

## NHS in Brief

# Commuting to work



National Household Survey (NHS), 2011



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- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| .              | not available for any reference period   |
| ..             | not available for a specific reference period  |
| ...            | not applicable   |
| 0              | true zero or a value rounded to zero   |
| 0 <sup>s</sup> | value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded |
| P              | preliminary  |
| r              | revised  |
| x              | suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the <i>Statistics Act</i>                                   |
| E              | use with caution   |
| F              | too unreliable to be published   |
| *              | significantly different from reference category<br>( $p < 0.05$ )  |

### Box 1: National Household Survey

This is the second release of data from the National Household Survey (NHS). Roughly 4.5 million households across Canada were selected for the NHS, representing about one-third of all households.

This *NHS in Brief* article, together with the article [Language use in the workplace in Canada](#), Catalogue no. 99-012-X2011003, complements the analytical document [Portrait of Canada's Labour Force](#), Catalogue no. 99-012-X2011002.

Further information on the National Household Survey can be found in the [National Household Survey User Guide](#), Catalogue no. 99-001-X. Specific information on the quality and comparability of NHS data on journey to work can be found in the [Journey to Work Reference Guide, National Household Survey](#), Catalogue no. 99-012-X2011008.

According to the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), roughly 15.4 million Canadians commuted to work, while 1.1 million worked at home most of the time.<sup>1</sup>

Of those who commuted, 13.5 million went to a usual place of work and another 1.9 million travelled to a location that varied from day to day.

Car, truck or van was by far the most commonly used mode of transportation. Overall, about four out of five Canadian commuters used private vehicles.

Specifically, 74.0% of commuters, or 11.4 million workers drove a vehicle to work. Another 5.6%, or 867,100 people made the trip as passengers.

The percentage of commuters who used public transit for the longest part of their trip was 12.0% in Canada in 2011. By comparison, 11.0% of commuters reported taking public transit in the 2006 Census of Population.

In the 2011 NHS, detailed information about the type of public transit used was collected for the first time. Of public transit users, 63.5% commuted by bus, 25.0% by subway or elevated rail, 11.2% by light rail, streetcar or commuter train, and 0.3% by ferry.

Finally, in 2011, 880,800 commuters walked to work (5.7%), and 201,800 cycled (1.3%). In the 2006 Census, 6.4% of commuters walked and 1.3% cycled.

### Mode of transportation in metropolitan Canada

In 2011, there were 33 census metropolitan areas (CMAs) in Canada (see [Box 2](#) for the definitions of the geographical units mentioned in this report). In general, the availability of public transit increases with the size of the CMA. Thus, commuters living in the Toronto and Montréal CMAs, the two most populous metropolitan areas in Canada, were the most likely to take public transit to work (23.3% in Toronto and 22.2% in Montréal). Public transit use was also comparatively widespread in Ottawa - Gatineau (20.1%) and Vancouver (19.7%) (see [Table 1.a](#) and [Table 1.b](#) for the corresponding proportions in the 2006 Census).

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1. Just over 66,000 people worked outside Canada.

## Commuting to work

The types of public transit used varied substantially from one CMA to another. For example, in Ottawa - Gatineau, almost all commuters who used public transit took the bus (99.0% of them).<sup>2</sup> By comparison, 51.0% of public transit users in Montréal and 45.4% in Toronto were bus riders (Figure 1).

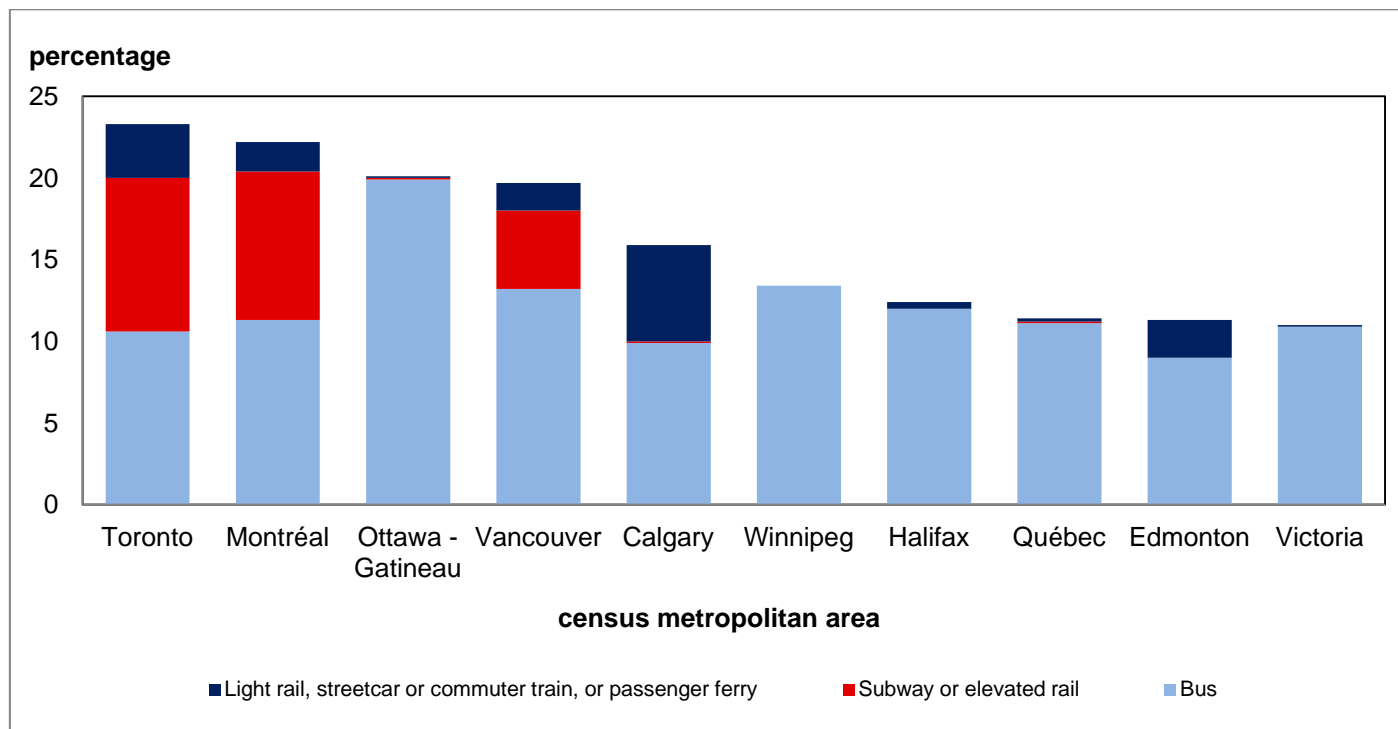
### Box 2: Census metropolitan area

A census metropolitan area (CMA) is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a population centre (known as the core). A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which 50,000 or more must live in the core.

[Census tracts \(CTs\)](#) are small, relatively stable geographical areas that usually have a population between 2,500 and 8,000 persons. They are located in [census metropolitan areas \(CMAs\)](#) and in [census agglomerations \(CAs\)](#) with a core population of 50,000 or more.

The central municipality ([census subdivision](#)) of a CMA or CA is the one that tends to lend its name to the CMA or the CA. For example, in the Montréal census metropolitan area, the central municipality is the City of Montréal. All other municipalities within the boundaries of the CMA or CA are considered peripheral to the central municipality.

**Figure 1 Proportion of workers taking public transit to work, by census metropolitan area and type of public transit, 2011**



Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

2. Some people work in a different CMA from the CMA in which their usual place of residence is located. This helps explain the fact that a small percentage of people report commuting by subway or elevated rail even though those services are not available in their CMA of residence (Ottawa - Gatineau or Québec, for example).

## Commuting to work

In general, the CMAs that have the highest proportions of public transit users also have the lowest proportions of commuters using private vehicles. However, the proportion of commuters who travel by car, truck or van varies with the location of their residence within these CMAs. For example, in a number of census tracts in Canada's six largest CMAs, the proportion of commuters using private vehicles exceeded 90% (see the [maps](#) showing the percentage of the employed labour force using a car, truck or van to get to work).

Active transportation, that is, walking or bicycling, is an option for many commuters who live close to their place of work. In 2011, active transportation was most common in the Victoria CMA, where it was used by approximately one commuter in six (10.0% walked and 5.9% bicycled).

The other CMAs with relatively higher proportions of walkers were Kingston (8.5%) and Halifax (8.5%). Proportionally, the number of cyclists was above average in the Kelowna CMA (2.6%) and the Ottawa - Gatineau CMA (2.2%) ([Table 1.a](#)).

**Table 1.a Proportion of workers commuting to work by car, truck or van, by public transit, on foot, or by bicycle, census metropolitan areas, 2011**

Census metropolitan area	Car, truck or van (total)	Car, truck or van (driver)	Car, truck or van (passenger)	Public transit	Walking	Bicycle
	percentage					
St. John's (Newfoundland and Labrador)	89.1	79.7	9.4	3.0	5.4	0.2
Halifax (Nova Scotia)	76.6	68.7	7.9	12.5	8.5	1.1
Moncton (New Brunswick)	88.8	78.8	10.1	3.3	6.1	0.6
Saint John (New Brunswick)	89.0	79.6	9.4	4.7	5.1	0.2
Saguenay (Quebec)	91.6	88.0	3.6	2.3	4.3	0.4
Québec (Quebec)	80.5	76.4	4.1	11.3	6.2	1.3
Sherbrooke (Quebec)	87.5	83.5	4.0	4.2	6.6	0.8
Trois-Rivières (Quebec)	90.8	87.5	3.4	2.3	5.1	1.0
Montréal (Quebec)	69.8	66.4	3.4	22.2	5.3	1.7
Ottawa - Gatineau (Ontario/Quebec)	70.4	63.8	6.7	20.1	6.3	2.2
Ottawa - Gatineau (Quebec side)	78.1	71.0	7.1	15.3	4.1	1.7
Ottawa - Gatineau (Ontario side)	67.7	61.2	6.5	21.8	7.1	2.4
Kingston (Ontario)	83.1	75.5	7.6	5.1	8.5	2.2
Peterborough (Ontario)	86.9	79.9	7.0	3.5	7.0	1.7
Oshawa (Ontario)	86.9	80.8	6.1	8.5	3.2	0.4
Toronto (Ontario)	69.9	64.5	5.4	23.3	4.6	1.2
Hamilton (Ontario)	84.4	77.8	6.7	9.3	4.5	0.7
St. Catharines - Niagara (Ontario)	90.3	83.2	7.0	2.9	4.8	1.2
Kitchener - Cambridge - Waterloo (Ontario)	88.2	81.4	6.7	5.4	4.3	1.1
Brantford (Ontario)	91.4	83.7	7.7	2.8	4.1	0.7
Guelph (Ontario)	86.2	79.1	7.0	6.2	5.1	1.5

## Commuting to work

**Table 1.a Proportion of workers commuting to work by car, truck or van, by public transit, on foot, or by bicycle, census metropolitan areas, 2011** (continued)

Census metropolitan area	Car, truck or van (total)	Car, truck or van (driver)	Car, truck or van (passenger)	Public transit	Walking	Bicycle
	percentage					
London (Ontario)	85.4	78.6	6.7	6.9	5.4	1.5
Windsor (Ontario)	91.3	85.9	5.5	3.0	3.7	1.1
Barrie (Ontario)	89.8	82.7	7.1	4.6	3.7	0.7
Greater Sudbury (Ontario)	87.7	80.7	7.0	4.5	5.3	0.7
Thunder Bay (Ontario)	88.5	82.3	6.2	3.6	5.0	1.3
Winnipeg (Manitoba)	78.2	71.0	7.2	13.4	5.1	2.0
Regina (Saskatchewan)	88.6	81.7	6.8	4.8	4.7	1.2
Saskatoon (Saskatchewan)	86.5	80.5	6.0	4.4	5.1	2.0
Calgary (Alberta)	76.7	71.3	5.4	15.9	4.9	1.2
Edmonton (Alberta)	82.2	76.7	5.5	11.3	4.1	1.1
Kelowna (British Columbia)	87.2	81.6	5.5	3.4	4.9	2.6
Abbotsford - Mission (British Columbia)	92.2	84.6	7.6	2.5	2.6	0.8
Vancouver (British Columbia)	70.8	65.9	4.9	19.7	6.3	1.8
Victoria (British Columbia)	70.7	65.8	4.9	11.1	10.0	5.9

Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

**Table 1.b Proportion of workers commuting to work by car, truck or van, by public transit, on foot, or by bicycle, census metropolitan areas, 2006**

Census metropolitan area	Car, truck or van (total)	Car, truck or van (driver)	Car, truck or van (passenger)	Public transit	Walking	Bicycle
	percentage					
St. John's (Newfoundland and Labrador)	88.2	74.4	13.8	2.9	6.6	0.3
Halifax (Nova Scotia)	75.8	65.1	10.6	11.9	10.1	1.0
Moncton (New Brunswick)	87.1	74.7	12.4	2.8	7.6	1.0
Saint John (New Brunswick)	86.3	75.1	11.2	4.4	7.3	0.3
Saguenay (Quebec)	90.5	85.2	5.3	2.4	5.2	0.8
Québec (Quebec)	80.4	74.9	5.4	10.2	7.3	1.4
Sherbrooke (Quebec)	86.4	80.5	5.9	4.7	7.3	0.9
Trois-Rivières (Quebec)	89.5	84.9	4.6	2.4	6.0	1.4
Montréal (Quebec)	70.4	65.4	5.0	21.4	5.7	1.6

## Commuting to work

**Table 1.b Proportion of workers commuting to work by car, truck or van, by public transit, on foot, or by bicycle, census metropolitan areas, 2006** (continued)

Census metropolitan area	Car, truck or van (total)	Car, truck or van (driver)	Car, truck or van (passenger)	Public transit	Walking	Bicycle
	percentage					
Ottawa - Gatineau (Ontario/Quebec)	70.8	62.8	8.0	19.4	6.8	2.1
Ottawa - Gatineau (Quebec side)	78.6	69.6	9.0	14.3	4.6	1.7
Ottawa - Gatineau (Ontario side)	68.0	60.4	7.7	21.2	7.6	2.2
Kingston (Ontario)	82.4	73.1	9.3	4.1	9.6	2.4
Peterborough (Ontario)	86.3	76.4	10.0	2.5	7.8	2.3
Oshawa (Ontario)	87.6	79.0	8.6	7.9	3.4	0.4
Toronto (Ontario)	71.1	63.6	7.5	22.2	4.8	1.0
Hamilton (Ontario)	84.6	76.1	8.5	8.7	5.0	0.9
St. Catharines - Niagara (Ontario)	89.9	81.0	8.8	2.5	5.0	1.5
Kitchener - Cambridge - Waterloo (Ontario)	87.7	78.3	9.4	4.8	5.1	1.6
Brantford (Ontario)	89.8	80.2	9.5	3.1	4.8	1.1
Guelph (Ontario)	85.1	76.7	8.3	5.8	5.9	2.2
London (Ontario)	84.6	75.5	9.1	6.7	6.1	1.6
Windsor (Ontario)	90.6	83.1	7.6	2.9	4.3	1.3
Barrie (Ontario)	90.6	81.2	9.4	3.8	3.9	0.6
Greater Sudbury (Ontario)	86.9	77.4	9.5	5.2	6.2	0.7
Thunder Bay (Ontario)	88.4	79.8	8.6	3.2	5.9	1.6
Winnipeg (Manitoba)	78.7	69.8	8.9	13.0	5.8	1.6
Regina (Saskatchewan)	87.7	79.6	8.1	4.2	5.8	1.4
Saskatoon (Saskatchewan)	86.1	78.7	7.5	3.7	6.2	2.4
Calgary (Alberta)	76.6	69.1	7.5	15.6	5.4	1.3
Edmonton (Alberta)	82.8	75.0	7.8	9.7	5.1	1.1
Kelowna (British Columbia)	89.1	81.4	7.7	2.7	4.6	2.1
Abbotsford - Mission (British Columbia)	93.2	83.2	10.0	1.8	3.2	0.7
Vancouver (British Columbia)	74.4	67.3	7.1	16.5	6.3	1.7
Victoria (British Columbia)	71.7	64.9	6.8	10.2	10.4	5.6

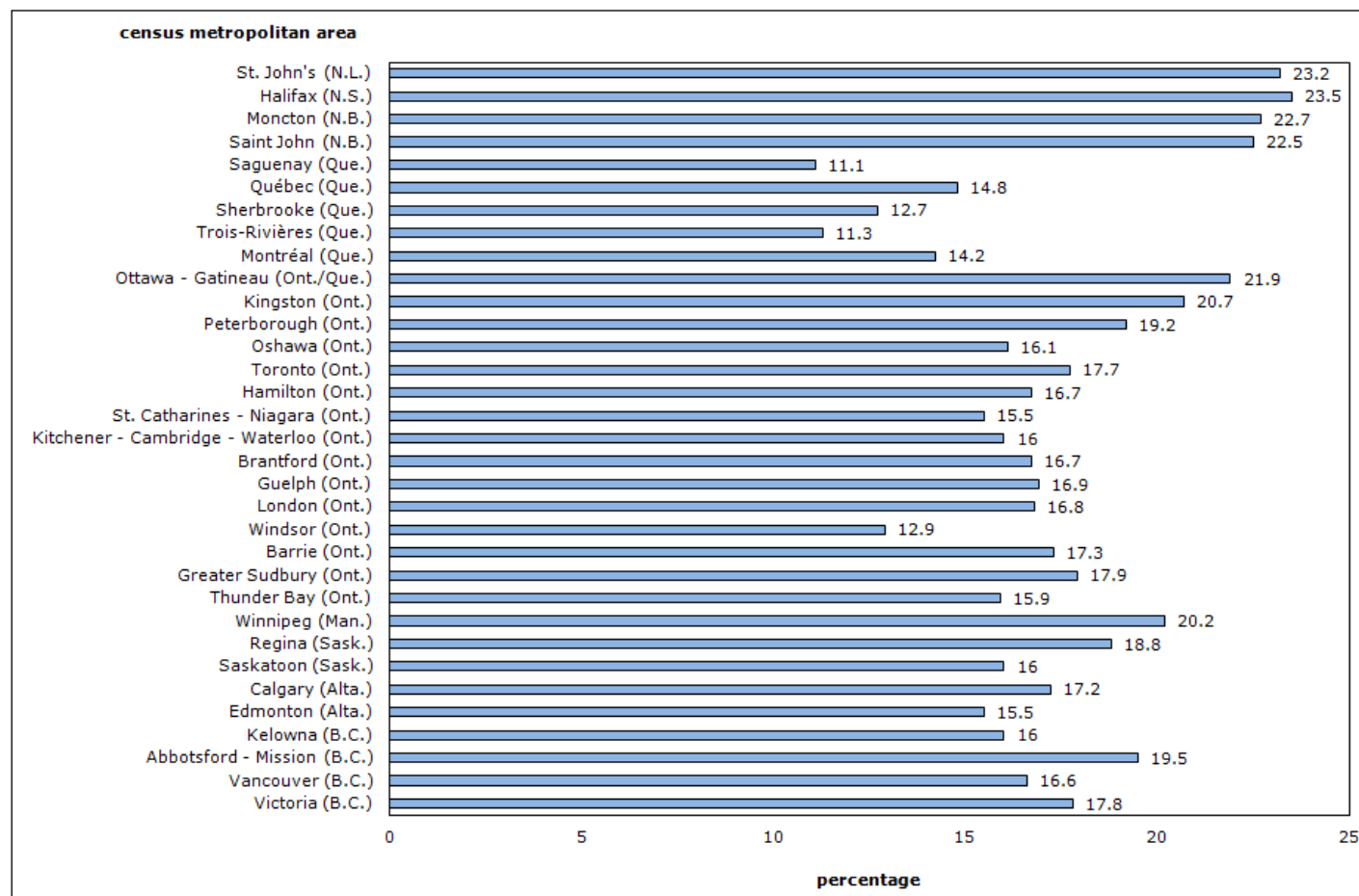
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006.

## Carpooling more popular in eastern Canadian CMAs

In the 2011 NHS, commuters who used a vehicle were asked how many people usually travelled with them in their car, truck or van. Of the people who commuted to work by vehicle, 17.0% carpoolled and the rest (83.0%) drove alone.

In 2011, the highest proportions of carpoolers were in the eastern Canadian CMAs: Halifax (23.5%), St. John's (23.2%) and Moncton (22.7%) (Figure 2). In contrast, the lowest carpooling rates were in metropolitan areas in Quebec: Saguenay (11.1%), Trois-Rivières (11.3%) and Sherbrooke (12.7%).

**Figure 2 Proportion of workers commuting by car, truck or van who carpool, census metropolitan areas, 2011**



Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.



## Travel time to work

In the 2011 NHS, commuters were also asked how long it usually took them to get from home to work. In 2011, commuters spent an average of 25.4 minutes travelling to work. This was almost the same as the average in the United States for the same year (25.5 minutes).<sup>3</sup>

The longest average travel times in CMAs were in Toronto (32.8 minutes), Oshawa (31.8 minutes) and Montréal (29.7 minutes) (Table 2). Comparatively, in the United States in 2011, the longest average travel times were reported in the New York - Northern New Jersey - Long Island metropolitan area (34.7 minutes) and the Washington - Arlington - Alexandria metropolitan area (33.8 minutes).

These average travel times do not reflect the experience of all commuters. For some, travel times are considerably longer. In Canada, 17.2% of commuters usually took 45 minutes or more to get to work. Commuters who live in the area surrounding the Toronto CMA were the most likely to be in this group. In 2011, 29.9% of commuters in Oshawa, 28.4% of those in Toronto and 26.6% of those in Barrie spent 45 minutes or more travelling to work (Table 2).

**Table 2 Usual commuting time to work, census metropolitan areas, 2011**

Census metropolitan area	Average time	0 to 14 minutes	15 to 29 minutes	30 to 44 minutes	45 to 59 minutes	60 minutes or more
	minutes	percentage				
St. John's (Newfoundland and Labrador)	17.9	38.9	46.8	10.2	1.3	2.8
Halifax (Nova Scotia)	23.7	25.8	40.0	22.2	7.1	5.0
Moncton (New Brunswick)	17.2	44.4	40.2	10.9	2.2	2.3
Saint John (New Brunswick)	20.9	32.7	42.9	15.2	5.7	3.6
Saguenay (Quebec)	16.9	48.5	36.6	9.7	3.3	1.9
Québec (Quebec)	22.0	28.0	42.3	20.1	5.9	3.7
Sherbrooke (Quebec)	18.8	39.3	41.4	13.0	3.2	3.0
Trois-Rivières (Quebec)	18.6	44.3	37.5	12.0	2.7	3.6
Montréal (Quebec)	29.7	19.0	31.5	25.6	12.0	11.9
Ottawa - Gatineau (Ontario/Quebec)	26.3	20.9	36.4	26.0	10.4	6.3
Ottawa - Gatineau (Quebec side)	26.7	21.2	34.8	26.7	10.8	6.6
Ottawa - Gatineau (Ontario side)	26.2	20.7	37.0	25.8	10.3	6.1
Kingston (Ontario)	20.4	33.0	43.5	16.4	3.5	3.6
Peterborough (Ontario)	22.2	40.2	33.5	13.4	5.6	7.3
Oshawa (Ontario)	31.8	25.5	29.4	15.3	10.6	19.3
Toronto (Ontario)	32.8	15.4	29.0	27.2	12.7	15.8
Hamilton (Ontario)	26.9	24.9	37.0	18.9	8.3	11.0
St. Catharines - Niagara (Ontario)	20.6	38.8	37.9	13.9	4.2	5.3
Kitchener - Cambridge – Waterloo (Ontario)	21.7	33.2	41.9	14.1	4.6	6.2
Brantford (Ontario)	22.7	38.8	30.3	15.6	7.9	7.4

3. U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey.

## Commuting to work

**Table 2 Usual commuting time to work, census metropolitan areas, 2011** (continued)

Census metropolitan area	Average time	0 to 14 minutes	15 to 29 minutes	30 to 44 minutes	45 to 59 minutes	60 minutes or more
	minutes	percentage				
Guelph (Ontario)	22.8	36.6	34.1	14.8	6.8	7.6
London (Ontario)	21.1	31.8	43.7	15.6	4.5	4.3
Windsor (Ontario)	18.8	34.3	46.5	13.9	3.1	2.2
Barrie (Ontario)	29.6	29.6	27.9	15.8	9.5	17.1
Greater Sudbury (Ontario)	20.1	36.2	39.9	16.4	4.3	3.1
Thunder Bay (Ontario)	17.1	47.0	39.6	9.1	1.7	2.7
Winnipeg (Manitoba)	23.3	24.3	42.3	23.4	6.3	3.9
Regina (Saskatchewan)	17.3	39.1	47.4	9.3	2.2	2.1
Saskatoon (Saskatchewan)	19.9	34.8	47.6	11.5	2.8	3.4
Calgary (Alberta)	27.0	18.0	37.8	27.7	9.5	7.0
Edmonton (Alberta)	25.6	22.7	38.3	25.0	7.9	6.1
Kelowna (British Columbia)	19.2	38.8	41.2	12.8	3.8	3.4
Abbotsford - Mission (British Columbia)	26.7	32.2	30.4	16.5	7.9	13.0
Vancouver (British Columbia)	28.4	19.6	33.0	26.6	11.0	9.9
Victoria (British Columbia)	21.8	30.1	41.7	18.4	5.5	4.3

Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

### Longer travel times by public transit

Commuters who travelled by public transit took longer to get to work, on average, than commuters who used cars. In 2011, commuters who used a private vehicle spent an average of 23.7 minutes travelling to work, compared with 40.4 minutes for bus riders, 44.6 minutes for subway users and 52.5 minutes for light rail, streetcar or commuter train passengers. Public transit travel times include the time required to walk to the bus stop or the subway or train station. They also include waiting times.

In 2011, commuters who walked or bicycled spent the least time travelling to work (on average, 12.7 minutes for walkers and 20.0 minutes for cyclists).

Travel time differences between modes of transportation can vary widely from one CMA to another and by type of journey (origins and destinations). The time at which commuters leave for work can also have an effect on commuting time (see [NHS Data Tables](#), Catalogue no. 99-012-X2011031 for travel times by mode of transportation and census metropolitan area).

### Place of residence and place of work

Place-of-work data are very useful to urban planners, as they can be used to identify the areas where jobs are concentrated in a region. When place-of-work information is combined with place-of-residence data, it is possible to determine the specific journeys for which transportation infrastructure is needed. In this context, commuting flows between municipalities, that is, the number of people who commute from one municipality to another, help to identify certain trends in types of commuter travel.

In many peripheral municipalities, a minority of commuters travel to work in the central municipality. For example, in the Toronto CMA, 27.1% of commuters who lived in the municipality of Mississauga and had a usual place of work travelled to work in the city of Toronto. The majority of commuters who lived in Mississauga (55.0%) also worked in Mississauga.

Most workers from the central municipality commuted within that municipality. For example, of commuters who lived in the municipality of Toronto and had a usual place of work (about 1 million people), 81.0% also worked there, while 17.4% commuted to one of the other 23 municipalities in the Toronto CMA (for example, Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham) and 1.6% travelled to work outside the CMA.

There are similar trends in some other large metropolitan areas. For example, in the Montréal CMA, a minority of commuters who lived in Laval (46.1%) or Longueuil (36.6%) travelled to work in the municipality of Montréal. In the Vancouver CMA, 36.1% of commuters who lived in Burnaby and 13.1% in Surrey commuted to work in the municipality of Vancouver.

People who commute to the central census tracts are more likely to take public transit, walk or bicycle. This is illustrated in the maps of the six largest CMAs (see the [maps](#) showing the percentage of the employed labour force using public transit, walking or bicycling to get to work).

### Time leaving for work

In addition to information about commuters' place of residence and place of work, information about the time they leave for work helps to provide a clearer picture of how transportation demand varies through the day. In 2011, 29.1% of commuters reported leaving for work between 7:00 and 7:59 a.m., 22.1% between 8:00 and 8:59, and 18.1% between 6:00 and 6:59.

The proportion of commuters who left for work early, between 5:00 and 5:59 a.m., was 6.4%. In the CMAs, the proportion was highest in Barrie (10.8%), Oshawa (10.4%) and Abbotsford - Mission (10.2%) (see [NHS Data Tables](#), Catalogue no. 99-012-X2011031).

### Additional information

Additional information on Commuting to work can be found in the [NHS Data Tables](#), Catalogue nos. 99-012-X2011030 through 99-012-X2011032, the [NHS Profile](#), Catalogue no. 99-010-X, as well as in the [NHS Focus on Geography Series](#), Catalogue no. 99-010-X2011005.

[Thematic maps](#) showing Commuting to work are also available for various geographic areas.

For details on the concepts, definitions, universes, variables and geographic terms used in the 2011 National Household Survey, please consult the [National Household Survey Dictionary](#), Catalogue no. 99-000-X. For detailed explanations on concepts and for information on data quality, please refer to the reference guides on the [2011 National Household Survey \(NHS\)](#) website.

### Note to readers

**Random rounding and percentage distributions:** To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2011 National Household Survey while maintaining the quality of the results, a random rounding process is used to alter the values reported in individual cells. As a result, when these data are summed or grouped, the total value may not match the sum of the individual values, since the total and subtotals are independently rounded. Similarly, percentage distributions, which are calculated on rounded data, may not necessarily add up to 100%.

Due to random rounding, estimates and percentages may vary slightly between different 2011 National Household Survey products, such as the analytical documents and various data tables.

**Comparability between counts from the 2006 Census long form and the 2011 National Household Survey estimates:** When comparing estimates from the 2006 Census long form and estimates from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) users should take into account the fact that the two sources represent different populations. The target population for the 2006 Census long form includes usual residents in collective dwellings and persons living abroad whereas the target population for the NHS excludes them. Moreover, the NHS estimates are derived from a voluntary survey and are therefore subject to potentially higher non-response error than those derived from the 2006 Census long form.

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