

Urban public transit, December 2020

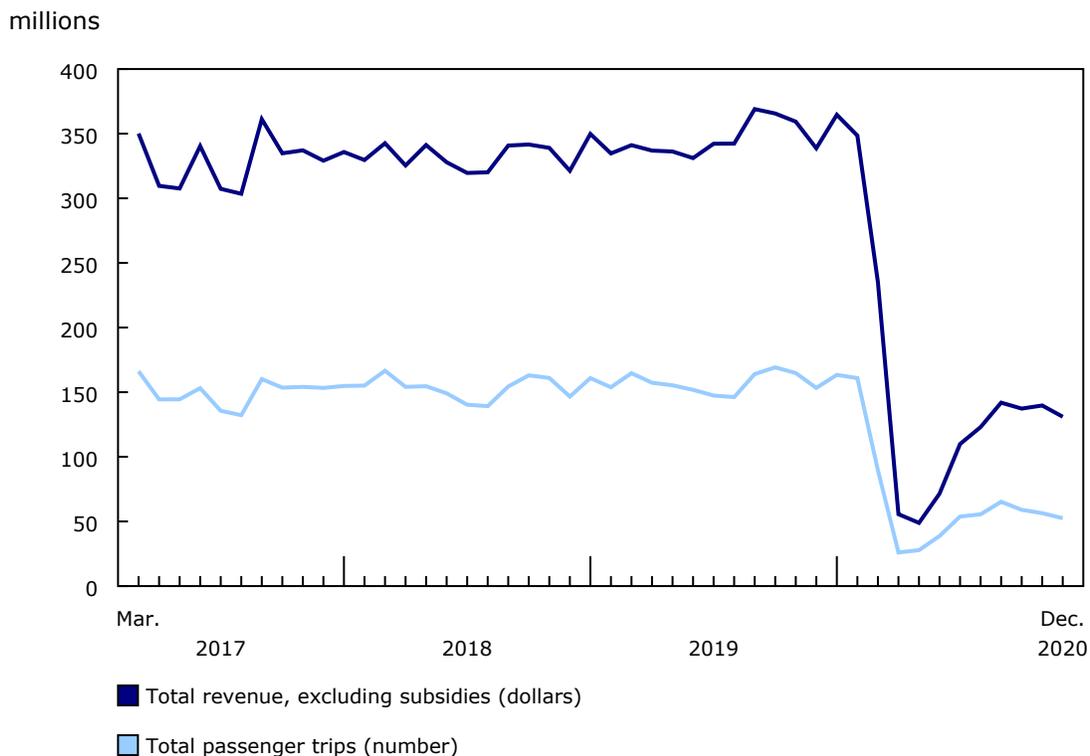
Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Thursday, February 25, 2021

Ridership continues to drop

Progress made during the summer towards recovery in public transit ridership was more or less halted over the last three months of the year. In December, Canada's public transit networks carried 52.5 million passengers, down 65.8% from December 2019, following similar year-over-year declines in October and November. This marked the tenth consecutive month of such declines and the lowest number of passengers carried since July 2020.

On a monthly basis, there were almost 4 million fewer passenger trips on Canada's transit systems in December—a 6.9% decrease from November 2020. A seasonal decline of this size is not unexpected given school breaks and vacations during the holiday season. Despite major restrictions and closures in the Montreal and Toronto areas to combat a second wave, agencies in Ontario and Quebec reported a 4.1% decline in passengers from November.

Chart 1
Urban public transit operating revenue and passenger trips, monthly, 2017 to 2020



Source(s): Table 23-10-0251-01.

Finances remain weak

In December, transit agencies continued to face the challenge of declining revenues stemming from the loss in ridership. Total operating revenues (excluding subsidies), were \$131.0 million in December, 61.3% or \$207.7 million lower than in December 2019.

A look back at 2020

The impact of COVID-19 on Canada's public transit industry was profound. After starting the year with two months of year-over-year growth in ridership (+1.6% in January and +4.6% in February), the onset of the pandemic along with measures to contain its spread cut March ridership almost in half (-45.6%). This was followed by year-over-year declines of more than 80% in April and May. While there were slow but steady increases throughout the summer, ridership remained more than 60% below 2019 levels through the rest of the year.

In 2020, public transit agencies transported 848.8 million passengers, down 55.1% from 1888.7 million in 2019. This drop followed modest growth in ridership in 2018 (+3.0%) and 2019 (+2.7%). Agencies in Quebec and Ontario, which account for roughly two-thirds of total ridership, reported 731 million fewer passengers during 2020, accounting for just over 70% of this annual decline.

The drop in ridership is having a major financial impact on transit agencies. In 2020, total transit operating revenues (excluding subsidies) dropped to \$1.9 billion, down 46.0% or over \$2.2 billion from 2019. With new waves and variants of the virus looming, the [Canadian Urban Transit Association](#) has recently asked the federal and provincial governments to extend financial support so transit systems can keep operating during the pandemic.

Note to readers

Data for the most recent quarter are subject to revision. The data in this release are not seasonally adjusted.

This survey collects data on operating revenue (excluding subsidies) and the number of passenger trips from a panel of urban transit companies that represents at least 75% of revenues in each province and territory. Users should note that the panel is adjusted annually to maintain the 75% coverage and could differ slightly from what it was in the same month a year earlier.

Caution should be used when comparing values prior to January 2017 with more recent values, as the number of sampled companies changed significantly. Data prior to January 2017 can be found in table 23-10-0078-01.

The [Transportation Data and Information Hub](#), a web portal developed jointly by Statistics Canada and Transport Canada, provides Canadians with online access to comprehensive statistics and measures on the country's transportation sector.

Available tables: table [23-10-0251-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [2745](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).