

# ACCESSIBLE TRANSIT IN CANADA: BUILDING ON THE BENEFITS



Canada's growing population is also aging, and the number of seniors is rising fast as more "baby boomers" enter their late sixties. This means more people with mobility-related disabilities that can limit their participation in society. Their quality of life, and the strength of the communities they live in, will depend on their ability to reach work, volunteering, education, health care, shopping and recreation opportunities.

It is in the public interest to keep these citizens active and engaged, and Canada's transit industry can help. It offers them the mobility they need, in the form of accessible conventional transit as well as specialized transit services. The importance of this role is highlighted in CUTA's new research report, *Value Case for Accessible Transit in Canada*. It documents the qualitative and quantitative benefits of helping more people with disabilities take transit. While the basic issues may be well understood by decision makers, the potential for real economic benefits is often overshadowed in public debate by the costs of making transit more accessible.

The research report documents Canadian and international case studies, opportunities and challenges raised through expert interviews, and the results of a multiple account evaluation of the economic and social benefits of more accessible transit. Those benefits include operating cost reductions, better access to employment and education, greater road safety, reduced home care costs, and enhanced social inclusion.

## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The number of seniors in Canada will grow from 4 million in 2006 to almost 10 million in 2036. About 45% of Canadians 75 years of age or older reported a mobility disability in 2011.

The annual operating cost of specialized transit services in Canada is about \$450 million. The average cost of a passenger trip on specialized transit is almost eight times greater than carrying the same passenger on conventional transit (\$25.75 versus \$3.31).

More accessible transit could lessen the estimated \$3.6 billion gap in annual income for mobility restricted individuals due to their lower participation in the workforce, and the estimated \$2.5 billion gap in annual income due to their lower rates of educational achievement because of mobility barriers.

More accessible transit could reduce the estimated \$800 million annual economic cost of collisions involving senior drivers with mobility disabilities, and the estimated \$390 million annual public cost of home care for seniors with mobility restrictions.

*Readers can download the full report at [www.cutaactu.ca](http://www.cutaactu.ca).*

## KEY CHALLENGES TO ACCESSIBILITY

In recent decades, legislation such as the *Access for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* clarified the intention of Canada's governments to make public transit more accessible. Greater investment has followed, but the transit industry still faces several challenges in its efforts to help Canadians with disabilities get around their communities with ease and comfort.

Transit systems are facing a demand for accessible transit service that is expected to grow steadily over the coming decades as the number of Canadians with mobility disabilities rises. Figure 1 shows that the number of seniors is projected to more than double from 4 million in 2006 or approximately 10 million in 2036.

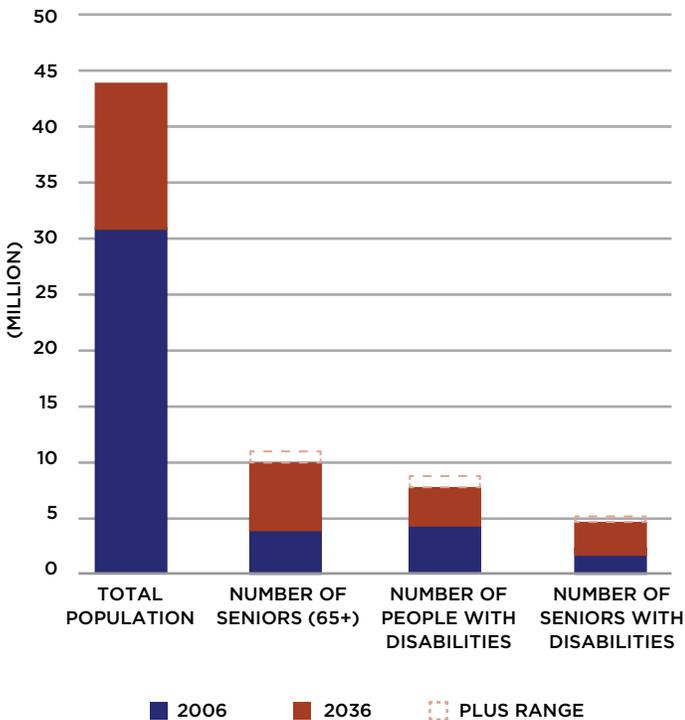


Figure 1: Canadian population estimates for 2006 and 2036 (millions)

At the same time that demand is growing, funding for accessible services is constrained. Shifting passengers from specialized to conventional transit could reduce operating costs, but it requires significant investment in accessible fleets and facilities at a time when other sectors are competing for available capital funds.

Another challenge is that the costs of providing accessibility are not shared by the stakeholders who benefit from it. For example, having people with disabilities travel to medical centres for dialysis or other regular treatments creates significant savings for the health care system, but at a cost to transit providers. Sharing the costs of accessible transit in a way that reflects its benefits could help make transit available for patients, when and where they need it.

Finally, accessibility depends on a range of related efforts and these sometimes need better coordination. In some places, wheelchair users are unable to reach bus stops due to a lack of sidewalks and curb ramps. Poor removal of snow and ice from sidewalks and bus stops can also be a major seasonal obstacle.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIONS

Transit operators and governments are meeting the travel needs of Canadians with mobility disabilities in a variety of ways.

One fundamental approach is to improve the accessibility and use of conventional transit. This improves social equity and also contains costs, given that the average cost to serve a passenger trip on conventional transit (\$3.31) is about one-eighth the cost of the same trip on specialized transit (\$25.75). Low-floor buses with kneeling capability and ramps are now the norm for new fleet purchases, and new transit hubs and stations regularly offer elevators or ramps as an alternative to stairs. It is important to note, however, that accessible features are not necessarily sufficient to attract new users. Promotions and fare incentives prove useful in encouraging customers to try conventional transit rather than specialized transit, especially for the first time.

Transit systems are also using outreach and education to encourage people with disabilities to ride conventional transit. They are offering training for riders, their families and caregivers, as well as education for transit staff and sensitivity campaigns aimed at other transit customers. "Travel training" courses that teach people with disabilities how to navigate the system, and how to get on or off kneeling or ramp-equipped buses, go a long way to helping them use conventional transit with comfort and confidence.

Transit systems are finding innovative ways to deliver specialized transit in a manner that makes the most of their resources. For example, some specialized transit systems are offering "conditional eligibility" to some customers, in snowy or icy conditions. Others are contracting with taxi companies to serve demand efficiently, or offering accessible community routes that provide on-demand service connecting to conventional transit routes.

Finally, information technology is making the transit experience more accessible, flexible and user-friendly. Internet communications and smartphone apps help customers access the information they need. Website users with visual disabilities can have transit information read aloud to them, and self-serve booking tools increase the convenience of making or changing trip reservations. Other important tools include in-vehicle computers, demand-responsive scheduling programs, and software that makes automatic pre-arrival calls to waiting customers.

*Toronto, ON*

### MAKING TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE MORE ACCESSIBLE

The TTC operates about 1,800 accessible buses, and its future streetcars will be low-floor models. More than 60% of the TTC's subway trains are accessible, and after extensive upgrading almost half of rapid transit stations can now be used by patrons in wheelchairs or scooters.



Patron wheels into a subway station

Montréal, QC

## CONTRACTING WITH TAXI COMPANIES TO PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE SERVICE

To guarantee service availability in the face of growing demand, the Société de transport de Montréal (STM) contracts with 14 different taxi companies. Those firms provided 86% of the STM's specialized transit service in 2011.



STM

Customer prepares to board an accessible taxi

Tsawwassen, BC

## COMMUNITY SHUTTLE ROUTES OFFER IMPROVED MOBILITY

In Tsawwassen, a small suburb within Metro Vancouver, TransLink uses fully accessible minibuses on a number of Community Shuttle routes. These routes charge the same fare as TransLink's bus and light rail services, and issue valid transfers that passengers can use to continue their trip to any part of the urban area.



©TransLink (All rights reserved)

Launch ceremony for a new Community Shuttle service in Tsawwassen

Edmonton, AB

## BUILDING RIDERSHIP WITH EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Edmonton Transit's *Mobility Choices Travel Training Program* offers information to seniors and people with disabilities. Presentations are customized for individuals or groups, and online videos help passengers use low-floor buses, community buses, light rail vehicles, and the Disabled Adult Transit Service (DATS). Edmonton Transit's *Seniors on the Go* program offers a local charter bus trip to groups who then receive detailed information on using transit to get around the city.



ETS

DATS bus operator assists a customer

Ottawa, ON

## USING FARE INCENTIVES TO PROMOTE CONVENTIONAL TRANSIT TRIPS

Seniors ride free on OC Transpo's conventional transit service every Wednesday. In addition, passengers with disabilities who need travel assistance receive an Attendant Card that allows able-bodied helpers to ride conventional transit with them for free.



OC Transpo

Attendants ride transit for free

## THE BENEFITS OF MORE ACCESSIBLE TRANSIT

CUTA's new research included a multiple account evaluation that assessed the benefits of greater transit accessibility.

**Better access to employment.** In 2006, the unemployment rate for adults with disabilities was 8.7%, versus 5.1% for other adults. Some of those with disabilities could work, but faced travel barriers that limited their access to job opportunities.

*What's at stake:* It is estimated that about 315,000 Canadian adults (15 to 64 years old) with a mobility disability could work but are not participating in the labour force. The lost economic output arising from their non-participation is estimated to be \$3.6 billion per year in individual earnings.

*The impact:* A 1% reduction in this lost economic activity (allowing just over 3,000 people with disabilities to find work) would yield a national income benefit of \$36 million; a 10% reduction (allowing over 30,000 people to find work) would yield a benefit of \$360 million. Looking at the overall economy, multiplier effects triple these benefits to over \$100 million and \$1 billion, respectively.

**Better access to education.** More accessible transit makes it easier for students with disabilities to pursue higher education and boost their future incomes.

*What's at stake:* Only 35% of adults with disabilities have a CEGEP, college or university diploma, compared to more than 50% of adults without disabilities. This lower level of education corresponds to a loss in income among mobility-restricted adults of \$2.5 billion per year.

*The impact:* A 1% reduction in income disparity due to lower educational achievement among adults with disabilities would yield an increase in national income of about \$25 million; a 10% reduction would yield an increase of about \$250 million.

**Greater road safety.** More accessible transit offers seniors a safer travel option than driving their own cars. While three-quarters of Canadian seniors have a driver's license, only 6% of them use transit. Importantly, recent statistics show that seniors over 70 are among the most collision-prone drivers.

*What's at stake:* An estimated 30% of senior drivers have a mobility restriction, and those drivers are involved in an estimated 4,000 injury-causing collisions each year. Each collision has an estimated economic cost of \$200,000, so the total social cost of collisions involving senior drivers with mobility restrictions is about \$800 million.

*The impact:* A 1% reduction in collisions involving senior drivers with a mobility restriction (about 40 fewer collisions) would yield an economic benefit of \$8 million; a 10% reduction (about 400 fewer collisions) would yield a benefit of \$80 million.

**Reduced transit operating costs.** Making conventional transit more accessible can reduce the demand for expensive specialized transit service.

*What's at stake:* The incremental net cost of serving one passenger on specialized transit rather than conventional transit is about \$22, and Canadian specialized transit systems carry about 17.5 million passengers each year. The total incremental operating cost of specialized transit services is therefore about \$385 million.

*The impact:* Shifting 1% of specialized transit demand (about 175,000 trips) to conventional transit would save about \$4 million in incremental operating costs; a 10% shift in demand (about 1.75 million trips) would save about \$40 million.

**Reduced home care costs.** More accessible transit makes it easier for seniors with mobility restrictions to reach health care services, and reduces the demand for taxpayer-funded home care.

*What's at stake:* Providing 15 million hours of in home health care to seniors with mobility restrictions has a public cost of about \$390 million annually.

*The impact:* A 1% reduction in home health care costs would yield savings of about \$4 million; a 10% reduction would yield savings of about \$40 million.

**Enhanced social inclusion.** Accessible transit allows seniors and other Canadians with mobility disabilities to volunteer, visit friends and relatives, reach health care and social services, and participate in recreational and cultural activities. Transit is also more affordable than owning and operating a private car or taking taxis for daily trips, and leaves seniors with more disposable income to spend on other needs.

**Integration with other policy objectives.** More accessible transit offers direct support for government policy on climate change and air quality. It also encourages physical activity, enables the efficient concentration of health care and social services, and supports land use policies that help seniors remain in their communities as they age.

## A LOOK AHEAD

This issue paper highlights just a few of the ways that Canada's transit industry is working to improve accessibility, and only summarizes some of the benefits that result. It is clear that more accessible transit offers substantial economic and social benefits that yield a solid return on investment.

Tremendous progress has been made over recent decades to make transit as accessible as possible, but there is still room to improve and benefit from further efforts. The findings of this research will inform the creation of stronger linkages between transit and other sectors, better cooperation among different orders of government, and the adoption of innovative management strategies and technologies. The transit industry remains committed to accessibility as a critical part of its effort to preserve and improve quality of life in Canadian communities.

SUMMARY OF ECONOMIC ANALYSIS		
What's at stake	Value of a 1% impact	Value of a 10% impact
<b>Better access to employment:</b> \$3.6 billion in reduced income due to lower workforce participation	\$36 million	\$360 million
<b>Increased contribution to economy:</b> \$11 billion in economic output not generated because of lost opportunity for income earning	\$110 million	\$1.1 billion
<b>Increased taxation:</b> \$2.8 billion in government taxation not generated because of lost opportunity for income earning	\$28 million	\$280 million
<b>Better access to education:</b> \$2.5 billion in reduced income due to lower educational achievement	\$25 million	\$250 million
<b>Road safety:</b> \$800 million economic cost of senior drivers' collisions	\$8 million	\$80 million
<b>Transit operating costs:</b> \$385 million incremental operating cost of specialized transit trips	\$4 million	\$40 million
<b>Home care costs:</b> \$390 million public cost of home care for seniors with mobility restrictions	\$4 million	\$40 million
<b>Sum of assessed impacts</b>	<b>\$215 million</b>	<b>\$2.15 billion</b>

*Note: This summary is provided for illustrative purposes. Readers are referred to the research report for detailed explanations and qualifications.*

The Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) is the voice of Canada's public transit industry. For additional information including research reports, industry updates, news bulletins and more, please contact us or visit our website.



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