

Montreal Electric Streetcar Suburbanization: A Study of a Canadian City's Morphological Transformation Before World War 1

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Montreal's rich transportation history presents an interesting laboratory for geographical research. The aim of this paper was to investigate the ways in which the electric streetcar shaped Montreal's urban form during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (1892-1913). Information was collected from historical newspaper articles, documents, and maps retrieved from a variety of local archives. By reviewing sources pertaining to the Montreal Street Railway Company's ventures, the initial expansion of the electric streetcar system was traced. The streetcar system's presence in the suburban context was also explored through the review of the Montreal Park and Island Railway Company's franchises. The term 'streetcar suburb' was frequently employed in the literature, but without explanation of its criteria. A streetcar suburb model was developed, which was then compared to Lachine – a suburban neighbourhood located at the southwest end of the island of Montreal. It is concluded that Lachine does not fit the streetcar suburb model. Though the neighbourhood exhibits some of the model's properties, they are not necessarily attributable to the streetcar. Lachine's urban development is more influenced by the presence of large industrial firms and institutions.