

There Goes the Neighbourhood: The Social Role, Real and Perceived, of Two New Light Rail Lines in North America

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New light rail projects are a common feature of North American cities; however, it is not always clear which communities are benefiting, or are perceived to be benefiting, from these investments in transport infrastructure. Extensive bodies of literature have examined the impact of light rail lines on social equity, as well as perceptions of light rail as a mode, but not necessarily in conjunction with one another. This thesis integrates these two concepts to conduct a comparative study of two new light rail projects: the Réseau express métropolitain (REM) in Montreal, Canada and the Purple Line in Maryland, United States. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, I conclude that the social role of the Purple Line is far more equitable than that of the REM, in both real and perceived terms.

Keywords: light rail, transport equity, perceptions of transit, Réseau express métropolitain, Purple Line



The REM, with stations sized proportionate to their averaged socio-economic z-scores
(Source: Author)