

## **Véloce II – An Active Transportation Strategy in Québec**

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### **Introduction**

Québec has taken a special path in the development of active transportation. It was first expressed by the development of a bicycle touring product, with the deployment of the Route verte and the adoption of a Bicycle Policy in 1995, but was finally affirmed by elaboration of policies and programs increasingly focused on utilitarian bicycle and pedestrian trips. In October 2013, the ministère des Transports announced the establishment of its brand-new Véloce II program, which consolidated its approach to active transportation and provided Québec with an integrated program, replacing all the programs previously administered in the development of bikeways and walking paths.

### **History of active transportation in Québec**

In 1995, after a public consultation, the ministère des Transports adopted its very first Bicycle Policy, echoing Ontario, which had adopted its own a few years earlier. That same year, in June 1995, the gouvernement du Québec announced the creation of the Route verte, an original idea of Vélo Québec with the aim of connecting Québec's different regions with a developed and marked bicycle network. The Government entrusted the Ministère with the responsibility to carry out this project, and the Bicycle Policy was implemented immediately. The Route verte project had to be built in part on national and regional highways linking the regions to each other, while taking advantage of the availability of abandoned railway rights of way and many peaceful rural highways crisscrossing Québec.

Infrastructure financing solutions had to be proposed to make this project work. The ministère des transports itself invested \$146 million in its road network to implement bikeways, both on the Route verte and on other routes developed parallel to it. These investments mainly consisted of paving the shoulders to improve cyclists' safety, and modifying the bridges and structures to integrate a bikeway.

The ministère des transports established different assistance programs so that the municipalities could proceed with construction of their portion of the Route verte. The *Programme d'aide financière au développement de la Route verte* (Financial assistance program for development of the Route verte) was the first of these programs, with \$26.5 million in grants between 1999 and 2012. It was followed by the *Programme d'aide financière à l'entretien de la Route verte* (Financial assistance program for maintenance of the Route verte), created in 2001, with the objective of supporting the municipalities in

asset maintenance on the Route verte and thus offer users an adequate service level. Finally, the *Programme d'aide gouvernemental aux modes de transport alternatifs à l'automobile* (PAGMTAA, or Government assistance program for alternative transport modes to the automobile), arising from the 2007 Québec Public Transit Policy, was the first program really dedicated to the development of urban bicycle and pedestrian infrastructures. This program was also the opportunity to innovate in funding by using the Green Fund, fed by royalties paid by the oil companies.

Since 1995, all these measures combined have ensured the Route verte's progress to what it is today: a developed and marked bicycle network over 5,000 km long, recognized in the rest of Canada, in the United States and worldwide as one of the world's finest bicycle routes. This network is the face of sustainable development and soft mobility. The Route verte has allowed regions to discover a new vocation: a new tourism industry. For many municipalities, it has been the opportunity to learn about planning and the deployment of active transportation infrastructures. Since cyclists "travel light", their dependence on the region's resources for shelter and food make them an ideal clientele for regional economic development. Finally, the Route verte has provided many governments, regional and local partners with environmental credentials, in the form of a project with one of the best environmental impacts of the past two decades.

This Route verte project, due to the close collaboration it necessitated among the government, local and associative players (Vélo Québec, in particular), aroused enormous interest in other Canadian provinces, and relationships were created around equally promising projects, particularly with the Waterfront Trail in Ontario and the New Brunswick Trail, including reciprocal signage installed at the territorial borders. Nova Scotia also took an interest in Québec's developments in the field and is currently working on a similar bicycle route project that should ring the peninsula.

## **2008 Bicycle Policy**

The 1995 Bicycle Policy was revised and republished in 2008 with essentially the same objectives as the original policy, but with a series of measures intended to force a shift to active transportation rather than to recreational tourist cycling. The objectives are still to:

- Increase the use of bicycles as a mode of transportation;
- Improve cyclists' safety;
- Improve bicycle infrastructures.

This new policy makes many statements, but those concerning the road environment continue to pose the greatest challenge to the ministère des Transports. The orientation of considering cyclists' needs in the design of road projects in Québec resulted in the greatest changes in the Ministère's methods and continues to generate debate. However, instead of adding cycling components to road projects, the adaptation of road infrastructures to bicycle and pedestrian traffic must be seen as an opportunity for users

to resort to inexpensive, healthy alternative transportation modes without harmful environmental impacts. In this sense, the return on investment is enormous.

With the 2008 Policy, the ministère des Transports thus adopted a series of targets for 2020 and indicators allowing it to measure their achievement. These targets include:

- increasing the cycling modal share by 50% from 1.2% in 2003 in the Montréal region;
- increasing regular bicycle use by 10%, whereas 33% of the population cycled less than once a week in 2005;
- increasing utilitarian bicycle trips by 10% from 17% in 2005;
- reducing by 30% the number of cyclists killed or seriously injured in a traffic accident, compared to the annual average of 189 people between 2002 and 2006;
- increasing by 305 the number of kilometres constituting the bicycle network in Québec.

In Québec, in 2010, particularly due to all the above-mentioned initiatives, there were 4 million cyclists, including 3.1 million adults between ages 18 and 74. This was 500,000 more than in 2005 and represented 54% of the population. Although development in recent years in Québec led to the deployment of many recreational tourism bicycle paths, the number of cyclists using their bicycle as a mode of transportation, regularly or occasionally, increased from 20% in 2000 to 37% in 2010 (see attached Table 1). This is particularly due to the fact that Québec contributed to increasing bicycle use by the general public, thereby creating a large number of potential users of utilitarian bicycle infrastructures established in urban areas. It must be said that, in Québec, 1 million workers live within 5 km of their work, a proportion undoubtedly similar in other Canadian provinces.

Between 1987 and 2010, the number of bicycles doubled, the number of cyclists increased by 50% in Québec and the number of motor vehicles rose by 64%. However, during the same period, the number of automobile accidents involving cyclists decreased constantly, by 58% for deaths, 72% for serious injuries and 52% for light injuries.

While the risk exposure factor seems to be growing, the Ministère believes that the positive balance largely depends on favourable environments. Indeed, between 2000 and 2010, the number of kilometres of bikeways doubled, reaching 9,200 km in 2010. The progress of the Québec bicycle network matches the adoption of the first Bicycle Policy of the ministère des Transports (see attached Table 2).

## **Véloce II – A complete strategy**

Taking advantage of the end of some of the active transportation development programs it administered until 2013, the Ministère proceeded with integration of all its support tools for municipal action to create a single assistance program. This program was announced to the municipal and associative partners meeting at a conference on tourism,

cycling and the Route verte, *Colloque Tourisme, vélo et Route verte*, held in Lévis on October 24, 2013. This new assistance program for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructures, Véloce II, unifies and consolidates all the conditions in one place, making it easier and more efficient to plan municipal interventions in active transportation. This program breaks down into 4 components, each with its own conditions but all treated the same way – through grants corresponding to 50% of the eligible costs defined according to the type of intervention. Each of these components has its own objectives, eligibility criteria, conditions of submission of applications and criteria of assessment of the projects submitted.

#### Component 1 – Development of active transportation in the urban perimeters

Active transportation, as a transportation mode, finds its full potential in urbanized environments. The Véloce II program is therefore aligned with regional and local planning which provides, in the *Act respecting land use planning and development*, for the identification of the urban perimeters of municipalities. The program thus concentrates its efforts on the development of bikeways and bicycle and walking paths in urban areas or areas undergoing urbanization, increasing the chances of supporting short trips to work, education, service centres and stores.

This component benefits from the innovations created with the previous PAGMTAA, because it is financed by the Green Fund, ensuring a good, regular and planned source of funding until 2020 (a total of \$35 million). The strong potential of this component for an eventual modal change to active transportation modes motivated funding by the Green Fund. In addition to bikeways and bicycle and walking paths established on dedicated sites or on existing streets before the program came into force, this component also covers traffic calming layouts on school routes, within a 500-metre radius of schools.

#### Component 2 – Development of the Route verte and its branches

Bicycle tourism and recreational tourism network shaped the profile of sustainable transportation in Québec. The new Véloce II program continues in this direction by supporting the completion of the Route verte, and by furthering the emergence of new circuits attached to the Route verte, allowing loops around its backbone and increasing retention of bicycle tourists in the region. This component is funded by the ministère des Transports from the appropriations it traditionally allocates to its regular grant programs.

#### Component 3 – Conservation of active transportation infrastructures

Maintenance of assets specific to road infrastructures is also a challenge for cycling and pedestrian infrastructures. As already mentioned, the bicycle network developed very rapidly in Québec, and some of these infrastructures are deteriorating, due to lack of maintenance or deficient design. The purpose of this component is to support the municipalities in the preservation of this active transportation equipment, including the interventions to upgrade existing bikeways and bicycle and walking paths and the route changes due to factors related to the upgrade of the environment in which the bikeways

were initially implemented (traffic on a designated roadway following a major urban development).

The total budget for Components 2 and 3 is variable, but is estimated at a total of \$5 million per year for the next three years.

#### Component 4 – Maintenance of the Route verte

The “national” character of the Route verte led the ministère des Transports to support the municipalities in the maintenance operations of this bicycle network through annual grants since 2001 under the *Programme d'aide financière à l'entretien de la Route verte* (Financial assistance program for maintenance of the Route verte). Now that the new Véloce II has replaced the former programs, the Route verte maintenance program is almost entirely included in Component 4 of the new program. The ministère des Transports thus is continuing its financial support to the municipalities to ensure the quality of the cycling experience and the compliance of the network with the service level required for such a bicycle route. The grants paid for maintenance of a bicycle path on a designated site may amount to \$1,500/km. The total budget for this component was \$2.75 million in 2013-2014.

### Outlook

The new Véloce II program and the continuation of the efforts of the ministère des Transports on its own highways through its Bicycle Policy are essential tools for the achievement of the targets set under this program for 2020. Already, in 2014, three of the five above-mentioned targets have been achieved:

- the share of bicycle trips for utilitarian purposes (35% when the target was 19%);
- the reduction of the number of deaths and serious injuries among cyclists who are victims of a traffic accident (130 victims for the 2007-2011 period, whereas the objective for 2020 was to reduce the number of victims below 132);
- the length of the Québec bicycle network (9,258 km, compared to the target for 2020 of 8,826 km).

Gains still have to be obtained for the bicycle modal share, which was 1.4% for the Greater Montréal region in 2008, compared to the target of 1.6% for 2020, and for the percentage of regular bicycle use, which was 35% in 2010, compared to the target of 37% for 2020 (see attached Table 3).

To achieve and exceed these objectives, the Ministère also benefits from initiatives recently announced in the National Strategy for Sustainable Mobility. In particular, this is the case for funding of initiatives to promote public transit and alternative transportation, for which a \$1 million investment is forecast. In addition, for the first time, this strategy takes a position on the important relationship between land use and the population's transportation choices. Thus, apart from the incentive infrastructures for active

transportation, a favourable urban environment could become the standard for any new development in Québec. We already know that high-density neighbourhoods with a good urban mix, such as Plateau Mont-Royal and Rosemont–La-Petite-Patrie in Montréal, exhibit walking and cycling modal shares far greater than the rest of the metropolitan region, with a cycling modal share of 8.6 % in 2008 in Plateau Mont-Royal, or 9.7% if only trips to work are considered (data from September to December).

The strategy also allows targeting of the interconnections of different alternative transportation modes, particularly the links to be improved among pedestrian infrastructures, bikeways and public transit equipment (development of railway and bus stations).

Finally, the Ministère is also continuing its other actions allowing improvement of the conditions of bicycle use in Québec, such as the dissemination of data on the bicycle-friendliness of roads on the Québec 511 road information site, or the development of a mobile application, with Vélo Québec, for Web mapping of the Route verte ([www.routeverte.com](http://www.routeverte.com)).

The Québec model in active transportation, particularly cycling, is a model that can be reproduced across Canada. Ontario has already tabled a draft policy, and discussions are continuing with Québec representatives to promote similar initiatives and pursue the type of collaboration that already exists between Vélo Québec (Route verte) and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust (Waterfront Trail), so that Canadians benefit from environments favourable to walking and cycling, regardless of where they are going.

## Appendix

Figure 1 – *Cycling as a transportation mode (2010)*

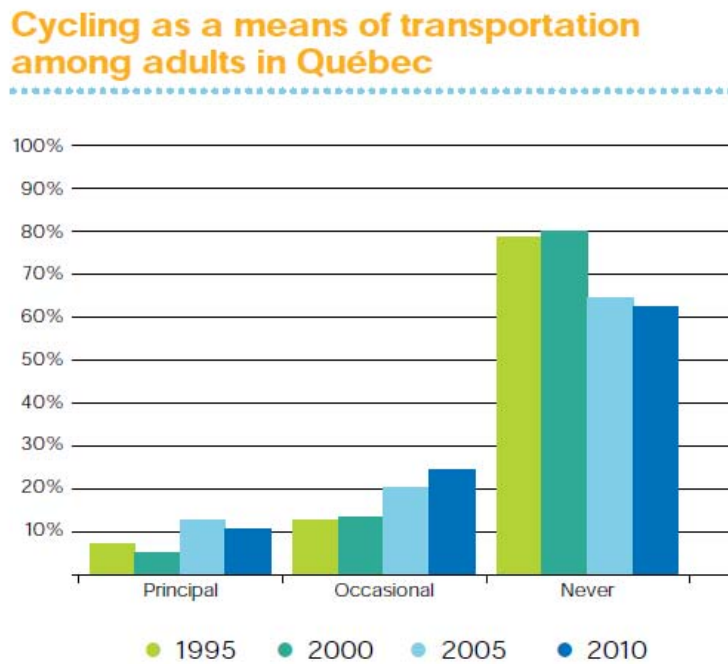


Figure 2 – *Growth of Québec's cycling network*

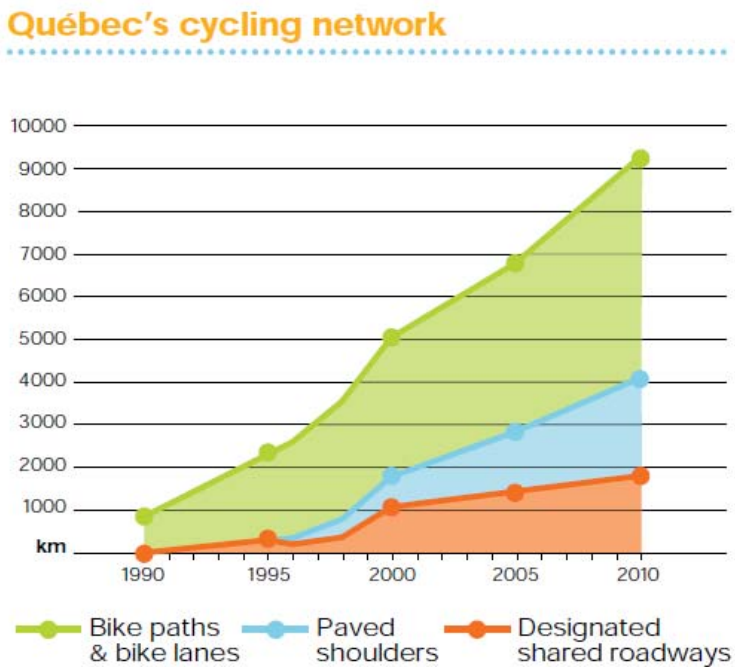


Figure 3 – *Indicators of the MTQ Bicycle Policy (2008)*

	Year of reference	<b>2012</b>	2020
↗ 50 % bicycle modal share	1,2 % (Mtl 2003)	<b>1,4 %</b> <b>(Mtl 2008)</b>	1,6 % (Mtl 2018)
↗ 10 % regular bicycle use	33 % (2005)	<b>35 %</b> <b>(2010)</b>	36 %
↗ 10 % utilitarian bicycle trips	17 % (2005)	<b>35 %</b>	19 %
↘ 30 % death or serious injuries	189 (2002-2006)	<b>130</b> <b>(2007-2011)</b>	132 (2015-2019)
↗ 30 % kilometers of bikeways	6 789 km (2005)	<b>9 258 km</b>	8 826 km