



RURAL WELLBEING

Commuting Factsheet



HIGHLIGHTS

- Urban commuters were more likely to take public transit than rural commuters.
- Rural commuters had shorter commute times, with 41% commuting for less than 15 minutes.
- More people commute locally and work from home in urban areas.

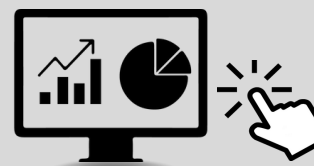
Overview

In 2020, transportation was the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario (see Canada's 2020 national emissions inventory). Emissions from passenger vehicles like cars, trucks, and vans were almost equal to the emissions from all of Ontario's heavy industrial emissions. Commuting data helps us understand how people are getting to work, how long their commute is, and whether they are commuting locally. This information can help inform strategies for reducing emissions from passenger vehicles such as improving public transit, supporting electric vehicle infrastructure, encouraging remote work, and developing more walkable communities that are less car-dependent.

Data source

Statistics Canada. 2023. 2021 Census Profile for Census Subdivisions in Ontario. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. [98-401-X2021021](#). Ottawa. Released February 8, 2023.

This factsheet presents information about commuting indicators from ROI's [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#). Explore the dashboard to view interactive maps and data visualizations.



Note that we calculated commuting statistics for the census subdivision level. However, data are not always available for every census subdivision. Data at this small geographic scale may be suppressed for confidentiality reasons. Because of missing data at the census subdivision level, some of the totals or averages presented here and in our accompanying dashboard may differ from other sources using different geographic levels or different methods for aggregation.

Definitions

Community: Census subdivisions, municipalities, and areas treated as municipal for statistical purposes, such as unorganized territories.

Community type: Categories of communities as rural or urban.

Rural: Any municipality outside of census metropolitan areas. Does not include communities designated as First Nations reserves or settlements.

Urban: Any municipality within a [census metropolitan area](#). Does not include communities designated as First Nations reserves or settlements.

Number of commuters: The number of the people employed in the labour force who are commuting.

Mode of commuting: The main mode of transportation a person uses to travel to their place of work.

Commute by car, truck or van: Proportion of the employed labour force who commute to work as a driver or passenger in a car, truck or van.

Commute locally: Proportion of the employed labour force who commute to work within their census subdivision of residence.

Commute duration: The length of time (number of minutes) it takes a person to travel to their place of work.

Long commute: Proportion of the employed labour force with a commute of 45 minutes or longer.

Worked from home: Proportion of the employed labour force who worked from home.

See Statistics Canada's [2021 Census Dictionary](#) for more information.

Commuting mode and duration

Most commuters in Ontario are travelling to work by car, truck or van (Table 1). A smaller proportion of urban commuters travel by car, truck or van compared to rural commuters. Urban commuters are more likely to use public transit or walk (Table 2). Twenty-six percent of commuters in Toronto use public transit, which is the highest proportion of all communities in Ontario. More rural commuters had a shorter commute time compared to urban commuters (Table 3).



Table 1. Summary of commuting data by community type.

Community type	2021 Population	Number of commuters	Commute by car, truck or van	Commute locally	Long commute to work	Worked from home
Rural	2,430,261	854,435	92%	50%	16%	19%
Urban	11,738,873	3,663,820	82%	61%	18%	32%
Ontario	14,223,942	4,533,350	84%	59%	17%	30%

Table 2. Mode of commuting by community type.

Community type	Car, truck or van	Public transit	Walked	Other method	Bicycle
Rural	92%	1%	5%	2%	1%
Urban	82%	10%	5%	2%	1%
Ontario	84%	9%	5%	2%	1%

Table 3. Commute duration by community type.

Community type	Less than 15 minutes	15 to 29 minutes	30 to 44 minutes	45 to 59 minutes	60 minutes and over
Rural	41%	28%	16%	7%	9%
Urban	25%	35%	22%	9%	9%
Ontario	28%	34%	21%	8%	9%

Local commute

More commuters in urban areas worked locally than in rural areas (Table 1). However, the proportion of local commuters is much higher in some communities, where it can be greater than 90% (Table 4). A high proportion of local employment can be a good indication of a community's economy and job market.

Table 4. Top 10 list of communities for commuting locally.

Communities	Community type	2021 Population	Number of commuters	Commute locally
Chapleau	Rural	1,942	835	98%
Hornepayne	Rural	968	440	97%
Greater Sudbury	Urban	166,004	60,840	97%
Sault Ste. Marie	Rural	72,051	23,980	96%
Red Lake	Rural	4,094	1,885	96%
Sioux Lookout	Rural	5,839	2,620	95%
Thunder Bay	Urban	108,843	39,345	95%
Matachewan	Rural	268	115	94%
Ottawa	Urban	1,017,449	275,700	94%
Kenora	Rural	14,967	6,185	92%

Long commute to work

The proportion of people with a long commute to work was similar across community types (Table 3) at 16% in rural areas and 18% in urban areas. However, the proportion can be much higher in individual communities, where almost half of commuters travelled for 45 minutes or more (Table 5). Long commute times are not just a climate change issue, but could also lead to negative impacts on mental health and overall quality of life. In some cases, a long commute could be the result of fewer choices for affordable housing, where people may choose a longer commute in favour of lower housing costs. Or perhaps longer commutes may reflect issues with the local job market.

Table 5. Top 10 list of communities for long commute to work (45 minutes or more).

Communities	Community type	2021 Population	Number of commuters	Long commute to work
St.-Charles	Urban	1,357	445	52%
Hilton	Rural	382	90	50%
Tudor and Cashel	Rural	740	195	49%
Mulmur	Rural	3,571	1,360	45%

Communities	Community type	2021 Population	Number of commuters	Long commute to work
Hilton Beach	Rural	198	90	44%
Dorion	Rural	375	150	43%
Markstay-Warren	Urban	2,708	895	43%
Central Frontenac	Rural	4,892	1,345	42%
Shelburne	Rural	8,994	3,690	42%
Grand Valley	Rural	3,851	1,610	42%
Innisfil	Urban	43,326	16,050	40%

Worked from home

A much higher proportion of the urban workforce worked from home in 2021 (Table 1). However, almost half of the workforce in some communities were able to work remotely (Table 6). It's important to note that the 2021 Census took place while some COVID-19 restrictions were still in place and many employees were still required to work remotely. It will be interesting to see the legacy of this important event on remote work statistics in the next Census.

Table 6. Top 10 communities for working from home.

Communities	Community type	2021 Population	Employed labour force	Worked from home
Burpee and Mills	Rural	382	145	48%
Johnson	Rural	749	350	46%
Oakville	Urban	213,759	99,950	45%
Ottawa	Urban	1,017,449	493,140	44%
Thornloe	Rural	92	35	43%
The Blue Mountains	Rural	9,390	3,985	42%
Head, Clara and Maria	Rural	267	60	42%
Waterloo	Urban	121,436	58,050	40%
Manitoulin, Unorganized, West Part	Rural	219	70	40%
Richmond Hill	Urban	202,022	93,015	40%

Summary

Understanding commuting statistics can highlight possible areas of action for climate change and economic development. For example, governments could prioritize investment in public transit in communities where people have a longer commute. Municipalities could develop local solutions to challenges regarding scarce employment and housing affordability, so that people have access to jobs and affordable housing in their communities.

The information presented here shows that most commuters drove to work in 2021, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is likely that some people will continue to work from home for the foreseeable future, however, not all jobs are well suited to remote work. The next Census will reveal whether remote workers have returned to the office, and if they have more sustainable options for commuting than they did in 2021.

Detailed community data about commuting can be found on the [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#).



This factsheet was prepared by the Rural Ontario Institute. Questions about data sources and comments or feedback can be directed to info@ruralontarioinstitute.ca.

This factsheet complements ROI's [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#). Factsheets provide insight and analysis of rural facts and trends featured in the dashboards.

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