Cultural Daily

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LIVE PLACES: Transportation Hubs

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, May 27th, 2015

Preliminary considerations

The transportation hubs I refer to are the particular connections between urban public transportation modes, at a terminal situation for one or the other mode preferably, because of the concentration of users it brings about at certain times of the day, and because of certain activities tied to social and economic characteristics of the neighborhood the hubs serve.

A taste of this can be had in the feature image, which shows a bus at its terminal station next to a subway station off to the left, near a pedestrian island with a bike stand, tree shaded benches in the foreground, and a taxi stand off to the left of the image.

Note how:

- The paved pedestrian area separates adjoining streets to the right of the image from the bus turn around, while providing a mooring for the bike stand and going a long way in accommodating historically conflicting modes of transportation, giving wide berth to bikes, pedestrians and in this case corner access to an apartment building.
- At certain times of the day, the multi modes nature of the hub brings people from two adjoining neighbourhoods for ritual-like waiting and loading cycles of activity.
- The bicycle stand, the tree shaded bench, and its brick paved setting, while solving the historical circulation knot, establish a pedestrian friendly scale inviting appropriation.
- This set of activity and transportation venues, all in proximity to each other, speak of the care with which their location was planned to bring them into an integrated urban environment supportive of peopled, hence live places.

In general, of any transportation hub that has won a place in the citizen's image of the city, we can say that it has earned it by:

- ***the practicality of its neighbourhood access,***
- ***the charm and scale of its emplacement, and***
- ***the density of its connection to the city wide transportation network … all factors of live place experiences.***

The following transportation hubs stand out in my mind, each illustrating one of these characteristics, giving each hub a particular image and animation … my apology for the number of images and the overly descriptive tone of this post … Enjoy!

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The practicality of neighborhood access

Laurier subway station is located at the limit of a particular neighborhood that has favored pedestrian and bicycle modes of circulation. As the first subway station coming into that neighborhood, it is not strange therefore to see the generous bike parking stands at the head of the station site and, across the main drag bordering it, a bike rental stand.

laurier station bike park and rental stands

At the opposite end of the subway station, it is not surprising to see the extent to which the designers have gone to signal their sympathy to the users with a wraparound arcade connecting a senior housing building entrance (with ramp access) to one of the station doors, while protecting the users waiting to board the bus lines that serve the station.

Here, therefore, is an example of architecture that synthesizes social and urban design concerns.

Laurier station wrap around arcade

Facing the arcade is a sidewalk sweep: starting at the corner of a trade union headquarter building, it carries a taxi stand before running past the pedestrian island with its bike stand, and past the entrance to a social housing building and a couple of convenience stores, to end up connecting with the main drag and the bus lines downloading stations.

Laurier station sidewalk sweep lower end

laurier station sidewalk sweep – upper end

All this concern for taxi, bike and pedestrian access facilitation can be understood, and appreciated given the adjacent “institutional row” made up of a trade union headquarters, an LDS church headquarters and the Quebec National School of ballet dancing … and given what these institutions come to represent as figure heads to the neighborhood and district.

laurier station institution row – south end

The charm and scale of emplacement

If Laurier station sits at the limit of its neighborhood, **Mont Royal subway station** sits at its heart, right across the local Cultural Center and Public Library, with which it shares a common “parvis” of sorts, both fronting on the neighborhood main drag that leads to Mont Royal Park, which gave the station its name.

Mt Royal station – parvis north

Behind the station building we note that famous brick wall inscribed with the ode to the Montreal Worker, written by a well loved poet and Provincial Minister to Cultural Communities.

Mt Royal station sacred wall precinct

Framing the east and west sides of the common “parvis” are an open market and a mix of green spaces along a block long bike stand.

These provide practically 24/7 animation, when passengers of both bus and metro services, and local bars and restaurants clients snake by the station on the way home, or maybe stop to buy some fruits, a flower, maple syrup products, etc.

Mt Royal station parvis informal activity and green side

Mt Royal station parvis open market side

The density of transportation connections

Vendôme subway station is one of the main hubs in the city given the seven bus lines that serve it, four of which having their terminal turn around there, and its city subway and regional commuter train stations.

Vendôme station – Main entry point with view of access to subway and commuter train quays.

The image above is taken at the main entrance, in front of the drop off point of the bus lines, as one can surmise from the density of wet foot prints in the left foreground.

Front and center is the stairs leading to the subway entry level with its red ticket booth. Past the turnstiles the stairs to the subway quays have been subdivided into “chutes” by multiple handrails to allow up and down traffic to be efficiently organized. (See below)

Vendôme station – stairs to and from subway quays

Left and right of the main entry, back at the top level, are the wings leading to side doors serving as an entry as much as an exit leading to the loading zone of a very busy line … again its traffic density can be deduced from the density of wet foot prints to the right. (See below)

Vendôme station – social and activity mix at a side entrance and exit wing at top level

Walking past the turnstiles leading to the subway quays, and further on and down one reaches a tunnel that leads to the commuter train quays.

A mezzanine over that tunnel serves as a warming and waiting area to the multiple bus line terminal loading zones between the subway station building and the commuter train quays. (See below)

Vendôme station – tunnel access to train and mezzanine access to bus

The bus lines are not the only ones to benefit from a pre-loading waiting and warming area; as can be seen below the commuter train station also has one from which one has panoramic view of subway station and the city to the left, and of the new hospital complex to the right. (See below)

Vendôme station – View from the waiting and warming area at commuter train quay.

One can say that this station is a three dimensional volumetric rendition of a complex circulation scheme. Its doors and windows not only direct traffic but allow for a modulated relation to the outside and its seasonal weather changes.

The various levels hence created, underscored with remarkable stained glass and sculptural art work, are as many stage scenes with the hordes of passengers ascending, descending and crossing in a colorful ballet of interpersonal distance keeping and negotiating!

Discussion

The urban transportation hubs, described above, with their age, gender, social, economic and cultural mix of users, and activities, can certainly be considered to promote neighborhood sociability in a way that *may frame what Jane Jacobs reportedly called a* ***"ballet of intricate interactions … that contribute to a healthy neighborhood"*** *(per David Brooks of the NYT).*

The urban transportation hubs by their very nature intersect, or interact with, wider parts of the city, be it via the underground subway network or via the bus and train lines above ground … sometimes their immediate vicinity, when sympathetically planned, will prove to frame what the French call a "pièce urbaine" i.e. a room at the scale of the city, as shown below.

New hospital complex next to Vendôme station create together an "urban room"

End Note:

Beyond signage and other standard equipment, the design of each subway station was given to architectural firms with the mandate to exploit its particular urban setting and to coordinate with city planning agency for integration in its present urban environment, and its potential development, as seen above.

Each of the transportation hub discussed here seems to have benefited from that policy, as it has turned a highly functional program into a stimulating live place.

All photos credit Maurice Amiel

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 27th, 2015 at 3:17 pm and is filed under Architecture, Community
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