

Montreal

Both Montreal and Toronto have close to 3 million people, but Montreal's 144-square-mile metropolitan area is the more compact. It has more than 18,000 persons to the square mile, almost twice as many as Toronto, and this makes moving people easier.

On the other hand, Montreal has a mean annual winter temperature of 26°F and an average annual snowfall of 120 inches, and that makes it more difficult.

The city has a dazzlingly beautiful subway, backed up by buses and suburban trains. The system is run by the Montreal Urban Community Transit Commission.

The subway, called the Métro, is part of an elaborate, sixteen-year-old underground/overground complex that allows Montrealers to use the downtown part of their cold city in February almost as easily as in August.

It began taking shape in the early 1960s when the Canadian National Railways asked developer William Zeckendorf to cover up twenty-two acres of ugly, open, elevated tracks in the heart of the city. Zeckendorf hired architects I.M. Pei and Mies van der Rohe, and together they built multi-leveled complexes, the first called Place Ville Marie.

Place Bonaventure (a typical complex) begins with the subway lines far below the ground. Above them is a five-acre arcade with shops, a movie house and restaurants. Above that is an exhibition hall which can hold 12,000. Then come the CN tracks and above them is a merchandise mart. Above the mart is the 400-room Bonaventure Hotel.

The subway opened in October, 1966. It has three lines numbered, somewhat oddly, One, Two and Four.

Line No. Four, the shortest, opened first, in time for Expo '67, Montreal's World Fair. It goes under the St. Lawrence River to St. Helen's Island and Ile Notre Dame (the Expo sites) and to the suburb of Longueuil.

Line No. Two, the longest, followed, first stretching 8.6 miles from Place Bonaventure to Henri Bourassa Street at the northern edge of town. It was later extended through three other districts, and a third leg will open in 1984.

Line No. One runs parallel to the river. It opened with ten stations, and a second leg opened in 1976. Place des Arts, the city-owned complex of theatres, is on this line, some ten minutes from the Bonaventure station.

The three major lines meet at the Berri-de Montigny station downtown, a few blocks from the St. Lawrence. Line No. 5 is being built across the north end of the city. The long-range plan calls for a total of fifty-one miles of track and ninety-four stations.

There is no Line No. Three. One was planned, to tie into the CN railway tunnel, but it was dropped.



Montreal's subway lines are fed by extended bus routes. The city has 131 routes over some 550 miles of street. Seventy-seven of the bus routes connect with the rail system at one of twenty-eight rail stations.

The downtown part of the system—including storage space for off-duty cars—is underground, allowing it to operate without delay through the heaviest snows and deepest freezes.

The Métro's cars are fifty-six feet long but only eight feet, three inches wide. This permits them to run on parallel tracks within a single tunnel, twenty feet, four inches wide, greatly reducing the cost of tunneling.

The cars are mounted on rubber tires which roll on concrete tracks. This gives smoother, quieter rides and much better traction, allowing gradients of up to 6.3 per cent. A backup steel track and flanged steel wheels can be used in emergencies. The cars are linked in three-car groupings, in nine-car trains.

The greatest excellence of Montreal's Métro is the beauty of everything that meets the eye. The cars, designed by Jacques Gillon, are of a blue enamel. Each station was designed by a different architect. Peel Station has brilliant abstract murals, Bonaventure's high vaulted walls give the vast domed chambers a cathedral quality and the Crémazie Station has a multi-coloured ceramic bas-relief, entitled "The Poet in the Universe."