Research Aims:
Now that the MUHC hospital complex is under construction, traffic in nearby Westmount is likely to increase. However, residents already have concerns about the safety of pedestrians and cyclists on busy streets and along the de Maisonneuve bike path. To understand how Westmount could address these concerns, this Summer 2010 study asked three questions:

- What risks do pedestrians and cyclists currently face in Westmount?
- What are the sources of these risks?
- What can be done about them?

We gathered information to answer these questions in four ways:

- A paper survey, which asked people how they get around, how safe they feel, and what particular locations they feel are dangerous;
- Direct observation at intersections, in which we counted pedestrians and cyclists and recorded problems or near-misses;
- Ambulance and auto insurance data, which we compared to the survey results to see whether the locations perceived to be dangerous were the same as the locations with high collision rates; and
- Interviews with community leaders, cycling advocates and law enforcement officials, to find out what problems they encounter and what they are doing to address them.

Key results to date:
The study found that Westmount is already safe for pedestrians and cyclists, with low accident rates for both. Still, there is a gap between perceived risk and observed collision rates. In particular, people believe the de Maisonneuve bike path is less safe than collision rates would suggest, while Atwater and highway entrances/exits may be more dangerous than people think (Fig. 1).

The study found that the key risk factors for pedestrians and cyclists are traffic speed and volume, non-compliance with traffic laws, poor signal and intersection design, and environmental factors like snow/ice and topography. The de Maisonneuve bike path is quite safe, but its design could be improved so that more cyclists obey stop signs and pedestrians feel safer.

Westmount cannot address these risks on its own, so partnerships with the province and the City of Montreal will be crucial. These partnerships could focus on improving road safety education, re-designing “scramble” intersections and traffic calming measures, and expanding Montreal’s bike path network. (See CURA Research Report RR11-01E for the full results.)