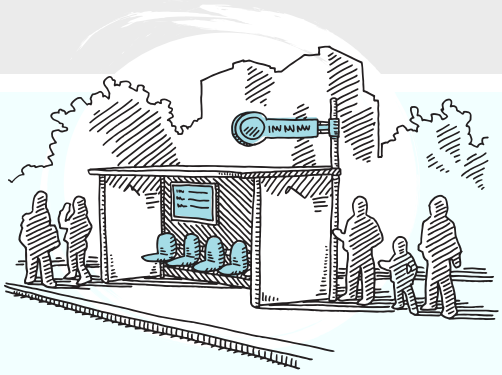
A Healthy, Green and Just Recovery

Public Transit FACTSHEET 1

Invest in public transit



TRANSIT AGENCIES ACROSS CANADA HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING FINANCIALLY AS RIDERSHIP HAS DROPPED AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. MANY HAVE BEEN FORCED TO CUT SERVICES. A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF CITIES IN USA AND CANADA HAS FOUND THAT IN MANY CASES, LOWER-INCOME NEIGHBOURHOODS, THAT DEPEND MORE HEAVILY ON PUBLIC TRANSIT, HAVE BEEN HARDER HIT BY SERVICE CUTS THAN HIGHER-INCOME NEIGHBOURHOODS. IT IS TIME TO RECOGNIZE PUBLIC TRANSIT AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE THAT PROVIDES MANY HEALTH, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS, THAT SHOULD RECEIVE PERMANENT FUNDING FOR OPERATING COSTS FROM CANADIAN GOVERNMENTS.

Public transit is good for us, our communities and our planet.

PUBLIC TRANSIT IS MORE AFFORDABLE

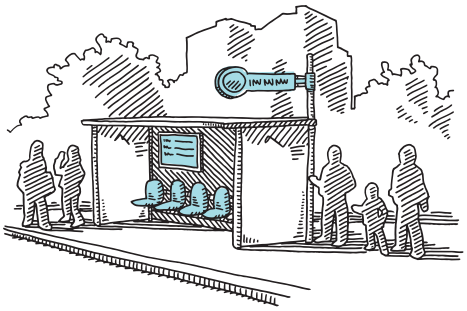
In Canada, it typically costs between $6,000 and $13,000 per year to own and operate a car. Public transit is a more affordable option. Households can save, on average, $10,000 per year by using public transit. An efficient public transit system improves access to jobs, schools, essential services and recreational opportunities for people of all ages and circumstances at a lower cost.

PUBLIC TRANSIT INCREASES SOCIAL EQUITY

Public transit can reduce social inequities that contribute to poor health. About 20-40% of the people in our communities do not drive because of their age, income or ability, or choose not to drive. In Canada, newcomers and women who commute to work rely more heavily on public transit. An efficient and reliable public transit system provides a more independent and affordable way to get around. By eliminating the need to own a car (or a second car), public transit also allows people living on low incomes to direct more of their income to other essentials such as food, clothing and rent. Public transit can also be designed to meet the needs of rural or remote communities, senior populations, and those who are physically or otherwise unable to drive.

PUBLIC TRANSIT REDUCES AIR POLLUTION

Public transit can reduce hospital visits, chronic diseases and early deaths by reducing air pollution. Air pollution causes about 14,600 early deaths each year in Canada. While air pollution is harmful to everyone, it is a greater risk for young children, older people, and those with pre-existing health conditions. Traffic-related air pollution is a serious concern in Canada because nearly one third of the population – about 10 million people – live in close proximity to high-volume traffic corridors that produce higher levels of air pollution.



The physical and mental health of Canadians is already being harmed by climate change.

Public transit reduces air pollution in a few ways. People who live in communities with high-quality public transit drive half as many kilometres as residents who live in car-oriented communities. In addition, public transit produces less air pollution per passenger-kilometre travelled than private vehicles. The health benefits from air quality improvements are even greater when transit vehicles are powered by electricity.

PUBLIC TRANSIT INCREASES ROAD SAFETY

Public transit can make our roads safer. Transit travel tends to have a lower fatality rate per passenger-kilometre travelled than car travel under the same conditions. Traffic fatalities for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, passengers, and transit users decline significantly as transit ridership increases in a community.

PUBLIC TRANSIT INCREASES PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Public transit can improve health by increasing physical activity. Transit use increases physical activity because most transit trips begin and end with some form of active travel. A study in Montreal found that people could get 25% of the physical activity recommended for good health with one round trip on public transit. The benefits of physical activity are well known; it can reduce the risk of over 25 chronic conditions including heart disease, breast cancer, colon cancer, and Type 2 diabetes. Public transit can also improve mental health by increasing physical activity, and by providing greater access to jobs, schools, services, and social and recreational activities.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS ALREADY HARMING THE HEALTH OF CANADIANS

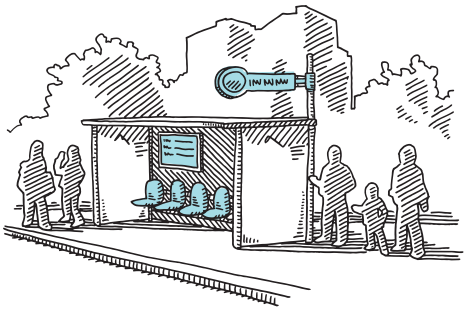
The physical and mental health of Canadians is already being harmed by climate change. In different parts of the county, climate change has increased the frequency and intensity of floods, wildfires, hurricanes, ice storms, and heat waves over the last several decades. These events have exposed millions to extremely high levels of toxic air pollution, forced hundreds of thousands of Canadians to evacuate their homes, and left hundreds of thousands without power for extended periods. Climate change is also melting permafrost in the far North, increasing sea levels on three coast lines, and extending the range of vector-borne diseases such as Lyme disease.

While climate change affects everyone, it has a greater impact on some. Young children, older Canadians, and people with pre-existing health conditions are more sensitive to heat waves and wildfire smoke. Indigenous Peoples in Northern communities can experience greater food insecurity as melting permafrost and changes in plant and animal populations disrupt their access to traditional food sources. In addition, people who live on lower incomes may not have the resources to protect themselves, or recover from, extreme weather events such as heat waves and floods.

PUBLIC TRANSIT REDUCES GREENHOUSE GASES

The international community has concluded that all countries must reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45% by 2030 and to zero by 2050 if we are to avoid catastrophic levels of global warming. The transportation sector is responsible for one quarter of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions.

By investing in public transit, we can reduce the total vehicle-kilometres travelled and the associated greenhouse gas emissions in communities across the country. Experience in Europe has shown that when road space is reallocated to public transit, cyclists and pedestrians, there is a gradual decrease in vehicle-kilometres travelled as drivers gradually shift to other modes of transport.



Governments can foster increased ridership along with all of the health, social and environmental benefits associated with public transit.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT MUST SUPPORT PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ridership on public transit is dependent on a built environment that supports its use. Several factors are particularly important:

- *the distance to transit stops* – more people will take transit if it is short walk or bike ride to a transit stop (i.e., ten minutes);
- *the density of neighbourhoods* – in order for transit service to be frequent and reliable, there must be a sufficient number of people living or working near a transit stop;
- *access to destinations* – the transit system must deliver people to popular destinations; and
- *comfort and convenience* – people who have the option of driving will only choose transit if it is as comfortable and convenient as driving, so frequent service and transit shelters are essential.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

For lower-income neighbourhoods that depend more on public transit for travel, service should be increased and dedicated bus lanes installed to reduce overcrowding. Transit travel must be made as safe as possible, especially during the pandemic.

With governments seeking to kick-start economies in communities across the country, investments in transit infrastructure and the electrification of transit vehicles are ways to create jobs, increase service and cultivate new green technologies. These investments will also reduce air pollution, health care costs, and greenhouse gas emissions.

By providing permanent funding for transit services, governments can foster increased ridership along with all of the health, social and environmental benefits associated with public transit.

Use your voice to call for greater investments in public transit to create healthy, green and just communities.

For more information, see our Backgrounder on Public Transit

CANADIAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION
OPHA Ontario Public Health Association / l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario
CHASE CANADIAN HEALTH ASSOCIATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY & EQUITY