Open letter from CAA-Quebec regarding funding for public transit

Public transit funding: Open letter from CAA-Quebec in reaction to an article published in La Presse on Monday, April 24, 2006, *La STM (Société de transport de Montréal) exige un nouveau pacte avant l’ouverture du metro de Laval* (STM demands a new agreement before the opening of the Laval metro), with particular reference to a CMM financing plan that includes a new gasoline tax of 2 cents per litre.

**MOTORISTS’ PATIENCE IS LIKE THEIR POCKETBOOKS: BOTH ARE GETTING THIN!**

While it is becoming increasingly difficult for motorists to keep their gas tanks full, their tolerance levels are hitting empty, thanks to the illogical rise in the various contributions they’re being required to pay. An article about public transportation funding in the Montreal region was published in La Presse on Monday, April 24.

Naturally, for CAA-Quebec members and all citizens, public transportation is an essential public service. But why should motorists be expected to pay more when they already contribute $100 million annually through a special tax on gasoline (1.5 cents / litre) as well as a specific registration fee ($30)? What about the approximately 40% of the amounts motorists pay in various fees and taxes when they buy gas or pay for their driver’s licence and registration in Quebec that does not return to the transportation sector, either for roads or public transportation? And what about the billions of dollars in excise tax that the federal government has been charging for years on gasoline sales, only a fraction of which is currently allocated to municipalities? These amounts could also be part of the solution if they are used for public transportation. Certainly, the opening of a Laval metro could be a good opportunity for settling the issue of public transportation funding once and for all, but motorists should not be expected to foot the bill until they have been shown that the money they already contribute is being used effectively.

**Pocketbooks and patience: pushed to the limit**

It is unrealistic to consider increasing taxes on gasoline in the current context. Motorists are already dealing with gas prices that are unlikely to fall in the near future. Although public transportation is a necessity for many citizens, it is not a solution for everyone. Alternative solutions must obviously be encouraged (carpooling, shared ownership, etc.), but we must also face facts: vehicles will remain a basic method of transportation as well as a complementary one.

That’s why further contributions are becoming increasingly problematic for motorists. They will already soon be expected to pay for poor government management of the public automobile insurance plan by absorbing hefty increases to ensure the survival of the Société de l’assurance automobile du Québec. Must they also be expected to cover the cost overruns for the construction of the Laval metro?

Motorists already drive on poor-quality roads for which, once again, they pay far more than what is spent to maintain or repair them.
**Bleeding motorists dry**
It is high time we realized that for years now, the automatic reflex of demanding that motorists pay more has too often been used as a cure-all solution. The cumulative effect of endless taxes and fees is that taxpayers—who, in many cases, are also motorists—are bearing an increasingly unfair burden. Before squeezing yet more out of motorists’ rapidly emptying pockets, surely we should look to properly using the amounts they already contribute.

**Agreement and trust: a hint of hope?**
Since the above-mentioned article was published, the Charest government has announced good news for Quebec’s municipalities with its tax agreement. As for the federal government, its recent budget provides for the creation of a trust for public transportation infrastructure that will also be used by other Canadian cities. These issues must be considered before we go so far as to ask still more from motorists.

Otherwise, will we one day need to set aside two cents per litre of gas to help motorists who have no choice but to use their vehicles?

CAA-Quebec
May 4, 2006