



The Daily

Statistics Canada

Monday, February 5, 2007

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time

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Study: A new look at commuting distance

The best way of solving commuting-related problems may not be to move jobs closer to residential areas, according to a new study published recently in *Urban Geography*.

Rather, this study suggests, people actually like to work in large business districts, and are willing to travel further to get to them.

This research, conducted through Statistics Canada's Research Data Centre program, uses data from the 2001 Census to take an innovative look at commuting in Montréal. It examines what motivates people to travel further to so-called "employment poles", a central business area or large suburban business districts, than to other workplaces.

Among workers who both lived and worked outside the home in the census metropolitan area of Montréal, over one-third (36%) worked at these employment poles, in the city centre or in one of five large suburban business districts.

Their average round trip between home and work was 23 kilometres. This was almost 5 kilometres a day further than the average distance traveled by those working outside employment poles.

The findings challenge the generally held assumption that workers accept the extra travel costs because of the higher incomes and job status offered at employment poles. Instead, income and job status actually play a relatively minor role in explaining why people who work in these large business districts are prepared to live further from their jobs than people who work outside them.

Even after taking into account gender, occupation and income levels of each job, and certain domestic and residential factors, the distance traveled to employment poles remains higher than the distance traveled to other job locations. ("Residential" factors include the choice of residential area and of suburban or urban environment, which control for the possibility that workers simply travel farther to the poles because that is where the jobs are.)

This suggests that there is something about the social environment offered by employment poles that attracts people from further afield. These effects are particularly strong for women. They suggest that

women derive more satisfaction than men from the type of environment major employment poles generate.

It is important to understand what motivates people to live so far from their work, so society can deal effectively with problems associated with long-distance commutes, such as urban sprawl, air pollution, congestion and stress.

Study findings indicate that it may not be possible to resolve these problems by dispersing businesses into smaller centres closer to residential areas. Workers may reject smaller centres in favour of the positive non-monetary effects that employment poles have to offer.

Improving access to employment poles by alternative means of transport, especially to suburban poles which are poorly served by public transit, may be a more realistic goal than trying to reduce commuting distance.

Note: Data for this study came from 2001 Census micro-data (20% sample). The analysis was organised through the Quebec Inter-University Centre for Social Statistics, Montréal's Research Data Centre, and conducted at Statistics Canada. The Research Data Centre program is part of an initiative by Statistics Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and university consortia to strengthen Canada's social research capacity. There are 16 centres currently operating at various universities.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3907.

The article "Travel from home: An economic geography of commute distances in Montréal" has been published in *Urban Geography* (2006, volume 27 (4): 330-359).

For more information, to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality in this study or to obtain a copy of the article, contact Dr. Richard Shearmur (514-499-4052; richard.shearmur@ucs.inrs.ca), Institut national de la recherche scientifique, Urbanisation, Culture et Société.

For more information about the Research Data Centre program, contact Gustave Goldmann (613-951-1472), Research Data Centre program. ■

Chicken production

2006 (preliminary)

Preliminary estimates of chicken production for 2006 are now available. Final estimates of chicken production will be released in May.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 5039.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Sandy Gielfeldt (613-951-2505; sandy.gielfeldt@statcan.ca), Agriculture Division. ■

New products

Waste Management Industry Survey: Business and Government Sectors, 2004
Catalogue number 16F0023XIE
 (free).

Industry Price Indexes, December 2006, Vol. 32, no. 12
Catalogue number 62-011-XWE
 (free).

Canadian Foreign Post Indexes, February 2007
Catalogue number 62-013-XIE
 (free).

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MAJOR RELEASES
 • **Urban transit, 1997** 2
Despite the emphasis on taking urban transit, Canadians are using it less and less. In 1996, 65th Calendar Year, an average of about 40 trips on some form of urban transit, the lowest level in the past 25 years.
 • **Productivity, hourly compensation and unit labour cost, 1996** 4
Growth in productivity among Canadian businesses was notably weak again in 1996, accompanied by sluggish gains in employment and slow economic growth during the year.
OTHER RELEASES
 • **Help-wanted index, May 1997** 3
 • **Short-term Expectations Survey** 3
 • **Steel primary forms, week ending May 31, 1997** 12
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Statistics Canada's official release bulletin

Catalogue 11-001-XIE.

Published each working day by the Communications Division, Statistics Canada, 10-G, R.H. Coats Bldg., Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0T6.

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