

IT'S A FACT...

By Mark Kearney and Randy Ray

Q. What's the story behind Montreal's underground pedestrian network?

A. Montreal's underground pedestrian network, which began beneath the Central Station complex, took off during the 1960s when the Place Ville-Marie office tower was built. This initial core would expand considerably with the construction of Place Bonaventure. The Métro, which opened in 1966, extended it much farther.

Other cities have tried to construct networks sheltering pedestrians from inclement weather, but the Montreal system, the world's longest and best-known, has clearly managed to pull together all the right conditions to enjoy great popular success.

With about 32 kilometres of tunnels spread over more than 12 square kilometres, connected areas include shopping malls, apartment buildings, hotels, condominiums, banks, offices, museums, universities, seven Métro stations, two commuter train stations, a regional bus terminal and the Bell Centre, home of the Montreal Canadiens. There are more than 120 exterior access points.

The underground city is still growing. In recent years, a link has been added between Place Ville-Marie and shopping centres farther north, themselves linked to another Métro line. Another recent connection gives access to the southeast, to the Stock Exchange tower and a new urban complex, and even to a gateway to the historic city centre, where pedestrians can stroll along the narrow streets, outdoors.

As many as 500,000 people use the network every day.

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