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There is a housing shortage in Canada. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2023) estimates that approximately 3.5 million additional housing units are required by 2030 to restore affordability to 2004 levels.

Building conversions from non-residential to residential use is a potential strategy for increasing housing supply at lower cost than new builds. For example, the City of Calgary has 11 approved projects for office conversions to create more than 1,400 new residential units (City of Calgary, 2024). The City of Hamilton is also implementing a new grant pilot program that could be used to help convert buildings and cover some conversion costs (CBC, 2025).

Conversions are potentially attractive because they often make use of existing infrastructure. They may also help alleviate the problem of underutilized office space observed in recent years. At the end of 2024, the national office vacancy rate was approximately 18.7% (CBRE, 2025), suggesting there is a lot of underutilized space available for conversions. However, several feasibility studies find that only about 25% to 34% of office buildings in North American markets have real conversion potential (Avison Young, 2023; Paynter, 2023).

Work from home (WFH) and hybrid working arrangements that have persisted since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic likely contribute to the office vacancy rates now observed across Canadian cities.[1] A better understanding of where teleworkable jobs—jobs that could in principle be done from home—are located informs whether WFH is potentially a viable mechanism for increasing the supply of convertible buildings in areas where housing shortages are most prevalent.

The goal of this report is to present findings from a new approach developed for analyzing the geography of teleworkable jobs in Canadian cities. For illustration, the first set of results obtained for Canada's largest city, Toronto, are presented. The report offers a compelling way to identify and visualize where teleworkable jobs are located, which informs discussions on how WFH might create office vacancies for viable building conversions in areas most susceptible to housing shortages and gentrification.

1. The percentage of employees aged 15 to 69 working most of their hours from home stood at 18.2% in November 2024, compared with 25.4% in November 2020 and 3.6% in May 2016.

Data and methodology

The 2021 Census of Population is used throughout this report. Determining whether a job can be done from home based on occupation follows the approach developed by Dingel and Neiman (2020). Specifically, an occupation cannot be done from home if the employee needs to perform for or work directly with the public; work outdoors; operate or repair machinery and equipment; inspect equipment, structures or materials; wear common or specialized protective or safety equipment; handle or move objects; or perform general physical activities. Otherwise, the occupation can be performed from home.

One limitation of using the 2021 Census of Population is that it was conducted at a time when telework was more prevalent than it is now, since some employers have mandated a return to the office. However, this concern is mitigated by focusing on whether a job can be done from home, rather than whether the employee actually works from home.[2] Changes in the number of teleworkable jobs within city areas are likely slower, since they require firm entry, exit and relocation.

For the purpose of this report, a geographic "region" (or city area) refers to a 0.5 square kilometre parcel of land obtained by creating a city-wide grid. Using a grid to define region boundaries is ideal because it is independent of the distribution of individuals or firms within the city. The density of teleworkable jobs in a region is simply the number of employees whose jobs could be performed from home based on their occupational tasks. Individuals were assigned to grids based on their location of employment.

Results

Map 1 shows the geography of teleworkable jobs in Toronto by region. Notably, there is a very large concentration of teleworkable jobs in the financial district and downtown core, illustrated by the darker red grids in the centre of the map. It is estimated that each of these 0.5 square kilometre regions contain 3,600 or more jobs that could be performed from home.

Further, the regions immediately neighbouring this core and, notably, some regions along Yonge Street contain an additional 1,400 to 3,600 jobs that could be performed from home.

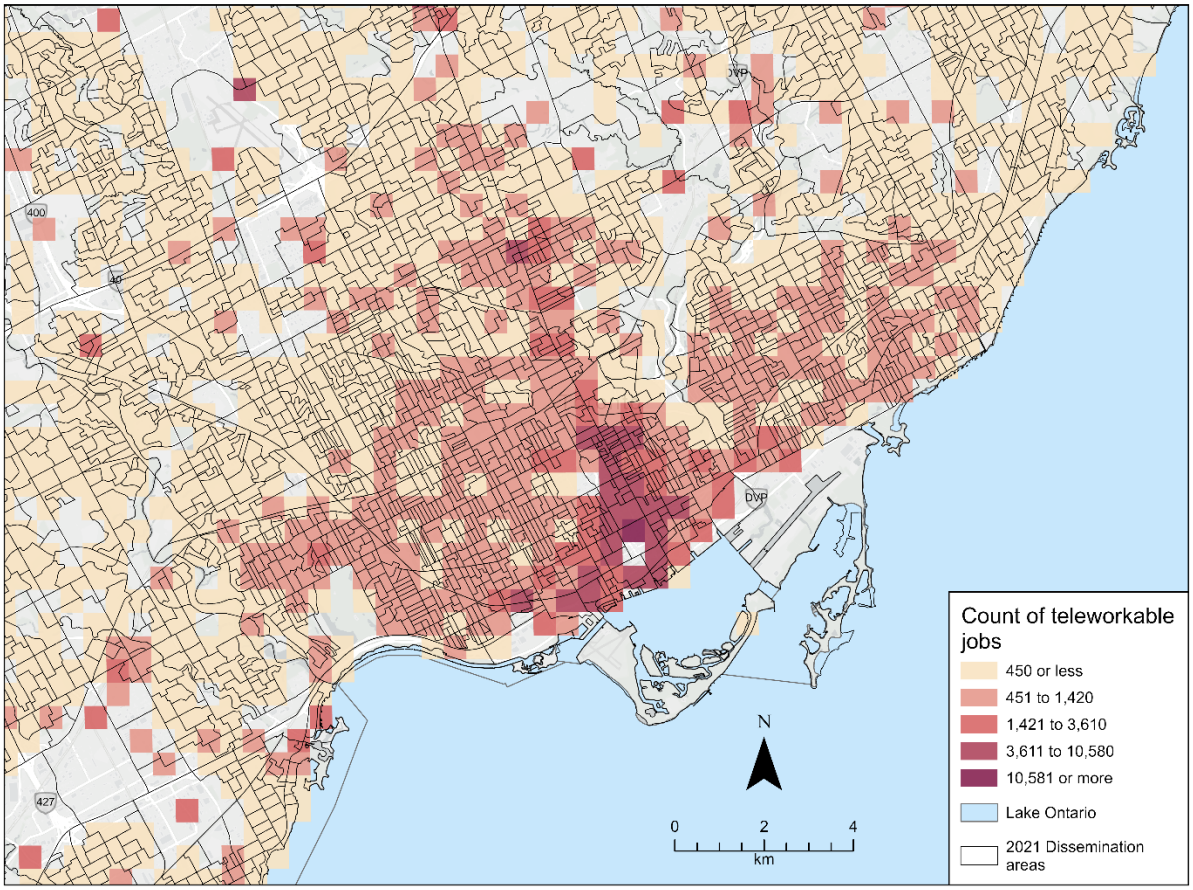
In addition, there is a fairly uniform distribution of teleworkable jobs outside of but within moderate proximity to the city centre, from about High Park in the west to East Danforth and south of Eglinton Avenue. It is estimated that there are between approximately 450 and 1,400 jobs per 0.5 square kilometre in this part of the city. There is also a similar density of teleworkable jobs around Yonge Street extending into North York.

2. In May 2021, 51.1% of employees in the economic region of Toronto held jobs that could potentially be done from home. In November 2024, 28.8% of employees in the economic region of Toronto were actually in hybrid work arrangements (14.8%) or working exclusively from home (14.0%).

Looking further outside of these regions, Map 1 shows there is greater dispersion, where many suburb regions of the city are estimated to contain fewer than 450 teleworkable jobs per 0.5 square kilometre.

Map 1

Geography of teleworkable jobs in Toronto by 0.5 square kilometre region

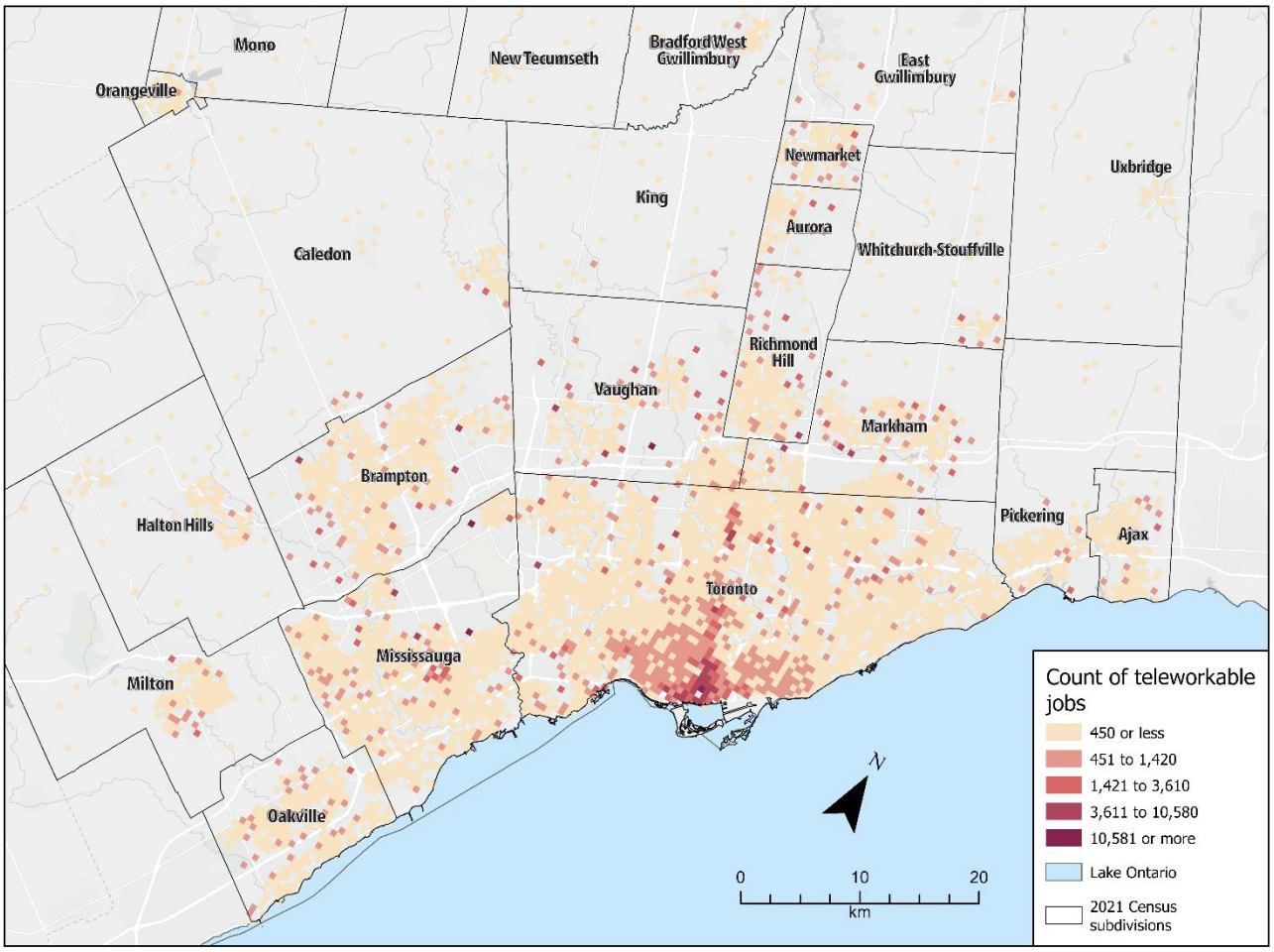


Notes: The approach used to identify jobs that can be done from home follows Dingel and Neiman (2020). The approach assesses the task content of occupations by drawing data from the Occupational Information Network. Place of work location data are grouped into grid squares and classified using the natural breaks (Jenks) method.
Source: Statistics Canada (2021a, 2021b); and Dingel and Neiman (2020).

To see how teleworkable jobs are distributed more widely across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Map 2 carries out the same analysis from Oakville in the west to Ajax in the east and extending just north of Newmarket. This analysis shows there are many "pockets" within cities adjacent to Toronto that contain moderate amounts of teleworkable jobs, and in some cases—in particular, the city centre in Mississauga—contain up to approximately 3,600 teleworkable jobs per 0.5 square kilometre.

Map 2

Geography of teleworkable jobs in the Greater Toronto Area by 0.5 square kilometre region



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Source: Statistics Canada (2021a, 2021b); and Dingel and Neiman (2020).

Conclusion

This report shows the geography of teleworkable jobs in Toronto and across the GTA. Results indicate that there are a substantial number of jobs that could, in principle, be done at home within Toronto's financial district and city centre, based on the occupational tasks of jobs and the inferred telework capacity of those jobs.

Amid rising costs of living in cities and displacement of lower-income families from city centres, WFH and building conversions might be a potential avenue for increasing housing supply. In addition, a Bank of Canada study by Morel (2022) shows the house price boom during the pandemic was the largest in Toronto's suburban areas as the shift to remote work made living near the office less advantageous. This report shows there are many areas throughout the GTA where building conversions might help alleviate pressure on suburban housing prices.

A limitation of this report is that it does not estimate how the number of teleworkable jobs map into the number of convertible buildings or residential units that might be constructed. The findings may be interpreted as an accounting exercise that takes stock of how many jobs are teleworkable and where they are located, which is an important first step in assessing whether WFH has the potential to alleviate housing shortages.

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