denis. Just to keep in mind, there were 270 merchants at this time in Saint-Denis, according to the SDC, and 60 merchants represents 20% of them. This article will be analysed in depth in the Merchant section of this chapter. City Councillor Francesco Miele began with a flair for the drama, saying “soixante de commerçants de la rue Saint Denis lançaient un cri du cœur.”

(In English: “sixty shopkeepers on Saint Denis Street cried out from the heart”). Once again, Councillor Miele invokes the merchant’s frustrations and frames the Saint-Denis REV as anti-merchant. He argues that this type of cycling infrastructure harms the local economy, and

dramatically pleads for the administration to listen to the merchants who once again, are “crying from the heart.”

Much like his previous attack in the June meeting, this argument frames bike lanes as being inherently anti-merchant. As per scholarly findings in Chapter 2: Literature review, this is a quite common bikelash argument, in that some merchants see their business dependent on customers arriving by cars. However, recent data shows that while some merchants do suffer, there are economic benefits of bike lanes, which will be more deeply analysed later in this chapter.

Later in the same meeting, right as the council is about to debate on awarding a construction contract for another portion of the Saint-Denis REV, Councillor Miele once again argues against the project. This time, he takes a more direct approach to bikelash, and announces that “Et donc c’est une vraie guerre à l’automobile qu’on a devant nous” (In English: “And so it’s a real war on the car that we have in front of us”). This is a very pure form of bikelash, at its most basic level that constructing a bike lane is akin to waging a war on cars.

After Councillor Miele concludes his arguments, Councillor Marvin Rotrand rises to speak. He also argues against the bike lane, putting forth the claim that “Si vous prendre pas une bicyclette en Janvier tu n’êtes pas un bon citoyen” (in English: If you do not take a bicycle in January, you are not a good citizen). He differentiates himself from Councillor Miele, saying he is not just looking for postponement of the project but rather a full cancellation. He also makes an economic case against the Saint-Denis REV, arguing that if suburbanites cannot park in Rue Saint-Denis, they will stay in the suburbs or shop on Amazon. He concludes his speech by asking others to vote against the project.

I thought that the inclusion of an argument against year-round biking was a compelling, Canadian-specific argument against bike lanes, which is something that was not really discussed in Chapter 2: Literature review in bikelash analysis. It is true that Montréal has long and cold winters, and people need to travel in all weathers, but Rotrand’s argument is far more moralistic than that. The argument is not that it would be difficult to travel in January by bicycle, but rather that a person would not be a “good” citizen if they did not. This is a curious angle on bikelash, because it applies morality to the bike lane debate, about what makes a person “good” in their relationship to mobility. The idea of a person being “good” for using a bike lane, and other people resenting that is a fascinating emotional response to bike lanes, and one that I would like to include

in wider discussions of bikelash. This comment may have been spoken sarcastically, or disingenuously, but I find it to be a compelling enough quote to include it here.

The next time the Saint-Denis REV was mentioned was September 21 in the 1PM session, this time brought up by City Councillor and House Leader of the Opposition, Karine Boivin-Roy. She also frames the Saint-Denis REV as being anti-merchant, noting that there had been a formal notice against the bike lane from the merchants (further discussed in the merchant section of this chapter). Boivin-Roy's argument argues against the urgency of building the bike lane during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which strikes me as another stalling tactic, like Salem's and Miele's arguments against the bike lane.

The last city council meeting before the Saint-Denis REV was inaugurated was October 19th, 2020. In the 1:30 PM session, Councillor Chantal Rossi attacks the bike lane from a different angle, using accessibility to discredit Projet Montréal's focus on providing mobility access to cyclists. She claims that Projet Montréal is "refusing to understand that not all citizens can travel only by bicycle or public transport." Like Councillor Miele, she claims that Projet Montréal, as a party, is "anti-car" for their support for bike lanes in Montréal. She concludes her speech by asking how many parking spots had been permanently removed since Projet Montréal came to power.

The bikelash on display here is another very pure form of the concept, the argument that any benefits for cyclists come at the detriment of car-users. It is an argument that the conversation of the Saint-Denis REV is not about cost, infrastructure, or traffic efficiency, it is about discussing changing a way of life through urban design. The Saint Denis REV is a challenge to automobility, and any attempt to support this infrastructure project is seen as an attack on people who use cars.

The political attack on the Saint-Denis REV was largely based on exasperating merchant frustrations against the project, and when that ceased to be effective, pivoting to an anti-car rhetoric of bikelash. I find this to be a very common form of bikelash in that these arguments have been observed in other case studies of bikelash. The emotional context of these arguments (such as the merchants "crying from the heart") highlight the impassioned nature of bikelash. This heated oratory serves a certain theatrical spectacle to City Council meetings, in which the symbol of the Saint-Denis REV is seen as an attack on the automobile-centric design of rue Saint-Denis. This is particularly illuminating to understanding the nature of bikelash in this project.

4.3 Participants in bikelash: Merchants

The media coverage of the merchant bikelash against the Saint-Denis REV begins in late August 2020. On August 25th, there was an article in *La Presse* titled “La rue Saint-Denis à Montréal, vous connaissez? (In English: “Do you know Saint-Denis Street?”) written by Madeleine De Villers (Concept Zone Inc) and Judith Noel Gagnon (Mycoboutique) and with 60 merchant signatories attached (De Villers et al., 2020). In the article, they come against the Saint-Denis REV and complain that Mayor Valérie Plante is not allowing them to live and is not listening to them (De Villers et al., 2020). They propose a postponement of the construction work to Spring 2021, or the use of temporary express lanes (De Villers et al., 2020). The article questions if the municipal administration has a plan to ensure the survival of street merchants and expresses anxieties about how deliveries and shipments will work with the removal of two traffic lanes (De Villers et al., 2020).

The article inspires other outlets to write about the merchant opinion of the Saint-Denis REV, such as the CBC and *Le Devoir* (CBC 2020, Corriveau 2020). Both articles reference the open letter on *La Presse*, and *Le Devoir* interviews Madeleine De Villers, who offers the additional information that she sells furniture and doubts that cyclists will buy furniture with bikes Corriveau 2020. De Villers was also featured on September 3 in the *Metro*, where she also argued against the Saint-Denis REV and called it a “disaster” that would lead to the loss of customers (Machillot, 2020).

As a method of analysing bikelash, this is typical from a small business owner that is common in bike lane proposals. It is intriguing that De Villers appears to be the most vocal opponent of the Saint-Denis REV and the one giving the most interviews against the project. Her arguments are remarkably similar to Ensemble Montréal’s arguments that the Saint-Denis REV is anti-merchant and will cost merchants economic opportunities by adding bike lanes.

Between August 28th and August 31st, a group of merchants known as the Coalition Accès Saint-Denis contracted the consulting service agency TACT to conduct a web survey of merchants (Poirier 2020). As mentioned in Chapter 1: Introduction, 65 traders (24% of all merchants who

were part of the SDC) responded, with 62% opposing the REV, which amounts to 40 merchants in total (15% of all merchants' part of the Rue Saint-Denis SDC) (Poirier 2020).

This article was written about in TVA Nouvelles, a Québec news organization, and includes comment from an anonymous merchant promising to fight back against the Saint-Denis REV project and does not include any positive mention of the project (Poirier 2020).

On the 15th of September, a formal notice was sent by the law firm Cain Lamarre, representing the merchants from Concept Zone inc, Optique Georges Laoun inc. and Mycoboutique Inc (CBC 2020). As mentioned earlier, De Villers is the owner of Concept Zone, the furniture store on Saint Denis. The letter repeats the claims that the merchants have suffered harm well beyond the normal inconveniences that arise from public works (CTV 2020). They argue that the municipal administration must at least minimise the impacts of the construction from merchants “who are out of breath” (CTV 2020). The letter does not directly threaten a lawsuit, but instead says that the clients “intend to bring all appropriate remedies in the circumstances as well as claiming from the city all damages they suffer and will suffer” (CTV 2020).

After the formal notice, there was an announcement of a merchant subsidy for merchants who were affected by the REV construction. This subsidy was announced three weeks after the formal letter from Cain Lamarre on behalf of three merchants was sent to Mayor Valérie Plante. This did not halt the backlash from merchants completely, as Noël claimed in an interview with 24 Heures news that it was a “symbolique qui est loin de couvrir les pertes” (In English: “a symbolic amount that is far from covering the losses,”) (Paré 2020).

Following the announcement of the subsidy, there are no more news reports of merchant dissatisfaction from the merchants of rue Saint-Denis. The bulk of the Backlash appears to be prior to the subsidy, and once it was announced, despite being deemed as “symbolic”, appears to have helped subside the Backlash wave.

4.4 Participants in bikelash: Members of the public

The 7PM session of the August 24th Montréal City Council meeting was dedicated to public questioning, which is when the public first began asking questions in meetings about Saint Denis specifically. This is to say that questions and comments had already been raised about other bike lanes and the REV in previous meetings, but now these questions specifically had to do with the Saint-Denis REV. As a note on order, there are only three questions permitted per question period on each subject to allow a greater diversity of questions asked. The questions are submitted ahead of time and then read out by chair of the meeting.

The sole question was asked by Jacques Desbiens, who is a cyclist frustrated by the lack of maintenance of bike lanes outside of Montréal's downtown core. He argued that the Saint-Denis bike lane would benefit those who live in the North-South axis of the bike lane, but those who live out of the core of downtown Montréal in Pierrefonds and Montréal North also cycle and deserve bike lanes.

'This is a perspective that has not been previously categorized by scholars studying resistance to bikelanes' The question is opposing the investment into a bike lane in rue Saint-Denis, however, not the concept of bike lanes itself. He does not fall into the category of a "vehicular cyclist" who is against cycling, nor is he an anti-gentrification activist who is arguing against bike lanes in his own neighbourhood. In many ways, Mr Desbiens refuses easy categorization in his question posed to the city Council. This is a compelling case of bikelash in which the goal is to create a more expansive cycling network that is accessible by all the population of the city, which is different from the usual goals of bikelash to hinder creation of bike lanes.

Mr Desbiens' question was answered by Councillor Giguère, who answered with empathy to the question, noting that he is "right to point out" that the vision for the cycling network cannot simply be central even though there is an existing demand there. She agreed that Projet Montréal wants to develop a better cycling network on the outskirts, and thanks him for the idea.

The 7PM session of September 21 is the public question period, in which questions from the public are read out by Suzie Meron. The first question comes from Mr. Martin from Musica restaurant, and he is curious about the exact number of parking spaces that would be removed in Plateau-Mont-Royal borough following the construction of the REV.

This question was answered by City Councillor Caldwell, whose response will be analysed in greater detail later in this chapter. For now, I will include that Councillor Caldwell's response reframed the question to discuss greater access in favour of discussing removed parking spaces.

The second question comes from Christine Lavoie, and she also has a compelling question that is hard to categorise from the academic literature of “bikelash.” She argues that the REV in Saint-Denis will make bus line #30 inaccessible, which serves people with reduced mobility. In

her comment, she describes the bike lane as disadvantageous to people with reduced mobility and asks if “non-cyclists” were seriously considered before implementation. She concludes by stating that merchants and motorists are not the only ones “legitimately opposing” the unwelcome bike path.

So, this is thought-provoking because it adds people with mobility issues to the categories of bikelash, which is something I previously had not come across in the literature. Much like Jacques Desbiens, this creates a new category in the bikelash literature.

City Councillor Eric Alan Caldwell answers again, though this time with much more empathy and a promise to follow up with her personally after he investigates the issue himself. He assures her that accessibility to the bus was one of the priorities preserved for all clientele.

The third and final question of this meeting comes from Fanny Vergnaud, who asks if the administration carried out economic impact studies to find out the impacts of the Saint-Denis REV, and if they were made public. This is again a curious question that has parallels to the consultation inquiry posed by Ensemble Montréal. Borough Mayor Luc Rabouin answers by saying that they did a review of economic studies that existed in other North American cities, and that in the next few months, there will be a pilot of the economic development of the REV, which will be able to compare years prior to the REV and post REV.

The question period extended to September 22nd at 9:30 AM, in which three more questions were asked about Saint-Denis but could not be answered due to the 3-question limit. The final public question period before Saint-Denis was completed was Oct 19, at 7PM. During this session, only one question was asked about the Saint-Denis REV, and it was asked by Victor Poudrier. He mostly complains that construction in Saint-Denis just finished, and now new excavation work is being carried out. Regarding the REV, he asks “Do you intend to allow millions of taxpayers' dollars to be swallowed up in a project that makes no logical or rational sense and that makes a mockery of our political will to green the streets of Montréal at any price?” which

appears to be an overly dramatic statement opposing the Saint-Denis REV. The response from City Councillor Sylvain Ouellet (city councillor of Villeray-Saint Michel - Parc Extension, Projet Montréal) was very interesting, because as Councillor Ouellet answers, he explains that Mr Poudrier wrote to Councillor Oullet on September 30th, 2020, got a reply, and thanked the councillor for the answer, only to repeat his question in the public question session. Ouellet repeats that the project has been underway for two years and it is almost finished, they are not redoing the sidewalk and an assurance that the project is not “wasting millions.”

The interaction between the public and City Councillors was remarkably interesting to analyse, because it differed from the debates between Projet Montréal members and Ensemble Montréal members. The members of the public had no direct way of voting against the construction of the Saint-Denis REV, they could only offer their opinions and questions regarding the project. However, by having their questions read into the record and having Councillors respond directly, this added public scrutiny to the project.

4.5 Strategies Used to Overcome the Bikelash of The Saint-Denis REV

Different strategies were used to overcome the bikelash of the Saint-Denis REV. This section uses analysis of city council transcripts, statements from Councillor Giguère, Councillor Norris, Mayor Rabouin and the party of Projet Montréal, and news articles from this time.

The most prolific defenders of the Saint-Denis REV came from Projet Montréal, which makes sense, because this was the party that proposed the project in the first place.

These councillors are:

- 1) City Councillor Éric Alan Caldwell (Projet Montréal, City Councillor of the district Mercier–Hochelaga-Maisonneuve in the Hochelaga borough)
- 2) City Councillor Marianne Giguère (Projet Montréal, City Councillor of the district De Lorimier in Le Plateau-Mont-Royal borough).
- 3) Borough Mayor Luc Rabouin (Projet Montréal, Borough Mayor of Le Plateau-Mont Royal)

According to statements from both Councillor Norris and Councillor Giguère, City Councillor Marianne Giguère was the “chosen one” to defend the Saint-Denis REV in public and in City Council meetings. Again, according to statements from Councillor Giguère, Norris and Rabouin’s office, reactions from the initial proposal of the Saint-Denis were positive.

Here are the strategies utilised by Projet Montréal to defend the Saint-Denis REV:

1) Reframe parking loss as an increase in accessibility:

Projet Montréal was asked three times in city hall meetings about how the administration planned to deal with the loss of traffic lanes and the removal of streetside parking. The first question was on May 25, 2020, asked by Councillor Aref Salem, then again on September 21, 2020, by Mr Martin during the public question period, and finally on October 20th, 2020, by Councillor Chantal Rossi. Each time, Councillor Caldwell answered by reframing the question to be about increasing access and not about frustrating car traffic. In the May 25th meeting, in response to Councillor Salem, he asked the council to consider the journey to a store by car, noting that “you can’t go directly into the store by car” and stating that some part of the journey must be done on the sidewalk. With this frame in mind, Caldwell states that active transportation will provide more access to these businesses and meet the needs of the merchant clientele.

Caldwell’s response to Salem is intriguing to me because he reframes the “removal of half the lanes in Saint-Denis Street” as providing more access for merchant’s clients, noting that the car can only be used for a portion of the journey. This is an impressive answer because it allows Councillor Caldwell to talk about the Saint-Denis REV in positive ways that benefit the public, rather than a project that “takes away” from drivers.

During the September 21 public question period, Eric Alan Caldwell answered again with the same framing when asked how many parking spaces would be removed to make room for the Saint-Denis REV. He acknowledges that parking is being removed but argues that more active and safe routes are being developed.

City Councillor Eric Alan Caldwell once again answers in an intriguing way, using an intriguing tactic to not address the specific point of the question, which was asking for a specific number of parking spaces removal, but instead to counter with an explanation of what the redesign plans are and an assurance that it will all be for the better.

The question of how many parking spaces would be removed was asked again by Councillor Chantal Rossi in the Oct 20th, 2020, session. She asked Projet Montréal directly to

provide a specific number of the removed parking spaces after accusing them of being “anti-car.” Councillor Caldwell went on to say that the exact number of removed parking spaces does not exist, because the party is instead tracking the improvement in mobility that this brings. He again reframes the question to be about increased access and argues that the Saint-Denis REV will provide greater and increased access, and that is what should be measured, rather than the removal of streetside parking.

I think the question of removed parking spaces is a tricky question to answer, because any number of parking spots being “permanently removed” would have been seized as a line of attack. By insisting that they are measuring improved access instead of tracking parking spaces removal, they reframe the debate to be about improved access instead of hindering car traffic.

I found this to be a compelling tactic to combat bikelash, because the debate is no longer about maintaining the automobility-focussed status quo, but rather about improving future access to destinations along the bike lane. This seems to have been a deliberate strategy by Councillor Caldwell, to consistently redirect the question to be about access, and not about specific parking numbers.

2) Emphasise the economic benefits of bike lanes.

Councillor Marianne Giguère proved herself to be a passionate defender of the Saint-Denis REV, and through her efforts, the project was able to sustain itself through bikelash. Part of her strategy was to consistently engage with the merchants of Saint-Denis to update and reassure them of the progress, as per her statement to me. In her statement to me, Councillor Giguère explained that she had personally gone to speak with the merchants and emphasised the economic benefits of bike lanes in commercial arteries. She also did the same in City Council meetings to counter the “anti-car” accusations that were hurled her way.

The most prolific defence in City Council came on June 16th, 2020, following discussions by Councillor Miele and Salem about the anti-merchant angle of the Saint-Denis REV. She begins by pointing out that the merchants themselves had made the request for a bike lane to the centre of the islands, which the SDC wanted to encourage traffic in the businesses. She turns to the economic benefits of the REV, arguing that the project will revive the street businesses that need it. She then begins a 7-minute impassioned speech in which she cites several studies that prove the economic benefits of bike lanes, as summarised here:

She cites a study done in New York on Ninth avenue after the establishment of a bike path, noting an increase of sales in businesses along the bike path up to 49%. She then cites another study in 2014 in San Francisco, which also saw a 24% increase for businesses after the establishment of a bike lane. She cites another 2017 study in Toronto where 95% of businesses saw an increase of business after a bike lane was established. She continues by questioning the council in general why this happens. She quickly answers that “cyclists spend more because they can easily stop and be tempted by an item they’ve seen in the window, or by a desire to buy something to eat along the way” She posits with the studies of bike lanes noting that cyclists spend 24% more than motorists in street shops, as per a study done in Portland Oregon. In London, she argues, there had been a 17% decrease in the vacancy rate on a commercial artery after the development of the bike lane. She continues to compare cycling to motor parking, noting that the same London study found that each square meter of bicycle parking generated five times more revenue for an artery than each square metre dedicated for car parking. She then states that cycling facilities are beautiful and increase the attractiveness of a district. She continues to say that bike lane infrastructure attracts workers in the high-tech industry, which is big in Montréal. The final fact that she brings up is that bike paths are good for jobs according to a 2011 study done on 58 cycling development projects in eleven different cities, and found that every million spent on cycling infrastructure, eleven jobs were created.

So, this was a very impassioned and long speech by Councillor Giguère, starting at 2:06:40 and concluding at 2:13:46. This was a striking speech because it was very academic, like a bibliography of studies that showed the benefits of bike lanes. It’s refreshing that she took a very quantitative, scientific approach to combating the emotional anti-merchant argument of Councillor Miele by stating the scientific statistics that showed the economic benefits of bike lanes. I think this is a refreshing strategy to overcome bikelash, because it counters the emotional response to change with studies and statistics that show the positives of the project, specifically targeted towards merchants who may have doubts about the future livelihood of their business. Showing positive economic results from bike lanes is a way to counter the negativity of bikelash, specifically targeting the anti-merchant angle of this argument.

Councillor Giguère spoke up in defence of the Saint-Denis REV in the August 2nd City Council meeting, this time arguing against the status quo of Rue Saint-Denis, which had been in a bad position for years. After defending the collaboration with the SDC, she repeats the economic

benefits of the Saint-Denis REV, “which will allow hundred and thousands of people who have money in their pocket to see the windows and access Rue Saint-Denis” She states that it is currently not pleasant to eat at the terrace in Saint-Denis because the traffic is so fast. She reaffirms that this will “bring rue St-Denis back to life.”

I think this is an engaging tactic to overcome bikelash, because economic benefits are a very concrete concept to put forward. By emphasising economic benefits of bike lanes, this specifically targets the anti-merchant angle of bikelash, and in fact, creates a positive association with bike lanes. By arguing against the status quo, Councillor Giguère creates a positive association with the change in the urban design of Rue Saint-Denis, one that is beneficial to both merchants and cyclists.

3) Be Responsive to anti-merchant bikelash.

This strategy of overcoming bikelash must do specifically with Rue Saint-Denis being a commercial artery, which may not apply to more residential corridors that are experiencing bikelash. Despite this, I have included this strategy because I think it was crucial to overcoming the bikelash that occurred over the Saint-Denis REV.

From my media analysis, there were only a few merchants who were vocally opposed to the bike lane, chiefly Madeleine De Villers from Concept Zone Inc, but also Pierre Noël of MycoBoutique and Anne-Marie Laoun of the Optique Georges Laoun shop (their names appear the most in all interviews in news articles detailing opposition to the Saint-Denis REV). This is confirmed by Councillor Giguère’s statement to me, which revealed there were only 3-4 merchants who were vocally opposed. However, because merchants made up the “face” of Rue Saint-Denis, it was important to engage and be responsive to their concerns. Project Montréal but especially the borough council of Le Plateau-Mont-Royal established communication with the SDC of Rue Saint-Denis and consistently maintained it throughout the project, as per statements from Councillor Norris and the office of Borough Mayor Rabouin. This is evident as well through the City Council meetings, in which Rabouin counters the anti-merchant arguments from Ensemble Montréal that the administration was not constant communication with the SDC and not listening to their concerns.

The other way that bikelash was countered was through a \$1.5 million merchant subsidy, announced on October 7th, 2020. This subsidy was announced three weeks after the formal letter from Cain Lamarre on behalf of three merchants was sent to Mayor Valérie Plante. This letter may

have had no lawsuit merit, but it was being covered extensively in newspapers and used as a line of attack by Ensemble Montréal. By creating a subsidy, the administration was able to show that they were emphatic, and responsive to the frustrations of the merchants opposed to the Saint-Denis REV, even if they were not the majority of merchants. However, this is not to say this quelled the bikelash from merchants completely, as Noël claimed in an interview with 24 Heures news that it was a “symbolique qui est loin de couvrir les pertes” (In English: “a symbolic amount that is far from covering the losses,”) (Paré 2020).

With these three strategies in place, the municipal administration of Montréal was able to push through the bikelash surrounding the Saint-Denis REV. These strategies have some commonalities with what scholars have argued, such as engaging with the public to show the importance and benefits of bike lanes, but other strategies, such as the merchant subsidy, have not been explored in academic literature of bikelash. I think this is a thought-provoking finding, and one that adds an important financial angle to the strategies in overcoming bikelash.

4.6 Timeline of the Saint-Denis REV

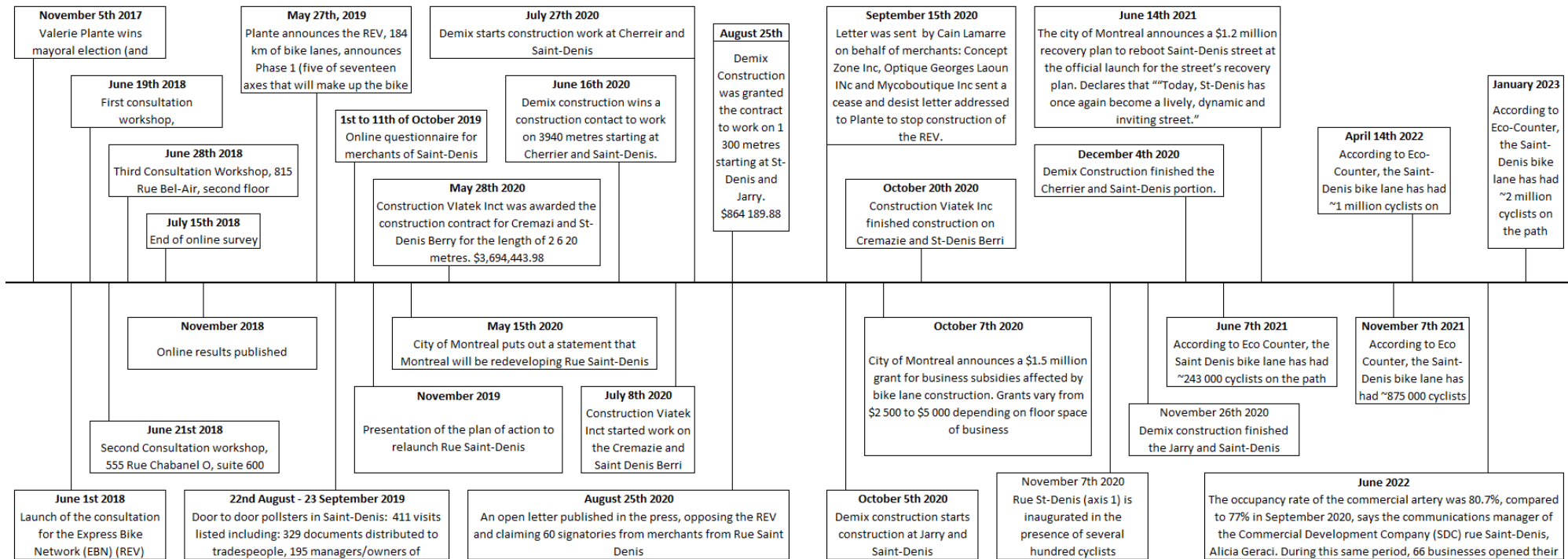


Figure 4. Timeline of the Saint-Denis REV

In order to help visualise events leading up to and post the Saint-Denis REV, I have created this chart which outlines events from 2017 to 2023. It is pictured here.

The official announcement of the Saint-Denis REV plans was on May 27th, 2019, which was then followed by a month-long polling period through August and September as merchants were consulted about the revitalization plan of Saint-Denis, which included the REV plans. Construction plans were announced a year later May 15th, 2020, with Viatek Construction starting work on July 8th of 2020 on the section of Saint-Denis between Berri and Cremazie. Once construction started, it was officially finished by Demix Construction on December 4th, 2020, on the Cherrier and Saint-Denis portion.

This shows that the time between the announcement and actual construction (a period which included consultation and dialogue between the City of Montréal and the merchants of Saint-Denis), was slightly more than a year, while construction took slightly less than six months.

A striking fact is the relatively quick announcement of the \$1.5 million merchant subsidy that was announced on October 7th, 2020, which was about three weeks after a cease and-desist letter was addressed to Mayor Valérie Plante on behalf of three merchants (Concept Zone Inc, Optique Georges Lacun Inc and Mycoboutique Inc) on September 15th, 2020. The letter had demanded that the administration “doit à tout le moins minimiser les impacts de ses choix sur des commerçants et justiciables” (In English: must at the very least minimise the impacts of its choices on merchants and litigants”) if suspension or cancellation of the project could not be achieved.

This letter was discussed In the September 21st, 2020, City Council meeting, and the subsidy was first hinted at by Borough Mayor Luc Rabouin, who said some compensation would be made available. Three weeks later, the City of Montréal made an announcement that a \$1.5 million dollar subsidy would be available for merchants who were affected by the construction of the REV. It is unclear if the backlash from the merchants would have continued to grow if the merchant subsidy had not been announced, or if this were an olive branch to the merchants who were most vocal in their backlash. News articles after the merchant subsidy do not mention backlash from the merchants after the subsidy announcement, which looks like it was a successful tactic in overcoming the backlash.

Something that is also curious about the construction timeline is that the inauguration date and actual day that construction finished are about a month apart. The St Denis REV was inaugurated on November 7th of 2020 while Demix finished the actual construction by December 4th, 2020. Through my research, I discovered that this inauguration was actually organized by a

private citizen, Jacques Naouzi, the owner of Code & Café, a business on Rue Saint Denis (Majeur, 2020). He strongly supported the project and organized the inauguration of the Saint-Denis REV that saw about 4000 people use it on the Saturday inauguration party (Majeur, 2020).

4.7 The Réseau Express Vélo

The REV was the vision of Projet Montréal since their 2017 Montréal municipal election campaign. The party had become the official opposition of City Hall in 2013 under the leadership of Richard Bergeron who resigned a year later in October of 2014. He was succeeded by Valérie Plante who became leader of the party in 2016. In the campaign lead up, Projet Montréal promised consultation on a “Bicycle Express Network” to be implemented, which they quickly followed through with the following year after their successful election win.

By 2017, Montréal had 788 kilometres of bike lane, with the Coderre administration planning to add 58 more kilometres within the next two years (Montreal Gazette 2017). Displayed here is a map of the bike lanes in Montréal in 2017. Here, it shows that the original North-South bike lane axis is a combination of bike lane segments on different streets, none of them protected. Using the Google Maps Historical View, I can show what those segments of bike lanes looked like in 2017, prior to the construction of the REV.

The bike lane Rue Lajeunesse begins on Rue De Castelnau E, which is about 5 kilometres from Boulevard Gouin E, the Northern tip of the island. A cyclist travelling from the Northern tip of the island would have to cycle down Rue Lajeunesse, then turn onto Saint-Dominique Street, which was similarly a bike lane with only painted lines to separate traffic, as pictured below. This bike lane only extended for about 1.3 kilometres, before the cyclist would have to turn onto Rue Clarke, a one-way bike lane that extended for 2 kilometres. It was also separated by a painted line, with streetside parking next to it, which would have increased the risk of dooring. The lack of a direct path makes navigating trips a difficult chore. The lack of protected cycling infrastructure similarly makes cycling seem dangerous and unpleasant.

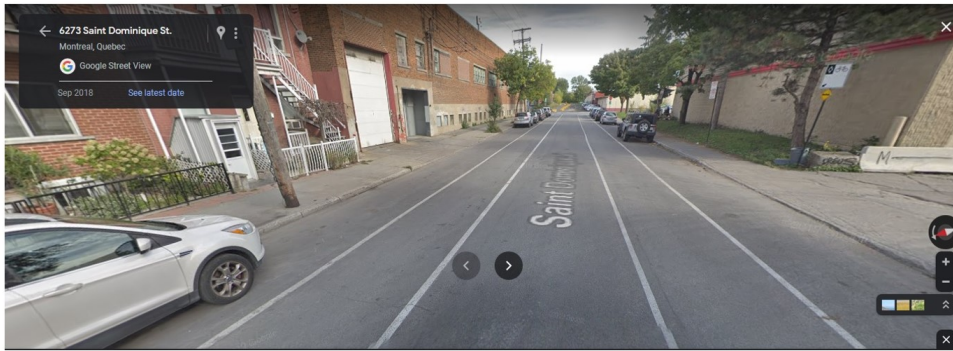


Figure 5. Google maps of Saint-Dominique street between Rue Beaubien and Rue de Belle Chasse. 2018.



Figure 6. Google Maps view of Rue Lajeunesse, between Rue Chabanel E and Rue Legendre E. 2017.



Figure 7: Google maps view of Rue Clarke between Rue Bernard O and Avenue Laurier O. 2017.

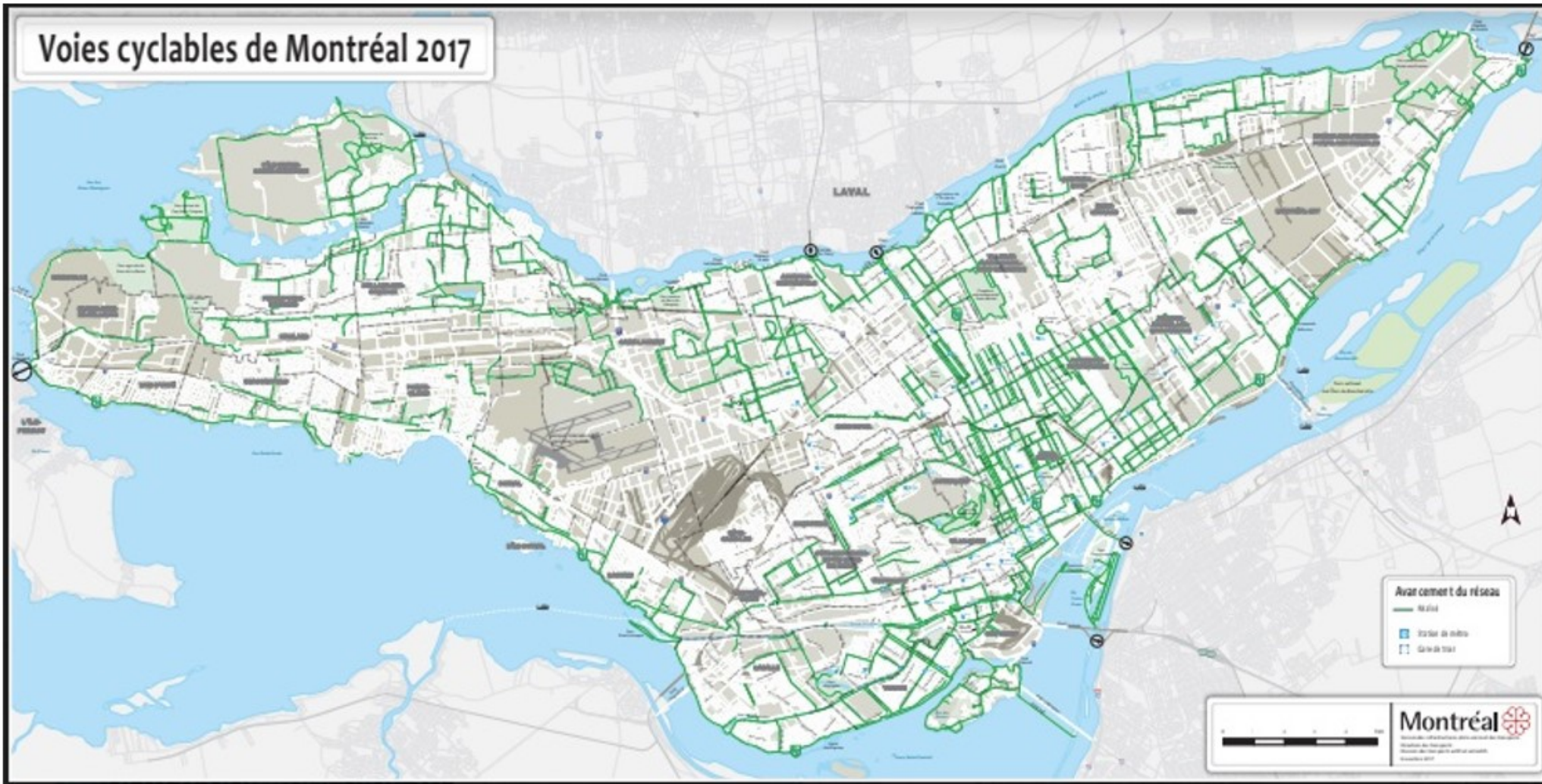


Figure 8. Map of bike lanes in Montréal in 2017. Source: Montréal

Cycling on the island was also dangerous and even deadly as there were forty-five cyclists who died after crashes with cars between 2006 and 2017 (Litwin 2018). However, this did not deter the growth of cyclists in Montréal, as the percentage of cyclists who cycle all year round (including winter) had doubled between 2009 and 2018, growing from 6% to 13% (Fortier 2018). In large part, Projet Montréal proposing the REV was tapping into a cycling movement that was growing yearly in Montréal and was already in need of dedicated infrastructure. When the REV was announced in 2019, it was projected to have 184 kilometres in length (Ville De Montreal 2022), with the first phase being completed between 2019 and 2021. Here is a map showing the proposed axis of the REV, with the red lines showing projects planned for between 2019 and 2022, while the black are future projects.



Figure 9: Proposed REV Axes. Source: Montréal, 2019

Saint-Denis was axis 1 of the project, which was a 10 km long north-south section, connecting Boulevard Gouin to Boulevard de Maisonneuve. As seen by the map, it would have provided a central artery which connected the North of the island to the heart of Montréal downtown directly. While Montréal had plenty of bike lanes through the city before, the proposed

REV would integrate them into a connected grid, facilitating easy and direct travel for Montréal's cyclists.

The announcement of the REV was on May 27, 2019, tweeted out by the official City of Montréal twitter account which announced that among the first five of seventeen axis will be Saint-Denis, between Gouin and de Maisonneuve boulevards (Global News 2019, Daily Hive 2019)

4.8 Public Consultations

Part of the argument that some merchants and some politicians put forth to foment the bikelash to the Saint-Denis REV was the argument that there was no consultation to the project. This is false on three fronts:

- 1) In June of 2018, the city of Montréal launched the first public consultations of the REV, which shaped the idea of what the REV should look like and what kind of infrastructure it should have.
- 2) In August of 2019, the city of Montréal launched a polling campaign of the merchants of Saint-Denis in a door-to-door campaign to discuss the revitalization efforts, including the Saint-Denis REV.
- 3) In October of 2019, there was an online questionnaire launched for merchants on the revitalization efforts of Saint-Denis, including the REV.

All the findings from the consultations were made public and can still be found on the city of Montréal's website. The results from the consultation were overwhelmingly positive towards supporting the REV construction both in Saint-Denis and in the greater part of Montréal.

The 2018 public consultation on the creation of the REV findings results was published in a report titled "Rapport de synthèse de la consultation publique Réseau Express Vélo" which translates to "Summary report public consultation Express Bike Network" (Ville de Montreal 2018).

The report breaks down two different findings from the report, one from the online survey and the second from the in-person consultation meetings. In the in-person consultations, they list that there was a total of 95 participating citizens, 12 discussion tables and 75 minutes of discussion. In the online survey, this was answered by 3 600 people. In this survey (which was available June 1 to July 15, 2018), 11 questions were asked, all asked anonymously. The results from this survey

were overwhelmingly positive towards the construction of the REV and to improve the cycling environment of Montréal.

In a question that asked what the main objective of the REV should be, the first ranked choice was “Hausse du nombre de personnes se déplaçant à vélo” which translates to “Increase in number of people travelling by bicycle” while the fifth (and last) ranked choice was “apaisement de la circulation automobile,” which translates to “Appeasement of car traffic.” This response shows a clear preference for cycling to be encouraged, even at the expense of car traffic.

When asked about infrastructure and which function of the street should be removed to create the development of a cycle path, the first two ranked answers were “Une rangée de stationnements” and “une voie de circulation,” which translates to “a row of parking lots” and “one traffic lane,” which is unusual when examining the Saint-Denis REV, as two lanes of traffic were removed but parking remained. In this specific way, the design of the Saint-Denis REV was not completely dependent on the consultation findings and strayed from what had been discussed in the survey.

Also, on the topic of infrastructure, when asked what elements would motivate “you” to cycle for daily trips, the first two ranked answers were “La présence de pistes protégées” and “La connectivité des pistes cyclables vers les grands secteurs d'emplois ou d'étude” which translates to “the presence of protected tracks” and “the connectivity of cycle paths to major sectors jobs or studies.” This is also a compelling finding, because this is how the REV wound up being designed in Saint-Denis, with bollards and pedestrian islands separating it from car traffic and creating a North-South bike lane to connect the city more efficiently.

The findings from the in-person consultation meetings were likewise positive regarding the REV. When asked what the objectives of the REV should be, the first two ranked answers were “Le réseau cyclable n'est pas assez sécuritaire, notamment aux intersections, près des arrêts d'autobus, dans les zones de livraisons, près de sorties de stationnements privés, ou près de stationnements sur rue (risque d'emportière)” and “Les pistes cyclables sont, par endroit, mal entretenues, notamment en ce qui concerne l'état de la chaussée, le déneigement et le marquage au sol” which translates to “The cycle network is not enough safe, especially intersections, near bus stops, in the delivery areas, near private parking exits, or near street parking (risk of dooring)” and “The cycle paths are, in places, poorly maintained, especially

regarding the condition of the roadway, the snow removal and ground marking.” This question is particularly relevant when analysing how the REV would eventually be designed as a series of protected bike lane networks that were separated from motor traffic. The maintenance is also completed year-round to remove snow and ice from the Saint-Denis REV (Ville de Montréal, 2019).

In the consultations, they also asked participants what the objectives of the REV should be. The first two ranked answers were “Améliorer le partage de la route et la sécurité des déplacements à vélo” and “Aménager un réseau, destiné aux déplacements quotidiens, qui serait efficace, direct et sans détour” which translates to “Improve Road sharing and safe cycling” and “Set up a network, intended for daily trips, which would be efficient, direct and straightforward.” It is impressive to me that “road sharing” and “Safe cycling” are listed on the same answer, as if they are connected intimately to each other, or have a causal relationship with each other. This is my opinion as well, that with better road sharing practices, safe cycling also improves alongside. The desire for a network was also a key feature in how the REV would eventually be designed and explains why Saint-Denis was selected in phase 1 of the project’s development (as there was previously no direct North-South corridor for cyclists).

Regarding the Saint-Denis merchant consultations, the report was released in November of 2019, and is available on the City of Montréal website publicly. The report is titled: “Porte-à-porte: Plan d’action de la relance de la rue Saint-Denis” which translates to “Door-to-door: Map of action for the relaunch of St. Denis Street” (Ville De Montreal, 2019). In the breakdown of data for this consultation, they note that 411 visits included 195 managers/owners of businesses questioned and 16 responding to the questionnaire. The online questionnaire had four questions, all having to do about the revitalization of Saint-Denis and one specifically about the REV construction in Saint Denis.

The first question asked “Voyez-vous d’un bon œil l’idée d’un plan d’action complet et concerté pour relancer la rue Saint-Denis?” which translates to “Do you welcome the idea of a comprehensive action plan and together to relaunch rue Saint-Denis?” This was asked by 176 people with 68% responding “yes” while 11% responded “yes, excluding the REV”. This is in line with information that the SDC of Saint-Denis confirmed with me, that in September of 2020, there

were a total of 270 active merchants on the street, and 60 of them (22%) signed their names to the open letter opposing the bike lane.

Out of the sixteen respondents to the online survey, nine respondents commented positively on this development, but made suggestions, including an additional consultation for the layout of the REV, further review, and study of development proposals, or establishing a two-way cycle path on one side of the street.

As seen in the evidence presented, it is wrong to say that the City of Montréal or Projet Montréal did not consult with the public regarding the Saint-Denis REV. It will always be true that there could have been more extensive consultations with a larger pool of people, but I am sceptical that it would have benefited the project instead of just postponing it. There was a clear amount of support from most people consulted for the project to justify the creation of the project. Suggestions or implications that the City of Montréal was negligent in this effort to consult with the public fail to consider the consultation that was done, and I am curious about the motivations behind a line of attack that are clearly false in the face of historical evidence.

4.9 Constructing the Saint-Denis REV

Prior to construction of the REV, there was no cycling infrastructure, which would force cyclists to cycle on the streets next to cars and risk being doored by motorists or struck by a car. This was a dangerous section for cyclists to travel on, and in the last six years, two cyclists had died. One cyclist died after he fell off his bike cross the Jean Talon Street in July of 2015 and got hit by a car (Presse Canadian 2015). Mathilde Blais, another cyclist, died in April of 2014 as she cycled under the Des Carrières viaduct on St-Denis Street, just south of Rosemont Boulevard (CBC 2014) when a crane truck struck her. Tragically, the coroner Paul G. Dionne had deemed her death avoidable if the crane truck that struck her had kept a minimum distance from her (Lau 2014). Dionne used his platform to advocate for more secure bike lanes to be installed on the road, and for the Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec (SAAQ) (In English: Quebec Automobile Insurance Corporation) had a duty to rewrite the Highway safety Code to enforce minimum distances between vehicles and cyclists. According to the statement from Projet Montréal, there have been more than 300 collisions involving cyclists and pedestrians from 2014 to 2020.

From news media reporting on cycling fatalities and injuries, to examining the infrastructure available on Saint-Denis prior to the REV construction, it is easy to see why there was such risk in cycling on Saint-Denis. This framing on public safety adds more dimension to the

construction of the REV, as it shows that apart from economic revitalization and creating a connected network of bike lanes, the REV has aided public health in creating a safe passage for cyclists to travel that it was separate from car traffic.

This image was taken from Google Maps, using the archival tool available that shows what the street looked like in the past. Images from 2007 were available, though I selected this one from August 2019, the year before construction started.



Figure 10: Google Maps view of rue Saint-Denis between Avenue Duluth E and Rue Roy E. 2019.

The image clearly shows the car-centric design of the street, in that it is entirely dominated by a design that caters 6 lanes to motor traffic, 2 sidewalks for pedestrians, and no designated spot for cyclists. I would argue that this type of infrastructure design is indicative of car-centrism, in that multiple lanes have been dedicated to the sole purpose of serving cars. It looks inhospitable to cyclists.

The next image is from November of 2020, just after construction has been completed. As can be seen from this image, the two lanes of traffic closest to the pedestrian sidewalk that had previously been used for streetside parking now belonged to the protected bike highway known as the Saint-Denis REV with blue bollards separating traffic. Parking remains on the sides of the Saint-Denis REV, and the two remaining lanes of traffic are separated by a concrete island in the middle of the road. This design not only creates space for cyclists to safely travel North-South, but also forces cars to slow down and create a safer condition for motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists alike.

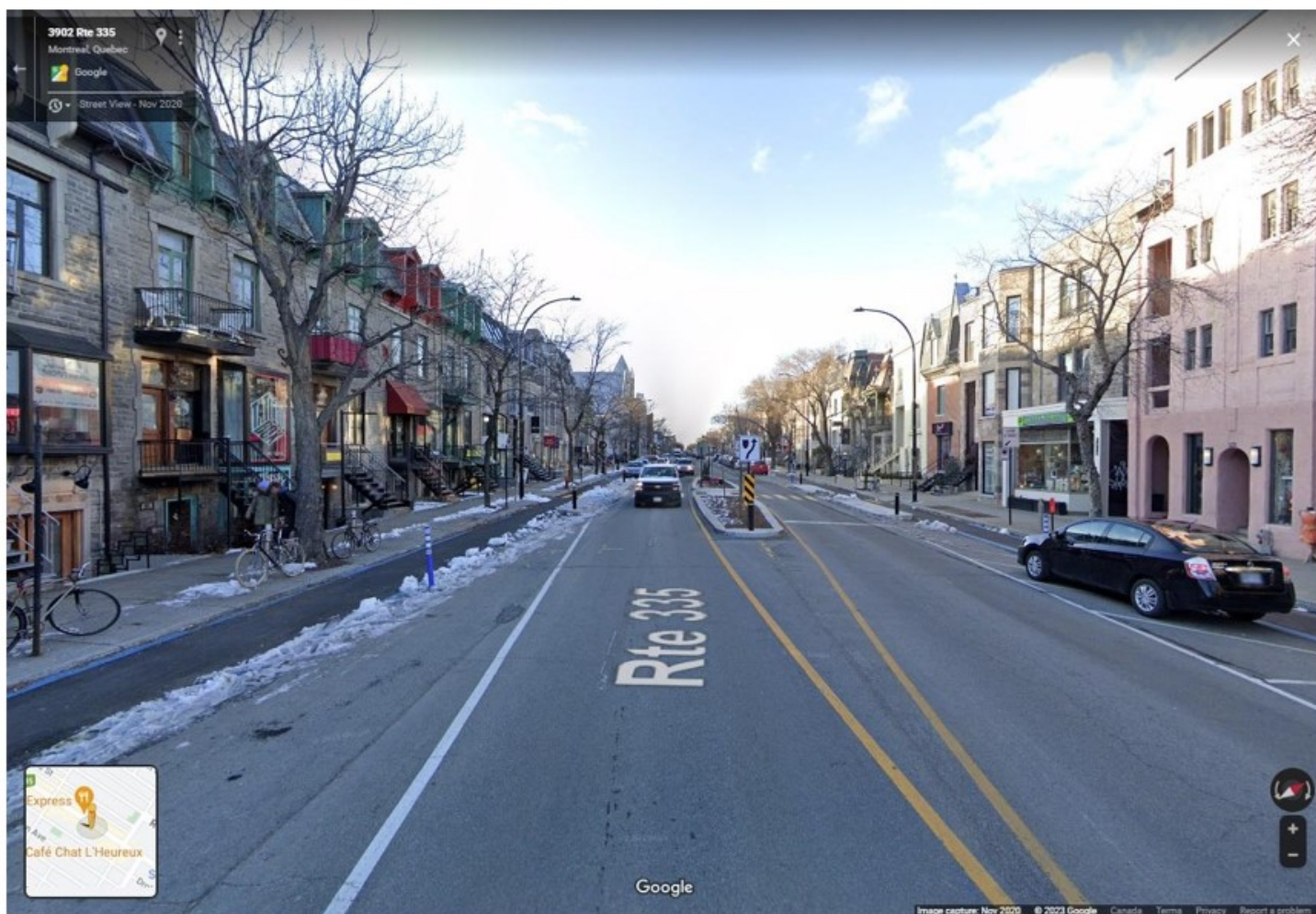


Figure 12: Google Maps view of Saint-Denis between Avenue Duluth E and Rue Roy E after the completion of the Rev. November 2020.

I wanted to include this later picture of Saint-Denis in August of 2022 because that is the most recent picture of the Saint-Denis REV. As seen in the picture taken one year later, the bike lane is still in excellent condition with blue paint and bollards clearly marking the division between car and bike traffic. The trees are lush and green, and the entire street looks much calmer and more inviting now, with more options for travelling instead of solely relying on the car. The street is now “shared” between multiple modes of traffic, creating a more equitable and accessible method of travelling along St-Denis.



Figure 13: Google Maps view of Rue Saint-Denis between Avenue Duluth E and rue Roy E. August 2022.

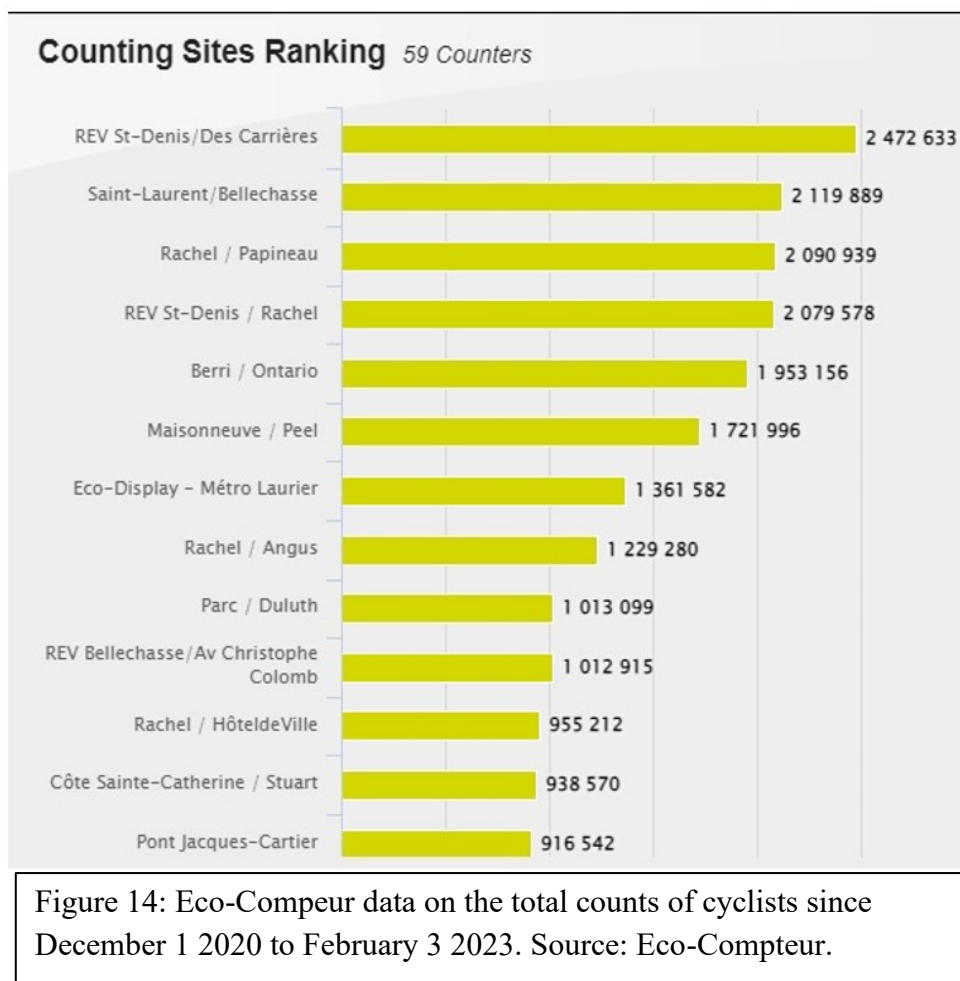
4.10 How many people use the Saint-Denis bike lane?

The France-based company Eco-Compteur was first contracted by the City of Montréal in 2013 and has been counting the number of cyclists for the past 13 years. Data is available since October 14th, 2013. Eco-Compteur has 59 counters around the City of Montréal, and they count cyclists using the bike lanes of Montréal. They have 4 counters on Saint Denis: rue Saint-Denis and rue des Carrières, rue Saint-Denis and rue Rachel, rue Saint-Denis and rue De Castelnau SB, rue Saint-Denis and rue De CasteNB.

Data on the Saint-Denis begins on December 22nd, 2020, and is presented until February 2023 (Eco-Counter 2022). The information shows a graph on the daily total users on the St-Denis/Rachel bike lane, as well as both the average and maximum traffic available.

According to Eco Counter, the average weekday traffic is 3 342 cyclists on Rue Saint-Denis and Des Carrières. The weekly average numbers jump up to 22,391 cyclists. The monthly total exceeds 90 000 users. On St-Denis and Rachel, there are similar numbers, with an average weekday traffic of 2,813.

Eco-Compteur has a chart that shows the total use of the bike lanes by cyclists, which is displayed in the chart here. It is impressive that the Saint-Denis and Des Carrières section is the most used section of the bike lane that is being counted, with over two million riders since December 1, 2020. This is an impressive feat, as Eco-Compteur's data compares it to other popular bike lanes, but the Saint-Denis REV has consistently been at the top of bike lane usage in Montreal since its inauguration. These numbers show a clear use of the infrastructure since it was built. The numbers of people using this artery of the REV is a justification of future bike lanes being built in Montréal, as this quantitative data shows the desire for this type of protected bike lane in commercial corridors.

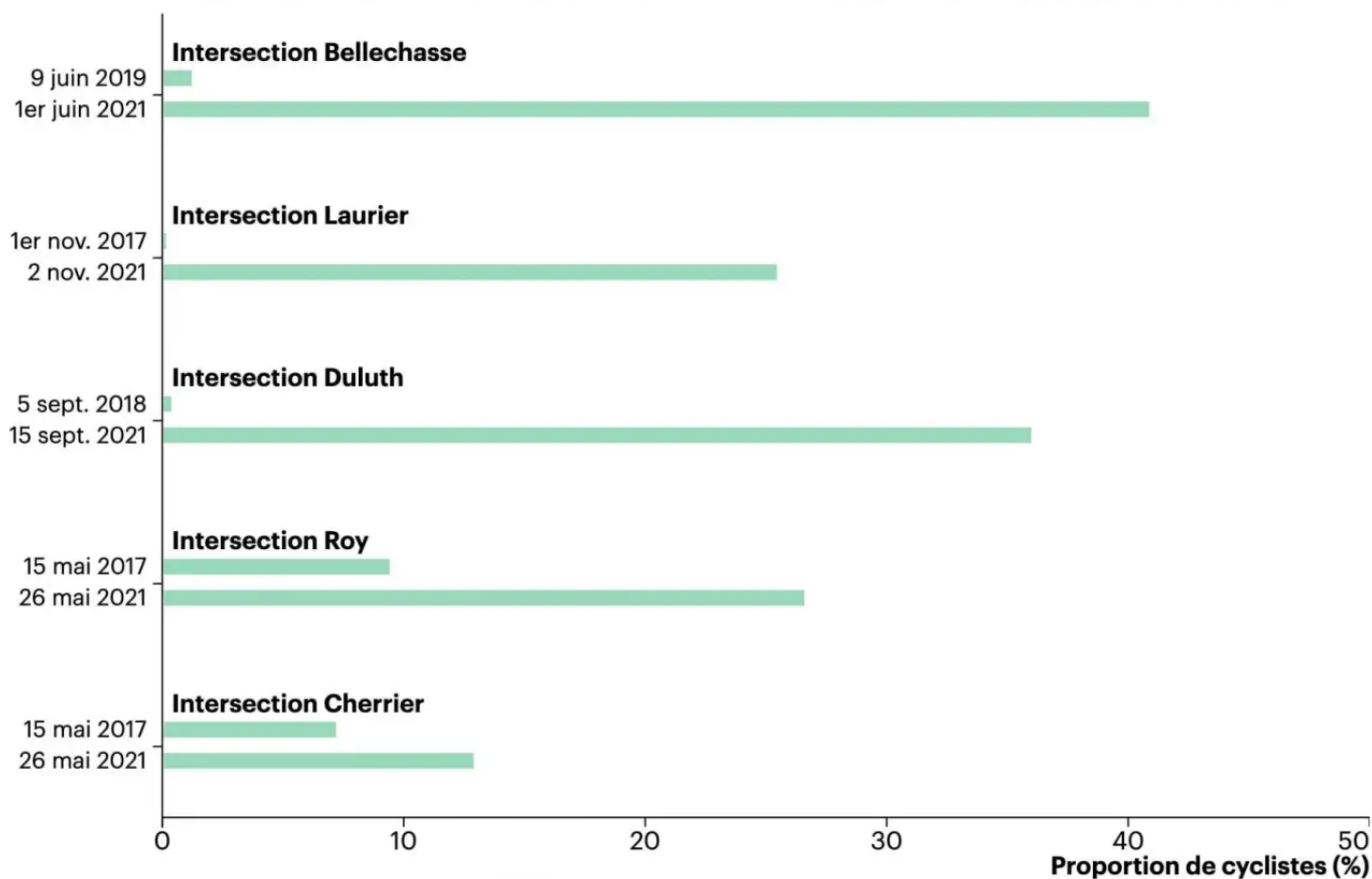


4.11 How has traffic changed?

On July 20, 2022, Le Devoir published an article on the bike/car ratio on the Saint-Denis REV, using open traffic data sampled by the City of Montréal (Noreau, 2022). In this article, they compared typical days before and after the construction of the Saint-Denis REV. In their findings that they describe as “unsurprising,” they show that the daily number of car passes had halved, showing that on June 10, 2019, 15 654 cars had used the Bellechasse/Saint-Denis intersection, and two years later, on June 2, 2021, 7976 motorists used the intersection.

L'utilisation du vélo en progression sur la rue Saint-Denis, à Montréal

Proportion de cyclistes par rapport aux autres véhicules, journées typiques, entre 2017 et 2021



Graphique : Le Devoir - **Source :** Ville de Montréal

Note : Données collectées depuis <https://donnees.montreal.ca/ville-de-montreal/comptage-vehicules-pietons>

Figure 15: Chart of Montreal Traffic. Source: *Le Devoir*, Antoine Noreau 2022

Their methodology uses data from the City of Montréal, which uses an electronic counting device, with readings taken at 15-minute intervals throughout the day, generally in the morning and evening peak periods, as well as a midday peak period. These observations detail the number, origins, and direction of vehicles, as well as pedestrians and cyclists for each possible movement at the intersection.

4.12 Economic Impact of the Saint-Denis REV

Figure 16: Commercial occupancy rate (%) on rue Saint-Denis, January 2019-January 2023 (Data Source: SDC Saint-Denis)

As seen in the data, prior to the construction of the REV, commercial vacancy (the opposite of commercial occupancy) sat at over 20%. In January of 2023, it was about 15%, showing a remarkable improvement on the businesses choosing to open on rue Saint-Denis.

4.13 Conclusion

The Saint-Denis REV has had positive economic effects as measured by commercial occupancy since its implementation and has changed the ratio of vehicle and cycle traffic on the road. Since its inauguration, it has been a popular bike lane for cyclists to use, showing an overall success to the design of the project. While the data is in preliminary stages, it seems there has been a net positive gain from the investment into the Saint-Denis REV from an economic and cycling accessibility perspective.

5 Discussion

5.1 Why did the Saint-Denis REV prevail?

The scholarly literature on bike lanes argues that bikelash is a predominant factor in the failure for bike lanes being installed. This bikelash can grow from several distinct categories of people, but each time it threatens to shut down the construction of a bike lane.

With this framing in mind, I am curious about why the Saint-Denis REV artery did not fail, but instead succeed in this construction and eventually even grow to a popular and well used bike lane. What were the factors that allowed it to succeed where other bike lanes have failed?

With these questions in mind, I propose the following factors as to why this bike lane did not fall prey to “bikelash.”

- 1) **Combining the bike lane with the Rue Saint-Denis revitalization plan:** the REV artery Saint-Denis was announced as part of a commercial artery. This engaged the merchants along the street of whom the majority were in favour of the project moving forward because they could see economic benefits from redesigning the street to be more accessible to the public. Councillor Alex Norris argued that this was a key strategy in the effort to complete the project. Councillor Marianne Giguère cites the effort to show merchants examples of how bike lanes have positive impacts on commercial arteries. This intertwining of bike lanes and economic revitalization reframes the bike lane debate as being pro-merchant and upends the normal discourse that bike lanes hinder the economic workings of merchants. This was a smart idea in terms of countering bikelash, and contributed the majority 60+% of merchants being in favour of a revitalization effort that included the REV.

- 2) **Projet Montréal won a majority in the 2017 municipal election:** In 2017, Projet Montréal won a slim majority over Equip Denis Coderre (the original name of Ensemble Montréal). This would prove to be crucial to the development of the Saint-Denis REV artery, as all City Council members who opposed the construction of this REV artery came from Ensemble Montréal as a united political block. I will not speculate on the personal musings of each politician opposing the bike lane, but it is important to note that Ensemble Montréal represented the official opposition in the municipal government, and

it is not unusual that they were opposed to key plans that Projet Montréal was trying to move forward with. I think that the political opposition of the Saint Denis bike lane could have overwhelmed the project if Equip Denis Corderre had won the 2017 municipal election and the REV idea was still proposed by Projet Montréal. This is why I argue that winning a political majority is partially why the Projet Montréal members of the Montréal municipal government were able to push past political opposition and install the bike lane.

3)

It was a well-picked project: The section of Saint Denis that was picked to be redesigned was between intersections Gouin and de Maisonneuve streets. This represented an area that was already wide for two lanes of car traffic to pass through and would provide a bike lane artery on the North-South axis that previously did not exist. This bike lane connects Saint-Denis to Rue Berri by turning on Rue Roy, which, when combined, represents a protected bike lane that connects cyclists from Jean Talon Market to the heart of Downtown Montréal, finishing at the Old Port. This not only connects popular touristic locations of Montréal but provides a North-South axis for local commuters. Rue Saint Denis was a commercial artery that was suffering from vacancies and needed a change that would stimulate the economy of the street. Cyclists were already cycling on that path and putting themselves in physical risk transporting themselves down that artery. All these factors lead back to the REV construction in Saint-Denis, as it solved many problems with one project. It simply cannot be understated that this was a well picked project that had many merits justifying its construction. This was both a project that would improve the public health and safety, but also stimulate the economy of a bereft street and provide an important connection to Montréal's scattered bike lane network.

4) **The Merchant Subsidy:** the final factor that I believe contributed to the success of Saint Denis was the clever use of grant subsidies to address the frustrations of merchants who were fuelling the bikelash against this project. As mentioned previously, there were three merchants who were the main voices of the anti-bike lane efforts, with about 60 signatories agreeing with them. In September of 2020, there were a total of 270 active

merchants on rue Saint-Denis, so 60 represented 20% of people against the bike lane. This is already relatively good news for Projet Montréal as there is a clear majority on their side. However, the minority was vocal and demanded to be addressed, even going as far to send a formal notice against the city. Doing nothing and ignoring them may have proved to be a fatal mistake that may have fanned the flames ever higher into destroying the bike lane proposal. Instead, the City of Montréal announced a \$1.3 million subsidy to compensate merchants who were affected by the REV construction.

The total amount a merchant could be eligible for was \$5000, which is a relatively minor sum when considering the importance of the bike lane and the future benefits of having it completed. Media coverage of the merchant bikelash died down after the subsidy was announced, suggesting that this strategy successfully countered and dismantled this branch of bikelash. I think this money was well justified in helping this project overcome the merchant bikelash and seems to have successfully worked in countering this opposition.

With these four factors at play, the Saint-Denis REV was successfully completed, leading to a revitalization of Saint-Denis and safer cycling paths on a connected network.

5.2 Can Saint-Denis be Replicated?

One question that stuck in my mind as I was writing this project was the question if Saint-Denis, and Montréal by extension, was unique due to its history and political make up. Could the Saint-Denis REV artery (and by extension, the REV project) be replicated in other Canadian cities?

I have already listed what I thought were the winning factors that pushed Saint-Denis past the finish line, but I am still curious about whether this project is unique due to Valérie Plante and Projet Montréal's vision, the decades of cycling advocacy that built a network of bike lanes in Montréal, and the dense, compact nature of Montréal itself.

This is a curious question, and I posed it both to Councillor Alex Norris, Borough Mayor Rabouin's office and Councillor Giguère. Both responded affirmatively that their process could indeed be replicated in other cities, and I see where they are coming from. Councillor Giguère quoted bike lane statistics from other North American and even UK cities to make her point about the economic benefits of bike lanes. Projet Montréal admitted there was no specific economic

impact study done on Saint-Denis, but that they relied on data done by other cities. When framed in this light, I do believe that a project like the Saint-Denis REV could be completed in other cities.

However, it is important not to just focus on the Saint-Denis artery of the REV, but to look at the complete system of the REV that had been proposed by Projet Montréal. The REV represents 184 kilometres (when completed) and serves to connect Montréalers to other bike lanes already constructed in the city. While it was a major, 9 KM project, it was connecting bike lanes that already existed in the city, serving as a “bike highway” network more than the creation of just one bike lane. So, with this in mind, I return to my doubt that any Canadian city could build it, as the REV required an existing network of bike lanes already built in the city.

It is also important to realise that the REV was more than a bike highway, it was expressively combined with the revitalization of a commercial artery and the safety for cyclists of the street. These are not unique factors for Montréal, as downtrodden commercial arteries with car-centric designs that harm cyclists are plentiful throughout Canadian cities. I think it is important to remember that the Saint-Denis REV was always promoted as more than a bike lane, but increased access to local businesses and safe passage for cyclists. I flip flop once more and return to thinking that this project can be replicated in other Canadian cities, especially if the bike lane represents more than a route for cyclists, but a benefit for merchants, an increase in the beauty of an area, and a public health strategy to minimize collisions between motorists and cyclists.

It is hard to say if Saint-Denis REV is truly a unique project or simply a winning combination of factors that came together at the right time in Montréal’s history. I would like to think that other municipalities are able to copy what has been done in Montréal with the REV project as a whole and replicate the intertwining of economic revitalization with cyclist safety. This would make a good study for future academic research if other Canadian cities are planning “bike highways” through their own urban cores and how that process wound up playing out.

5.3 Lessons to take away from Saint-Denis.

I have already listed the winning factors that I believe contributed to the success of Saint-Denis, but I also want to use this section to discuss some lessons that have been imparted by the development of this artery of the REV.

- 1) **Develop projects quickly** - When Alex Norris was asked about community consultation, he made a point of saying that a priority of this project was completing it, and he was worried about stalling the project out by conducting more extensive consultations. This is not to say that the public or merchants were not consulted, or proper scientific review of the economic impact that bike lanes have on commercial arteries were not done. What did happen though is that the Montréal administration was able to overcome opposition from Ensemble Montréal and merchants for more extensive review once their preliminary consultations came back favourable for construction. Councillor Giguère also agrees that this project was done fairly quickly “knowing the normal deadlines for carrying out major projects” in Montréal.

- 2) **Reframe questions about the removal of parking and traffic lanes to be about increased access.** One thing that I thought was an interesting tactic by Councillor Eric Alan Caldwell was his careful response anytime someone asked about the number of parking spots removed or about the removal of traffic lanes. Instead of arguing that over the number of parking spots that would be permissible to remove, Caldwell simply reframed the removal of parking spaces to be about increasing public access to spaces (like merchant shops). I thought this was a clever, political response that allowed them to sidestep the direct question of parking spots to a debate that was framed much more positively to bike lanes. I think that was clever and a good political misdirect.

- 3) **Appear responsive to bikelash:** this project had been endangered by bikelash from merchants, who were invoked in both the media and by opposing politicians to the project. The Plante administration overcame this bikelash by using several tactics: personal face-to-face consultation with merchants, constant communication with the Saint-Denis SDC (association of merchants), postponing work for the summer so merchants could enjoy terrace season and finally, the merchant subsidy. This showed both flexibility and responsiveness with dealing with bikelash on the part of the municipal administration.

I think that these three lessons can be taken away from the Saint-Denis REV project and how it overcame the challenges of bikelash.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Concluding Thoughts

The Saint-Denis REV is an interesting project because it was a big gamble done by Projet Montréal after their big election win to capitalise on urban mobility by tying in a revitalization project with bike lanes. It overcame bikelash by utilising a diverse number of political and economic strategies to become successfully installed on the street of Saint-Denis. This success has implications for other similar projects that could be done in other Canadian cities as municipalities seek Active Transport solutions for their transportation issues.

While some other cities in Canada may be able to take away lessons from the construction and success of the St-Denis REV, it is also important to understand the political context and history on which Projet Montréal was able to capitalise on (cycling advocacy, etc). Montréal was already a global leader in promoting cycling, and Projet Montréal had been elected in following their promise to build on their vision of a bike highway system. There are some factors in this project that make Saint-Denis unique, but this is not to say that other similar projects in Canadian cities could not replicate the process and strategies that worked to install the REV on Saint-Denis. Indeed, the research that Projet Montréal used to justify the project was done in other cities, showing that this type of research can be applicable to other cities, and one does not have to “reinvent the wheel” each time that a bike lane needs to be installed.

I hoped to use this thesis to contribute to the growing literature of “bikelash” and its impact on the creation of safe cycling infrastructure. Bikelash, as categorised by other academic scholars in the urban studies field, was recognized as a crucial factor in the stalling or cancellation of bike lanes. I found this to be interesting, and I conducted my research with this question in mind: how did Saint-Denis overcome bikelash? The answer comes down to several factors and key contexts, but the short answer is that bikelash was strategically countered by addressing all fronts of the opposition, including the merchants, political opponents, and Montréal residents. Bikelash, in this project, was not ignored or dismissed as hysterics, but rather countered effectively on all fronts. City council meetings were met with statistics about the economic benefits of bike lanes and careful reframing of tricky questions, empathy during public question meetings and constant communication with the merchants of Saint-Denis. Using these tactics allowed Saint-Denis to

move forward and complete its construction to its final state. While Projet Montréal city councillor members had unique advantages such as controlling a majority in city hall, and trying to create a bike highway in a city where cycling was growing in popularity, there are commonalities between this project and other cities. Economic revitalization in commercial arteries in downtowns across Canadian cities is a critical issue, especially as businesses such as Amazon compete with them. Combining cycling infrastructure with increased access for merchants not only puts cyclists and merchants on the same side of the debate, but it also creates a win-win solution with all parties.

What I hope this thesis shows is that bikelash can be overcome, and should be, because of the manifold of benefits that stem from the investment in cycling infrastructure. Vocal, and even intense opposition to bike lanes should not doom a well-designed bike lane project. This case study serves as proof that bikelash is not an unbeatable phenomenon. The Saint-Denis REV lived to tell the tale of heated opposition from multiple factions of politicians and merchants, and now serves the Montréal cycling community as the major North-South axis of the REV. This is a triumph for the future of mobility and signalled a new phase of transportation planning, at least in Montréal, if not other Canadian cities looking for innovative solutions to old problems.

Saint-Denis is a triumph of cycling infrastructure and a key part of the revitalization of the commercial artery. In one infrastructure project, the Plante administration was able to create a new artery to connect the North-South axis of Montréal, revitalise a dying street, create safe passage for cyclists and create a branded project that projected the importance of active transportation infrastructure in North American cities. It is an impressive project that was done quickly and skilfully in the political manoeuvres it had to contend with to finish. Cycling up the slight incline of Saint-Denis is a joy and safe ride, and a marker of the changes that can be made in a city with political ambition and will to change the tides of car centrism in our urban centres.

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