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Commuting to work: Results of the 2010 General Social Survey

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Commuting to work: Results of the 2010 General Social Survey

by *Martin Turcotte*

Introduction

For many workers, commuting to work is routine and causes little concern. Others, however, consider it a waste of time and a source of stress and frustration. This is especially true for workers whose commutes seem to take an eternity and are made even slower by traffic congestion.

Often irritating workers, traffic slowdowns and capacity problems in the road system are serious issues. In addition to delaying deliveries and reducing business productivity, traffic congestion contributes to urban smog and pollution—diminishing environmental quality and jeopardizing public health.

This article examines various facets of travelling between home and work. Part 1 begins with information about commuting times and how frequently workers are caught in traffic. In particular, it compares commuting times in major metropolitan areas by mode of transportation used by workers. Part 2 looks at workers' perceptions of the time they spend commuting. Are they happy with this time or not? In the past, there was no way of answering this question, but now there is data from by the General Social Survey which allows this question to be addressed.

In Part 3, the focus is on car users' perceptions of public transit. Have they ever tried using public transit to get to their current place of work? Is it convenient for them? In Part 4, a connection is drawn between the characteristics of commuting to work (commuting time, recurrence of traffic congestion, etc.) and selected subjective measures of quality of life, including stress levels and satisfaction with work–life balance. For more information, see the box entitled "What you should know about this study".

Part 1: Commuting times by place of residence, mode of transportation, residential density and traffic congestion

The larger and more populous the region, the longer it takes to get to work

In 2010, it took Canadian workers an average of 26 minutes to get to work on a typical day (the average includes all modes of transportation). This average was affected by various factors, including where workers lived. In general, travel times are longer in large metropolitan areas, where workers have to travel greater distances and traffic congestion is more frequent (Table 1).

For example, average commuting time was longest (30 minutes) in the six largest census metropolitan areas (areas with at least 1 million residents: Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Ottawa–Gatineau, Calgary and Edmonton). In the 10 census metropolitan areas (CMA)¹ with between 250,000 and fewer than 1 million residents in 2006, average commuting time was shorter (25 minutes).

Smaller census metropolitan areas with fewer than 250,000 residents had the shortest commuting times, averaging 19 minutes. In general, these smaller CMAs have many places of work that are not difficult to get to, in part because traffic congestion occurs less frequently. Average commuting times were the same in census agglomerations (areas with between 10,000 and 100,000 residents).

Commuting times were slightly longer in areas outside census agglomerations and census metropolitan areas (23 minutes on average). This might be because some people who live outside the boundaries of census metropolitan areas commute into those areas. In addition to travelling long distances, these workers may encounter traffic congestion if they commute into major centres.

What you should know about this study

This article is based on data from Statistics Canada's 2010 General Social Survey on Time Use, which included questions on time stress and the sense of well-being. A section of the survey also dealt with commuting to work.

This study is about people whose main activity during the week preceding the interview was working at a paid job or for themselves. People who were on vacation that week are excluded. The result is a sample of 6,988 respondents representing about 13.7 million workers in 2010.

Definitions

Commuting time: To measure how much time workers spend commuting, they were asked: "On a usual day last week, how many minutes did it take you to go one way from home to work?"

Mode of transportation: There were three modes of transportation reported: car or private vehicle, public transit and active transportation.

Car users: includes both passengers and drivers who use a private motor vehicle to commute to work.

Public transit users: includes passengers of public transit systems, including streetcars, subways, light-rail transit, commuter trains and ferries.

Active transportation: includes walking and cycling.

Respondents were given the opportunity to report more than one mode of transportation for their commute to work and people who reported using public transit in combination with some other mode of transportation (car, walking) are included with public transit users.

When Canada's six largest metropolitan areas are compared, a positive relationship between population size and commuting times is found. Of those six areas, the two most populous—Toronto and Montréal—have the longest commuting times (33 minutes and 31 minutes respectively). In both, 27% of workers had travel times of 45 minutes or more, which is much greater than in any other CMA or other area (Table 1). For more details on commuting in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver, see the "Getting to work in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver" text box.

Commuting takes longer by public transit than by car

How someone gets to work is associated with how long it takes to get to work. Workers who walk or bicycle to work have shorter trips (14 minutes on average) while public transit users spend considerably more time travelling to work (44 minutes). Car users, including passengers, fall somewhere in the middle. Since the vast majority of workers travel in private vehicles, their average commuting time of 24 minutes is very close to the average for all workers.

It makes sense to compare the commuting times of car users and public transit users based on the size of the metropolitan area. In 2010, in the six largest metropolitan areas, car users took an average of 27 minutes to get to work, while public transit users took 44 minutes. In mid-sized metropolitan areas (areas with between 250,000 and 1 million residents), the difference in average commuting times was larger—23 minutes for car users and 46 minutes for public transit users.

The gap is not due to distance travelled, as public transit users generally travel shorter distances. Among workers in CMAs with at least 250,000 residents who travel less than 5 kilometres to get to work, car users had an average commuting time of 10 minutes, compared with 26 minutes for public transit users (data not shown). The same held true for all other distance categories.² Since the use of public transit involves walking, waiting and sometimes traffic congestion, it is not surprising that commuting times are generally longer for public transit users. Nevertheless, the use of bus lanes and underground rail lines can speed up public transit commutes

and even make them shorter than automobile commutes. However, when average commuting times for public transit users and car users are compared, automobile commutes are shorter.

The conclusions concerning commuting times by mode of transportation are much the same when proportions of users are considered. For example, in 2010, among workers in metropolitan areas with a population of at least 250,000 who lived 5 or more kilometres from their place of work, 45% of public transit users had morning commutes of 45 minutes or more, compared with 18% of car users (data not shown).

Low residential density neighbourhoods are less conducive to public transit

Access to public transit is closely tied to urban land use. It is much easier to provide efficient public transit in the high-density residential neighbourhoods typical of the central areas of major cities. The pool of potential users per square kilometre is much larger in such areas. This has an impact on public transit users who live in lower-density residential neighbourhoods—their commuting

Table 1 Average commuting time to work and proportion of workers, by selected characteristics, 2010

	Commuting time				
	Average	Less than 15 minutes	15 to 29 minutes	30 to 44 minutes	45 minutes or more
	minutes		percentage		
Total Canada	26	30	33	19	17
Type of region of residence					
Census metropolitan areas of 1,000,000 or more residents†	30	19	33	25	23
Census metropolitan areas of 250,000 to 999,999 residents	25*	29*	38*	18*	15*
Census metropolitan areas of less than 250,000 residents	19*	41*	39*	13*	7*
Census agglomerations	19*	49*	31	11*	10*
Outside of census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations	23*	41*	29*	15*	15*
Census metropolitan area					
Toronto†	33	15	33	25	27
Montréal	31	20	27	27	27
Vancouver	30*	22*	33	25	21*
Ottawa—Gatineau	27*	15 ^E	50*	21	14 ^{E*}
Calgary	26*	21 ^E	33	29	16 ^{E*}
Edmonton	23*	27*	41	20	12 ^{E*}
Mode of transportation					
Car or private vehicle†	24	31	36	18	15
Public transit	44*	5*	21*	30*	43*
Active transportation (walking or cycling)	14*	57*	27*	14*	F*
Type of region and mode of transportation					
Census metropolitan areas of 1,000,000 or more residents					
Car/private vehicle†	27	21	37	24	18
Public transit	44*	5 ^{E*}	20*	31*	44*
Census metropolitan areas of 250,000 to 999,999 residents					
Car/private vehicle†	23	31	40	17	12
Public transit	46*	F*	25 ^{E*}	29 ^{E*}	42*

† reference group

* statistically significant difference from reference group at $p < 0.05$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

Getting to work in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver

Data from the General Social Survey can provide a more detailed picture of commuting times in Canada's three largest metropolitan areas, as the number of survey respondents from these three areas allows for more detailed analysis.

Average commuting times in these three CMAs followed the general trend: they were longer for public transit users than for car users. In Toronto and Vancouver, it took public transit users about 20 minutes longer than car users to get to work, while in Montréal, the difference was much smaller (about 10 minutes) (text box table).

CMAs are named after their central municipality, but they also contain other municipalities, which may be described as 'neighbouring', 'peripheral' or 'suburban' municipalities. The urbanization of most peripheral municipalities has been a function of automobile use. In contrast, many neighbourhoods in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver are densely populated, which favours active modes of transportation or public transit. These differences in urban planning and the development of road systems can have a major impact on how workers commute to work.

In these three areas, workers living in the central municipality were much more likely to use public transit than workers in neighbouring municipalities. The difference was particularly pronounced in Montréal, where 41% of workers living in the city of Montréal commuted by public transit, compared with 11% of workers in neighbouring municipalities.

The differences in commuting times within the three areas were small. In the Vancouver area, the average commuting time was 27 minutes for workers living in the central municipality, compared with 31 minutes for workers residing in neighbouring municipalities (text box table). In the Montréal area, it took workers from the city of Montréal an average of 28 minutes

to get to work, while the average commuting time for their counterparts in neighbouring municipalities, such as Laval or Longueuil, was 34 minutes. In the Toronto area, commuting times were the same for workers residing in the central municipality and workers in neighbouring municipalities (33 minutes).

These relatively minor differences may be due to the fact that many workers from peripheral municipalities do not have to travel to the central municipality to get to their place of work. Prior to economic expansion into the suburbs, the suburban municipalities played an essentially residential role within the census metropolitan area. This is no longer the case, since a great many jobs are outside the central municipality/city centre. According to 2006 Census data, for example, employment grew even more rapidly in the peripheral municipalities than in the central municipalities.¹

Workers in the greatest metropolitan areas are more likely to experience traffic congestion daily on their way to work (Table 2). In the Toronto CMA, 29% of full-time workers were caught in traffic jams every day of the week, compared with 26% of their counterparts in Montréal and 25% of full-time workers in Vancouver (results not shown). In the Montréal metropolitan area, residents of the central municipality, i.e. of the city of Montréal, were less likely to experience traffic congestion every day (18% of full-time workers compared to 29% of those in the surrounding municipalities). The same held true in Vancouver with respective proportions of 17% of full-time workers living in the city of Vancouver caught daily in traffic compared with 28% of those living in surrounding municipalities.

1. Statistics Canada. 2007. *Commuting Patterns and Places of Work of Canadians, 2006 Census*, Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 97-561.

Getting to work in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver (continued)

Mode of transportation and average commuting time to get to work in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver census metropolitan areas

	Mode of transportation			Average commuting time to work		
	Toronto	Montréal	Vancouver	Toronto	Montréal	Vancouver
	percentage using public transit			minutes		
Mode of transportation						
Car†	...	...	...	29	30	25
Public transit	...	...	...	49*	39*	48*
Place of residence						
Central municipality†	29	41	32	33	28	27
Neighbouring municipalities	16*	11 ^{E*}	17*	33	34*	31

† reference group

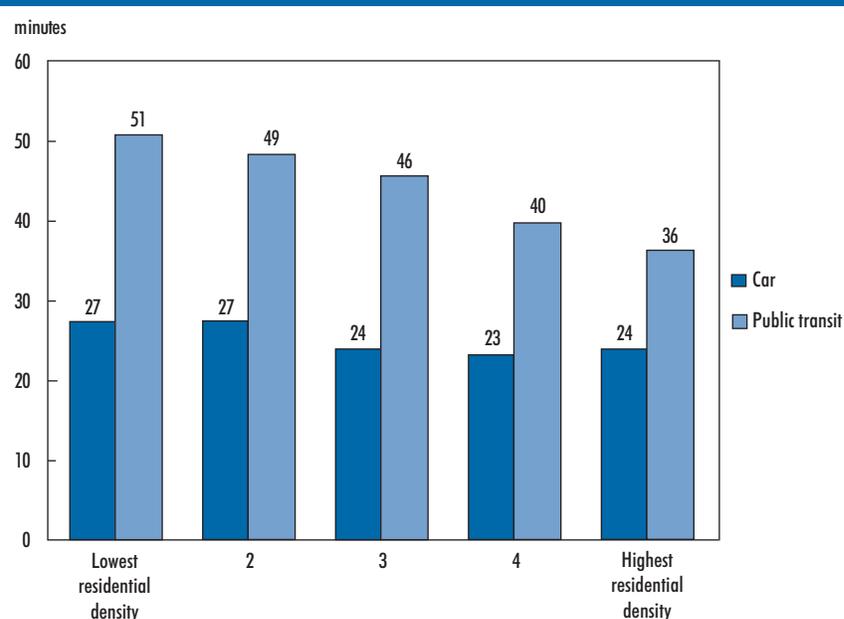
* statistically significant difference from reference group at $p < 0.05$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

times are longer because the distances are greater. Less frequent service may also increase public transit commuting times if transfers are necessary and schedules are out of sync.

The impact of neighbourhood is evident when public transit users in metropolitan areas with 250,000 or more residents are examined. In neighbourhoods with the highest residential density, typical of city centres, public transit users' average commuting time was 36 minutes. In comparison, public transit users in the lowest residential density neighbourhoods took an average of 51 minutes to get to work. On the other hand, there was little or no connection between residential density and the commuting times of car users (Chart 1).

Chart 1 In low-density neighbourhoods, public transit takes more time



Note: For workers living in a census metropolitan area of 250,000 or more residents.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

Traffic congestion makes commutes longer and affects many workers

In the 2010 General Social Survey, workers were asked for the first time whether traffic congestion was recurrent, occasional or non-existent during their daily commute to work. The following analysis is confined to full-time workers as respondents were asked about the frequency of congestion during an entire week.

In 2010, nearly 20% of full-time workers reported experiencing traffic congestion every day they commuted to work. Another 8% said they encountered congestion three or four times a week. On the other hand, a majority of workers (51%) said they were never caught in traffic jams on the way to work (Table 2).

Congestion problems were more frequent for car users in larger metropolitan areas. In the largest metropolitan areas, for example, about 30% of car users who were employed full time experienced heavy traffic every work day. In comparison, this was the case for 8% of workers

living outside census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations.

Public transit users were not immune from traffic problems (Chart 2). This is attributable in part to the fact that many buses use the same road lanes as private cars and that some workers drive to park-and-ride lots before taking public transit. In 2010, in the six largest metropolitan areas, 53% of public transit users encountered congestion at least one day a week, compared with 67% of car users. However, they experienced congestion less frequently than car users (22% of public transit users were caught in traffic at least three days a week, compared with 41% of car users). It is impossible to differentiate between subway users and bus riders.

Not surprisingly, car users in large metropolitan areas who frequently experienced traffic congestion had longer commuting times (Chart 3). Congestion had a particularly large impact on workers who commuted more than 25 kilometres: those who never encountered congestion took

an average of 36 minutes to get to work, while those who were caught in traffic at least three days a week took 51 minutes.

Part 2: Workers' perceptions of commuting time

Most workers are satisfied with their commuting times

Some people may consider a commute to work of 45 minutes or more acceptable, while others may find this hard to bear. How satisfied are workers with their commuting times?

In general, satisfaction with commuting times was high: 39% said they were very satisfied with the amount of time it took to get to work, and another 46% said they were satisfied. This leaves 15% of workers who were dissatisfied with the amount of time required to travel to work. The proportion of dissatisfied workers was highest (20%) in census metropolitan areas with 1 million residents or more. Outside these areas, the proportion of dissatisfied workers ranged from 8% to 10% (Table 3).

Table 2 Frequency of traffic congestion by region of residence and mode of transportation, full-time workers, 2010

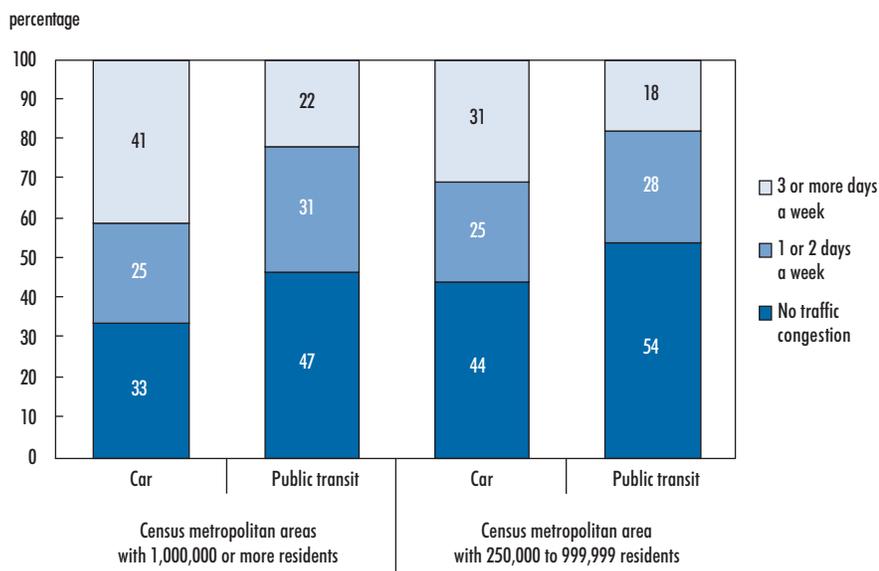
	Type of region of residence					Outside census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations
	Total	Census metropolitan areas of 1,000,000 or more residents†	Census metropolitan areas of 250,000 to 999,999 residents	Census metropolitan areas of less than 250,000 residents	Census agglomerations	
	percentage					
All full-time workers	100	100	100	100	100	100
No traffic congestion	51	38	47*	53*	67*	78*
1 or 2 days a week	22	26	25	24	15	11*
3 or 4 days a week	8	10	10	8	7*	4 ^{E*}
Every day	19	26	19*	16*	11*	8*
Car drivers and passengers	100	100	100	100	100	100
No traffic congestion	50	33	44*	52*	65*	77*
1 or 2 days a week	21	25	25	24	16*	11*
3 or 4 days a week	9	12	10	8 ^{E*}	7*	4 ^{E*}
Every day	20	30	20*	16*	12*	8*

† reference group

* statistically significant difference from reference group at $p < 0.05$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

Chart 2 Many public transit users experience traffic congestion 3 or more days a week



Note: For full-time workers living in a census metropolitan area of 250,000 or more residents.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

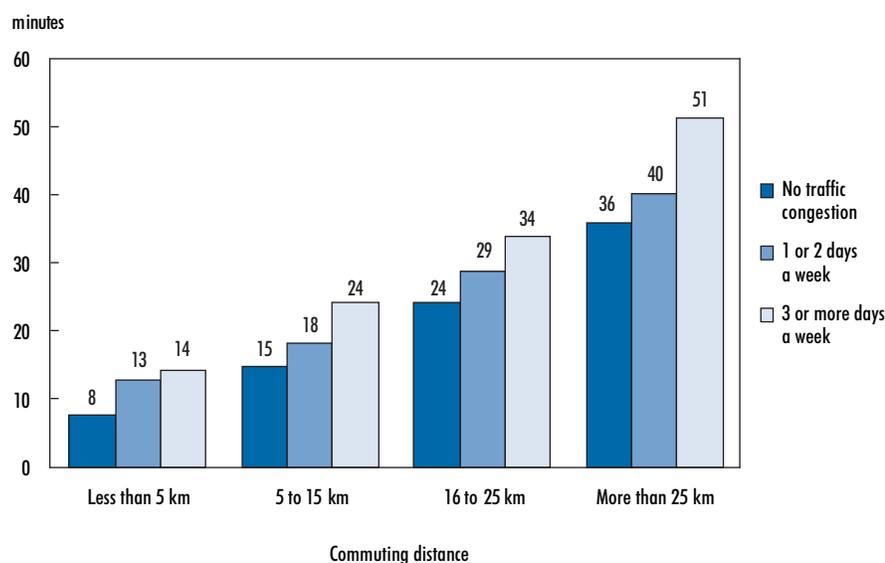
Not surprisingly, dissatisfaction increased with commuting time. Nevertheless, a slight majority (55%) of those who took 45 minutes or more to get to work said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their commuting time. People who choose to live a long distance from their place of work might be more likely to accept the fact that it takes them a considerable amount of time to commute.

Traffic congestion is a major source of dissatisfaction

Much more than commuting time, traffic congestion leaves people very dissatisfied. In the absence of traffic congestion, a large majority of workers said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their commuting times. For example, 24% of those who had commuting times of 45 minutes or longer but never experienced traffic congestion said they were dissatisfied with that length of time (Table 3). The proportion was substantially higher (64%) for those who spent the same amount of time commuting but were caught in traffic at least three days a week.

The results were similar for other categories of commuting time, with very low levels of dissatisfaction for workers who never encountered congestion and much higher levels for those who did so every day or most days.

Chart 3 Traffic congestion incidence on time spent commuting in the car, by commuting distance



Note: For full-time workers living in a census metropolitan area of 250,000 or more residents.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

Public transit users are more tolerant of longer commuting times

In larger metropolitan areas, 6% of workers who used an active mode of transportation (walking or bicycling) to get to work were dissatisfied with their commuting time. Public transit users were more likely than car users to be dissatisfied with their commuting times (23% versus 18%). Public transit users' higher level of dissatisfaction was primarily due to the fact it took them longer on average than car users to get to work.

However, when commuting times were taken into account, a complex relationship between transportation

Table 3 Satisfaction with time spent commuting to work, 2010

	Degree of satisfaction		
	Very dissatisfied or dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
	percentage		
Total Canada	15	46	39
Type of region of residence			
Census metropolitan areas of 1,000,000 or more residents†	20	49	31
Census metropolitan areas of 250,000 to 999,999 residents	14*	48	38*
Census metropolitan areas of less than 250,000 residents	8*	46	46*
Census agglomerations	9*	42*	49*
Outside of census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations	10*	41*	49*
Time spent commuting to work			
Less than 15 minutes†	4	26	70
15 to 29 minutes	7*	55*	38*
30 to 44 minutes	16*	63*	21*
45 minutes or more	45*	46*	9*
Time spent commuting to work and frequency of traffic congestion¹			
Less than 15 minutes			
No congestion†	3 ^E	19	78
1 or 2 days a week	4 ^E	39*	57*
3 or more days a week	12 ^{E*}	54*	34*
15 to 29 minutes			
No congestion†	3 ^E	43	54
1 or 2 days a week	2 ^E	67*	31*
3 or more days a week	23*	66*	11*
30 to 44 minutes			
No congestion†	5 ^E	57	38
1 or 2 days a week	10 ^E	74*	16 ^{E*}
3 or more days a week	33*	62	5 ^{E*}
45 minutes or more			
No congestion†	24	57	20
1 or 2 days a week	38*	52	10 ^{E*}
3 or more days a week	64*	34*	F*
Mode of transportation²			
Car/private vehicle†	18	49	32
Public transit	23*	52	25*
Active transportation (walking or cycling)	6 ^{E*}	27*	66*

† reference group

* statistically significant difference from reference group at $p < 0.05$

1. For full-time workers only.

2. Workers living in census metropolitan areas of 250,000 residents or more only.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

Changes in round-trip commuting times

The round-trip commute between home and work is not always direct. Many workers make one or more stops en route—to drop off their children at school or daycare, buy a few things at the grocery store or pick up clothing at the dry-cleaner's. Obviously, these stops and side trips increase total commuting time between home and work.

If the entire duration of travel between home and place of work includes such side trips, the average round-trip commute was 65 minutes in 2010 for workers making a round trip on weekdays between their home and their main place of work. The average round-trip commuting time has increased: it was 63 minutes in 2005, 59 minutes in 1998 and 54 minutes in 1992. It was longer in the three largest metropolitan areas: 81 minutes in Toronto, 76 minutes in Montréal and 74 minutes in Vancouver.

For all workers, side trips to buy goods and services were the largest contributors to the increase in round-trip commuting times to work, followed by travel for child-care activities (appointments, school, etc.) and travel to restaurants.

For more information on the methods used to estimate round trip commuting times, please refer to: Turcotte, Martin. 2007. *The time it takes to get to work and back*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-622.

mode and satisfaction level emerged (Chart 4). For shorter commuting times, public transit users were less satisfied than car users. Yet, as commuting time increased, the pattern was reversed. For example, 21% of car users with commuting times between 30 and 44 minutes said they were dissatisfied, compared with 10% of public transit users.

Part 3: What workers think about public transit

A major goal of urban transportation is to encourage car users to leave the comfort and convenience of their automobiles and take public transit. In Canada in 2010, 82% of workers travelled to work by car, 12% took public transit, and 6% walked or bicycled.

In the 2010 General Social Survey, workers who did not use public transit were asked if they had ever tried using public transit to travel to work. They were also asked how they rated the level of convenience of public transit.

Of the 10.6 million workers who commuted by car, 15%, or 1.6 million, had tried using public transit to get to work. Slightly less than half (47%) of those who had tried public transit felt that it was a convenient way to get to work.

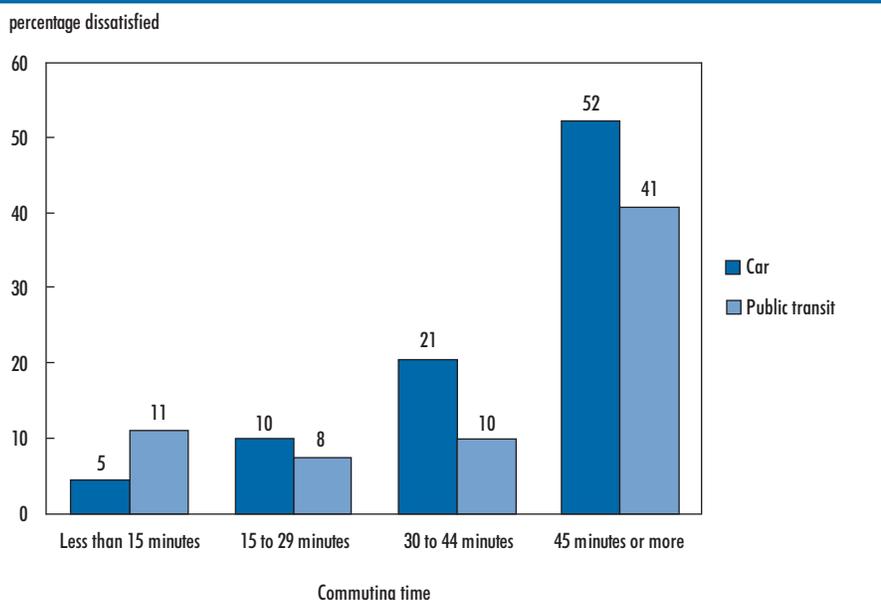
The same question was asked of the 9 million car users who had never tried using public transit to commute to work. Of that group, 15% thought that it would be convenient (Figure 1).

In summary, of the 10.6 million car users, just over 2 million felt that public transit would be convenient for them, while about 8.3 million thought it would be somewhat or very inconvenient.

Part 4: The impact of commuting on stress, well-being and work-life balance

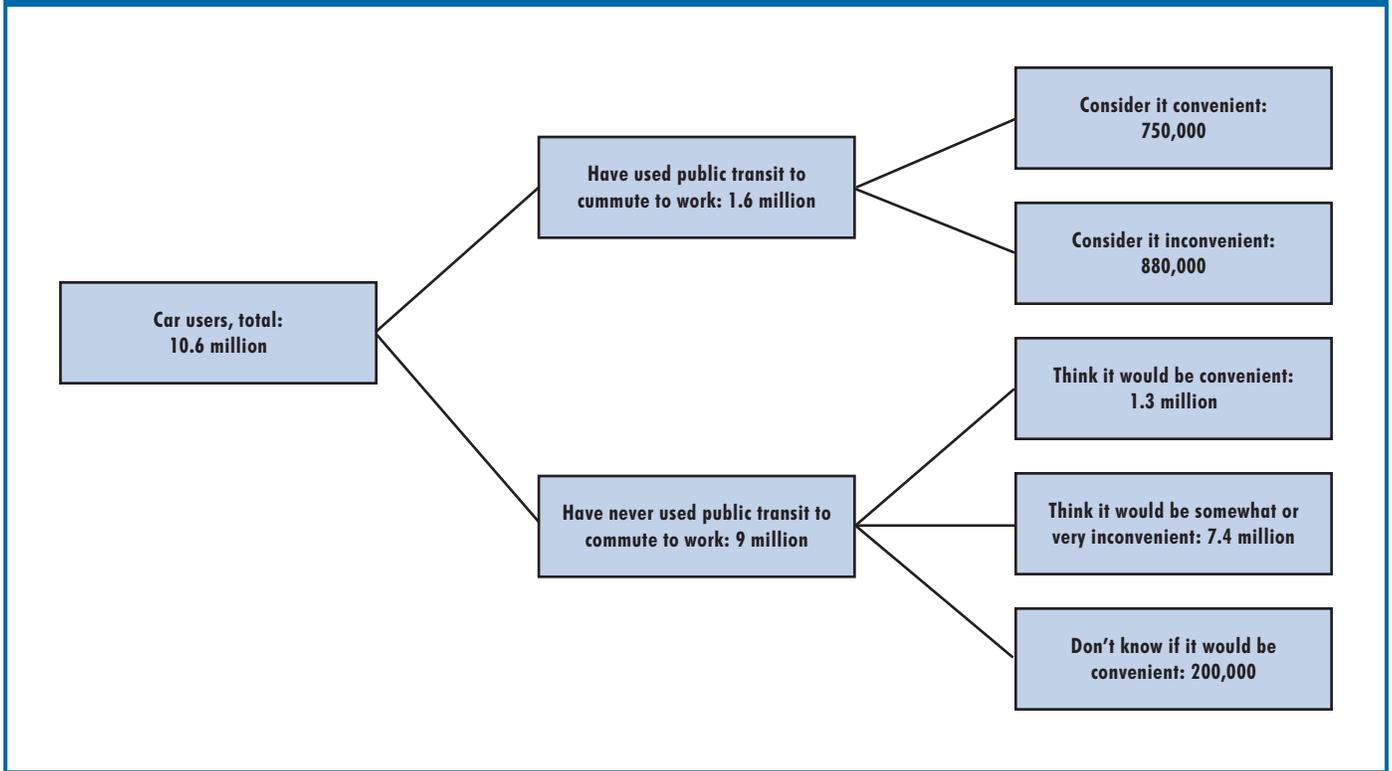
A number of factors come into play in the choice of where to live. One of them is distance from work. If it is assumed that for people who choose to live far from where they work, the advantages of the location are well worth the time spent commuting.

Chart 4 Car users with the longest commutes more likely than public transit users to be dissatisfied with commuting time



Note: For full-time workers living in a census metropolitan area of 250,000 or more residents.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

Figure 1 A majority of car users find public transit inconvenient



Accordingly, general well-being or satisfaction should be similar regardless of the amount of time it takes to commute to work. However, the results of the General Social Survey on Time Use show this is not the case and that longer commuting times are associated with higher stress and less satisfaction with work-life balance.

Workers with longer commutes find most days stressful

The connection between commuting times and stress was clear. Of the full-time workers who took 45 minutes or more to travel to work, 36% said that most days were quite or extremely stressful. In contrast, this was the case for 23% of workers whose commuting time was less than 15 minutes (Table 4).

The same type of difference was observed for the frequency with which workers experienced traffic congestion. Of those who

were caught in traffic at least three days a week (about one out of four workers), 38% said that most days were quite or extremely stressful. The corresponding proportion was 25% for those who never encountered traffic problems on their way to work.

High stress levels are associated with a number of other factors such as health status, hours worked, presence of children and occupation (Table 4). Some of these factors, such as hours worked or health status, had a greater impact on stress levels than did commuting times. For example, 43% of full-time workers who were in fair or poor health described most days as quite or extremely stressful, compared with 21% of those who were in excellent health. On the other hand, many factors were less closely associated with stress than commuting time, such as the presence of children, education and household income.

Moreover, when the impact of all these factors was kept constant in a regression model, the general conclusion was unchanged: workers who experienced traffic congestion more frequently and workers who had longer commuting times were more likely to rate most days as quite or extremely stressful (data not shown).

The association between commuting times, the frequency of traffic congestion and a series of time-stress indicators is presented in Chart 5. For each indicator, an increase in commuting time is associated with an increase in the prevalence of stress. For example, 39% of full-time workers who took less than 15 minutes to travel to the office felt that they felt pressed for time every day. Among those whose commuting time was 45 minutes or more, the proportion was almost one out of two (49%). The feeling of being trapped in a routine and the impression that there is no time for fun also increased with commuting time.

Table 4 Commuting time, traffic congestion and other factors associated with stress and work–family balance, full-time workers, 2010

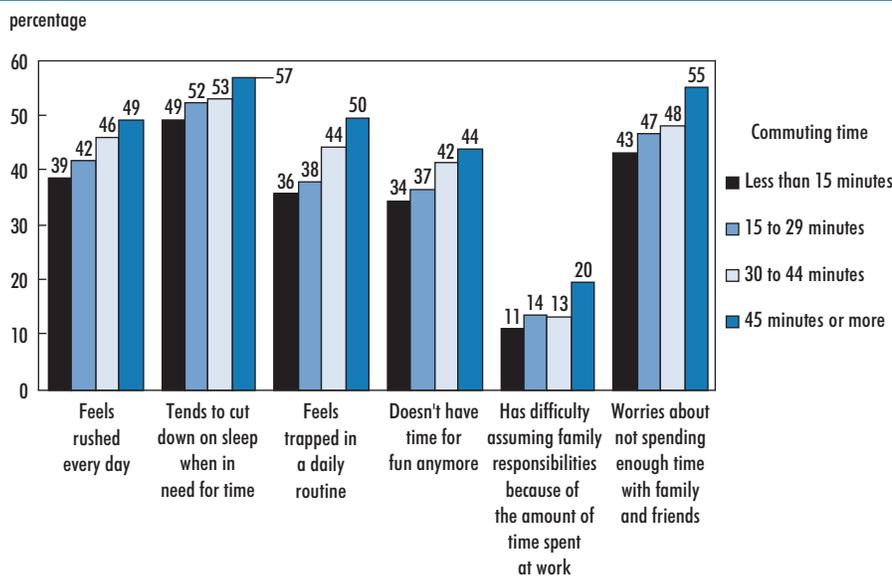
	Workers describing their days as somewhat or very stressful	Workers satisfied or very satisfied with their work–family balance
	percentage	
Time spent commuting to work		
Less than 15 minutes†	23	79
15 to 29 minutes	26	73*
30 to 44 minutes	32*	70*
45 minutes or more	36*	65*
Frequency of traffic congestion		
No congestion†	25	78
1 or 2 days a week	23	71*
3 or more days a week	38*	64*
Sex		
Male†	26	74
Female	31*	72
Age		
Less than 25 years†	18	76
25 to 34 years	27*	67*
35 to 44 years	34*	69*
45 to 54 years	29*	76
55 years or more	24*	82*
Children present at home		
No†	27	75
Yes	31	70
Self-reported health		
Excellent†	21	83
Very good	23	78*
Good	32*	69*
Fairly good or bad	43*	54*
Education		
High school diploma or less†	26	76
College or trade school diploma	29	74
University degree	29*	69*
Household income		
Less than \$60,000†	28	73
\$60,000 to \$99,999	27	73
\$100,000 or more	30	74
Not stated	26	73
Occupation		
Management occupations†	38	67
Professional occupations	31*	70
Technologists, technicians and technical occupations	30*	71
Clerical occupations	30*	76*
Sales and service occupations	25*	75*
Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	23*	75*
Occupations unique to primary industries	21*	82*
Occupations unique to processing, manufacturing and utilities	22*	78*
Hours worked per week		
30 to 39 hours†	23	82
40 to 49 hours	24	76*
50 hours or more	40*	60*

† reference group

* statistically significant difference from reference group at $p < 0.05$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

Chart 5 The likelihood of feeling trapped in a daily routine increases with commuting time



Note: For full-time workers.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

In general, workers were satisfied with the amount of time it took them to travel to work. However, dissatisfaction was more common in larger urban centres, where it was observed that frequent encounters with traffic congestion had quite a large impact on the likelihood of being dissatisfied with commuting times.

Most car users (85%) had never used public transit to travel to their current place of work. Of that group, 15% believed that public transit would be convenient for them. The other 85% thought it would be somewhat or very inconvenient for them (or did not know). Of the 15% of car users who had used public transit to get to work, just under half believed that public transit would be convenient for them.

Longer commuting times were associated with higher stress levels in full-time workers. The same was true for those who often experienced traffic congestion.



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1. Québec City, Winnipeg, Hamilton, London, Kitchener, St. Catharines–Niagara, Halifax, Oshawa, Victoria and Windsor.
2. These results were confirmed by a linear regression model, based on the worker population in the largest metropolitan areas. The independent variables in the model were distance, distance squared, frequency of encounters with traffic congestion and mode of transportation used (car versus public transit). All these variables were statistically significant, and the regression's R^2 was 0.49. For equivalent distance and frequency of traffic congestion, public transit users took an average of 17 minutes longer to get to work than car users.

Workers with longer commutes less satisfied with their work–life balance

In addition to higher stress levels, longer commuting times were associated with work–life balance. Specifically, 79% of people who had commuting times of less than 15 minutes said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their balance between work and family life. This proportion declined as commuting time increased—reaching 65% among workers who took 45 minutes or more to get to work (Table 4). People whose commuting time was 45 minutes or more were also more likely to say that they had difficulty fulfilling their family responsibilities because of the time they spent at work (Chart 5). The feeling of not having enough time for family and friends also increased with commuting time.

Summary

In 2010, it took workers an average of 26 minutes to travel to work. Workers in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver had the longest commuting times, at 33, 31 and 30 minutes respectively.

Public transit users took longer to get to work than car users living an equivalent distance from their place of work. For example, in Canada's six largest metropolitan areas, each of which has a population of at least 1 million, public transit users' average commuting time was 44 minutes. In contrast, the average commuting time for car users was 27 minutes.

Not surprisingly, traffic congestion was more common in larger metropolitan areas and affected more car users. In the major centres, public transit users were not immune from the effects of traffic congestion—in the six largest metropolitan areas, one out of five public transit users reported experiencing traffic congestion at least three days a week. This was less than the two out of five car users who were in the same situation.