

# Commuting to work by car and public transit grows in 2023

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In May 2023, 15.9 million Canadians or four in five workers were commuting to a location outside their home for work, up from both 2021 (+3.3 million) and 2016 (+457,000). This national-level increase in the number of commuters follows a notable drop recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the 2021 Census of Population, [the number of commuters was 2.8 million lower in May 2021 than in May 2016](#). The recent rise in commuting was driven in part by a decline in the proportion of employed Canadians working from home, as well as historically high population growth and marked gains in total employment. While commuting was up across most of the country from May 2021 to May 2023, some regions, including the census metropolitan area (CMA) of Toronto (+857,000; +47.0%), recorded a faster increase than others.

Commuting patterns can evolve for a variety of reasons, including changing business practices, urbanization, the availability of commuting and transit infrastructure, as well as personal and financial considerations. Understanding changes in commuting patterns is important for Canadians and policy makers due to possible impacts on the well-being of workers, the environment, and public infrastructure such as roads, public transit, and walkways.

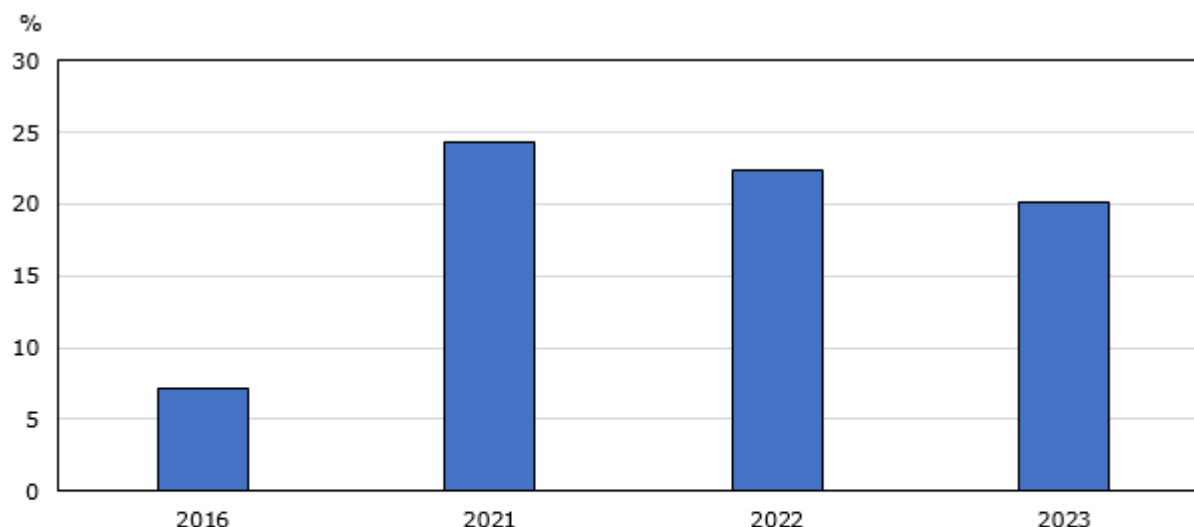
This article draws on data from the Census of Population for May 2016 and May 2021 and from supplements to the Labour Force Survey for May 2022 and May 2023 to provide an updated picture of commuting in Canada. To enhance the comparability of the data, all estimates in the article refer to workers aged 15 to 69 living in the provinces.

## **The share of employed Canadians who usually work from home continues to decline in 2023**

The decline in the number of commuters from May 2016 to May 2021 reflected the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including tighter public health restrictions introduced to curb a new surge in infections in the spring of 2021. In May 2021, nearly one in four (24.3%) employed Canadians were usually working from home. This proportion had declined to 22.4% by May 2022, paralleling the gradual return to in-person work as COVID-19 infections waned and public health restrictions were lifted. By May 2023, the proportion of workers usually working from home had fallen to one in five (20.1%).



## Infographic 1 – Share of workers usually working from home, Canada, 2016 to 2023



**Note(s):** Due to rounding, estimates and percentages may differ slightly between different Statistics Canada products, such as analytical documents and data tables. Estimates from the Labour Force Survey supplements are based on a smaller sample and have a wider margin of error.

**Source(s):** Labour Force Survey supplements, 2022 and 2023 (3701) and Census of Population, 2016 and 2021 (3901), custom tabulations.

At the same time, the proportion of workers whose usual place of work was a location other than their home rose from 77.6% in May 2022 to 79.9% in May 2023. Over this period, notable increases in the share of workers working outside their home occurred in the following industries: public administration (+9.7 percentage points to 63.7%); information, culture and recreation (+6.7 percentage points to 67.6%); and professional, scientific and technical services (+4.1 percentage points to 45.2%).

### More commuters travelling to work in May 2023 compared with pre-pandemic May 2016 levels

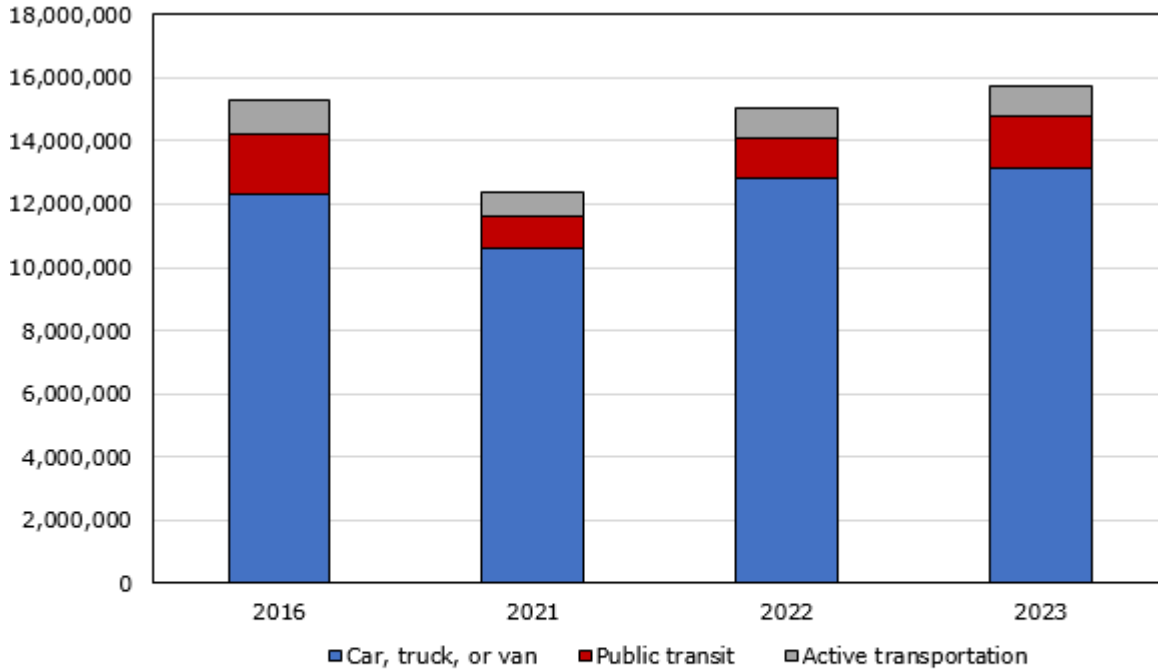
Paralleling the rise in the share of onsite work as well as notable employment and population growth since May 2021, the number of people usually commuting to a location outside the home for work increased to 15.9 million in May 2023. This number was up by 724,000 (+4.8%) compared with May 2022 and by 3.3 million (+26.2%) compared with May 2021. The number of commuters in May 2023 also surpassed (+3.0%) the level recorded in May 2016 (15.5 million).

### Over eight out of ten commuters mainly use a car, truck, or van to travel to work in May 2023

Mainly travelling by car (including truck or van) as a driver or passenger remained the most popular mode of transportation to commute to work in May 2023, accounting for 82.6% of commuters (13.2 million people). However, the proportion mainly commuting to work by car was down compared with both May 2022 (84.2%) and May 2021 (84.0%). While the total number of car commuters increased from May 2021 to May 2023 (+24.2%; +2.6 million), a faster increase in public transit usage (+63.6%; +628,000) over the same period pushed down the overall share of commuters who mainly commute to work by car. The higher proportion of car commuters in May 2021 and May 2022 may be related to a more notable drop in workers' usage of public transit during the pandemic due to a desire to avoid crowded spaces where social distancing would be difficult.

In May 2023, 10.1% of commuters (1.6 million people) mainly travelled to work via public transit, up from the proportions recorded in May 2022 (8.5%; 1.3 million) and May 2021 (7.8%; 1.0 million). Despite the recent increase, public transit usage among commuters in May 2023 remained below its pre-pandemic level of May 2016 (12.6%; 1.9 million). The share of commuters mainly using active modes of transportation such as walking or cycling was down slightly in May 2023 (6.0%; 960,000 people) compared with May 2022 (6.3%; 961,000) but was similar to the proportion recorded in May 2021 (6.1%; 769,000; people).

**Infographic 2 – Number of commuters by main mode of transportation, Canada, 2016 to 2023**



**Note(s):** Due to rounding, estimates and percentages may differ slightly between different Statistics Canada products, such as analytical documents and data tables. Estimates from the Labour Force Survey supplements are based on a smaller sample and have a wider margin of error.

**Source(s):** Labour Force Survey supplements, 2022 and 2023 (3701) and Census of Population, 2016 and 2021 (3901), custom tabulations.

**Number of workers mainly commuting by car grows in Ontario, Alberta, and Prince Edward Island in the 12 months ending in May 2023**

The number of people mainly using a car to travel to work increased in Ontario (+227,000; +4.8%), Alberta (+123,000; +7.2%), and Prince Edward Island (+6,600; +9.9%) from May 2022 to May 2023, but was little changed in the other provinces. Compared with May 2021, all provinces saw an increase in the number of people travelling to work by car.

**The number of car commuters in the Toronto and Vancouver census metropolitan areas in May 2023 surpasses May 2016 levels**

Increases from May 2021 to May 2023 in the number of workers mainly commuting by car in the Toronto (+601,000 to 2.0 million), Montréal (+151,000 to 1.3 million) and Vancouver (+118,000 to 832,000) CMAs recouped declines recorded during the pandemic, and in May 2023, car commuting had returned to its May 2016 level in

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Montréal and surpassed this level in Toronto and Vancouver. However, in line with the national trend, the share of car commuters in May 2023 was lower than in May 2021 in Toronto (-1.9 percentage points to 74.1%), Montréal (-2.7 percentage points to 72.8%) and Vancouver (-6.2 percentage points to 68.5%).

### **Commuting by public transit up in eight provinces in May 2023**

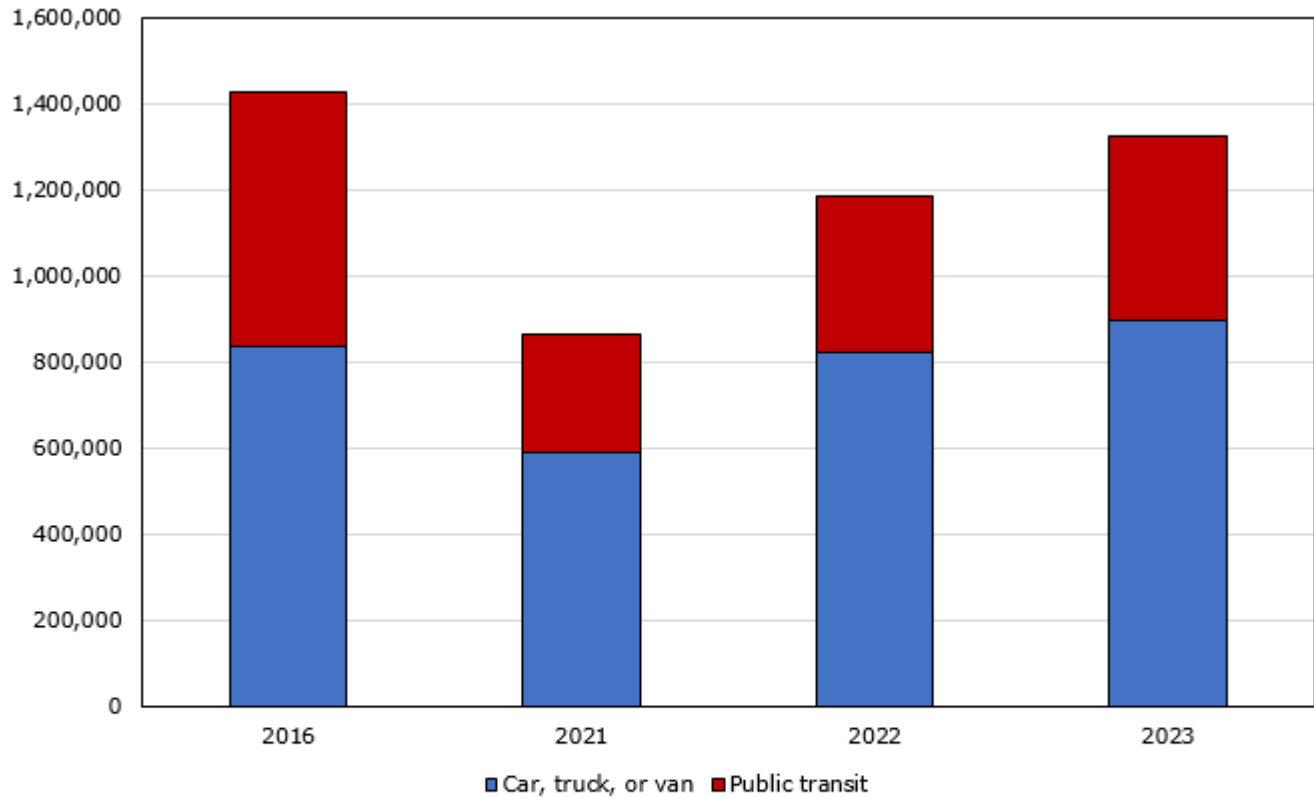
With an increase in employment and more people returning to work onsite, there was a rise in the use of public transit to travel to the workplace in most provinces. From May 2021 to May 2023, growth in the number of workers mainly commuting by public transit was observed in eight provinces, with notable increases in Ontario (+320,000; +83.2%), British Columbia (+153,000; +89.7%), and Quebec (+66,000; +23.2%). Smaller increases were recorded in Alberta (+46,000; +52.8%), Manitoba (+16,000; +54.0%), Nova Scotia (+12,000; +87.6%), Saskatchewan (+9,600; +123.6%) and New Brunswick (+3,500; +82.5%). With the number of car commuters growing more slowly in those eight provinces, the share of commuters taking public transit also increased from May 2021 to May 2023. The shift towards public transit was led by British Columbia (+5.0 percentage points to 14.5% of commuters), Ontario (+3.0 percentage points to 11.7%) and Nova Scotia (+1.8 percentage points to 6.0%).

Commuting to work by public transit was also up in each of Canada's three largest CMAs. Compared with May 2021, Toronto saw an increase of 265,000 (+92.5%) in the number of commuters mainly taking public transit, which reached 552,000 in May 2023. In Vancouver, there were 129,000 more workers using public transit to travel to work, an increase of 89.7% to 273,000 compared with two years earlier. Finally, compared with May 2021, 59,000 (+24.8%) more workers mainly used public transit in Montréal, pushing the number of commuters up to 296,000. The proportion of commuters taking public transit grew notably in both Vancouver (+7.4 percentage points to 22.5%) and Toronto (+4.9 percentage points to 20.6%), but was little changed in Montréal (16.4%).

### **The number of workers reporting a long commute rises from 2021 to 2023**

Due in part to the increase in car commuting and more traffic on the roads, there was a 51.7% (+306,000) rise in the number of workers with a long car commute—lasting 60 minutes or more—from May 2021 to May 2023. Car commuters were not alone in seeing this rise; there were 1.4 million workers with long commutes across all modes of transportation in May 2023, up 157,000 (+12.8%) from a year earlier and 903,000 higher than the level recorded in May 2021 (+53.4%). Nonetheless, the number of workers with a long commute across all modes of commuting in May 2023 remained lower than in May 2016 (1.5 million commuters).

**Infographic 3 – Number of car and public transit commuters with a long commute, Canada, 2016 to 2023**



**Note(s):** Due to rounding, estimates and percentages may differ slightly between different Statistics Canada products, such as analytical documents and data tables. Estimates are for the main mode of commuting. Estimates from the Labour Force Survey supplements are based on a smaller sample and have a wider margin of error.

**Source(s):** Labour Force Survey supplements, 2022 and 2023 (3701) and Census of Population, 2016 and 2021 (3901), custom tabulations.

For those mainly travelling to work by car, the average commute time was 24.5 minutes in May 2023, higher than in May 2021 (22.9 minutes) and May 2022 (24.0 minutes). Among workers mainly using active transportation, commute duration also increased slightly from May 2021 to May 2023 (+0.9 minutes to 14.9 minutes). For public transit users, average commute time was virtually unchanged over the same period at 42.2 minutes.

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## **Note to readers**

### **Definitions and information on interpretation**

"Commuting" refers to anyone who usually travels to a fixed or a non-fixed location outside their residence for work.

The term "usual" refers to the most common pattern for the worker, whether for a place of work or a mode of commuting. For example, if someone works the majority of a typical workweek or month at a fixed workplace address that is not their home, they would be identified as having a usual workplace outside their home and would be considered a commuter.

For data from the May 2022 and May 2023 Labour Force Survey (LFS) supplements, estimates by industry are based on the 2017 North American Industry Classification System.

This analysis focuses on differences between estimates that are statistically significant at the 68% confidence level.

### **Labour Force Survey supplement, May 2022 and May 2023**

The universe for the May 2022 and May 2023 LFS supplements consists of respondents aged 15 to 69 who reside in the provinces. The sample also excludes persons living on reserves, full-time members of the regular Canadian Armed Forces and persons living in institutions. For more information, including about the questionnaire, please see the [Labour Market Indicators program](#). For more detail on the LFS, please consult the [Guide to the Labour Force Survey](#).

### **Census of Population, May 2016 and May 2021**

To match the LFS supplement sample, census data were restricted to respondents aged 15 to 69 who were residing in the provinces, excluding persons living on reserves, full-time members of the regular Canadian Armed Forces and persons living in institutions. More information can be found in the [Guide to the Census of Population](#).

**Table 1**  
**Number and proportion of car commuters by province, 2016 to 2023**

	2016		2021		2022		2023	
	number of commuters	% of all commuters	number of commuters	% of all commuters	number of commuters	% of all commuters	number of commuters	% of all commuters
<b>Canada</b>	<b>12,291,650</b>	<b>79.4</b>	<b>10,602,505</b>	<b>84.0</b>	<b>12,808,600</b>	<b>84.2</b>	<b>13,164,900</b>	<b>82.6</b>
Newfoundland and Labrador	180,860	89.2	155,265	88.9	183,600	89.7	179,100	87.0
Prince Edward Island	56,745	91.9	57,040	92.5	66,300	91.4	72,900	92.7
Nova Scotia	326,925	85.3	280,650	87.5	353,800	86.1	357,300	85.5
New Brunswick	281,225	91.2	258,515	92.0	290,500	91.3	289,500	90.1
Quebec	2,822,720	78.2	2,575,750	82.4	2,753,800	81.4	2,788,400	80.3
Ontario	4,652,145	77.9	3,693,950	83.6	4,738,600	84.3	4,965,300	82.5
Manitoba	453,355	82.5	424,390	86.1	497,000	87.2	500,800	83.6
Saskatchewan	415,010	89.1	371,765	90.5	459,000	89.6	461,100	89.4
Alberta	1,561,020	82.7	1,343,260	87.3	1,710,400	88.3	1,832,900	88.6
British Columbia	1,541,640	75.9	1,441,910	79.9	1,755,600	80.6	1,717,600	76.8

**Note(s):**

Due to rounding, estimates and percentages may differ slightly between different Statistics Canada products, such as analytical documents and data tables.

Estimates from the Labour Force Survey supplements are based on a smaller sample and have a wider margin of error.

Data are for workers who mainly commute to work by car, truck or van.

**Source(s):** Labour Force Survey supplements (2022, 2023) and Census of Population (2016, 2021), custom tabulations.

**Table 2**  
**Number and proportion of public transit commuters by province, 2016 to 2023**

	2016		2021		2022		2023	
	number of commuters	% of all commuters	number of commuters	% of all commuters	number of commuters	% of all commuters	number of commuters	% of all commuters
<b>Canada</b>	<b>1,948,920</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>986,705</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>1,286,200</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>1,614,700</b>	<b>10.1</b>
Newfoundland and Labrador	5,095	2.5	3,505	2.0	x	x	x	x
Prince Edward Island	810	1.3	865	1.4	x	x	x	x
Nova Scotia	24,700	6.4	13,460	4.2	26,700 <sup>E</sup>	6.5 <sup>E</sup>	25,300	6.0
New Brunswick	7,225	2.3	4,270	1.5	4,200 <sup>E</sup>	1.3 <sup>E</sup>	7,800 <sup>E</sup>	2.4 <sup>E</sup>
Quebec	499,670	13.8	284,550	9.1	342,100	10.1	350,600	10.1
Ontario	880,795	14.7	385,065	8.7	520,200	9.3	705,500	11.7
Manitoba	53,125	9.7	28,915	5.9	34,300	6.0	44,500	7.4
Saskatchewan	13,550	2.9	7,730	1.9	10,900 <sup>E</sup>	2.1 <sup>E</sup>	17,300 <sup>E</sup>	3.4 <sup>E</sup>
Alberta	193,115	10.2	87,285	5.7	112,400	5.8	133,400	6.4
British Columbia	270,835	13.3	171,050	9.5	226,400	10.4	324,400	14.5

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Estimates from the Labour Force Survey supplements are based on a smaller sample and have a wider margin of error.

Data are for workers who mainly commute to work by public transit.

**Source(s):** Labour Force Survey supplements (2022, 2023) and Census of Population (2016, 2021), custom tabulations.

**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3701.**

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; [infostats@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).