

## Double public transit ridership by 2035

Canadian transportation sector emissions have not decreased at all since 2005, and in 2022 increased more than any other sector—including oil and gas. Canada is nearly 40% below the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average for public transit utilization (ridership per capita) in urban areas with transit service.<sup>66</sup> While Canada has zero-emissions vehicle (ZEV) adoption targets, Canada has no targets to increase public and active transportation use.

The most effective way of encouraging more people to use public transit is to ensure that service is convenient, frequent and reliable. But municipalities are not currently able to use federal transit funding to increase service levels. This hurts efforts to increase ridership and displace car travel, which is public transit's most powerful method of reducing carbon emissions.

The Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP), which included \$23.5 billion in public transit investments, did not lead to the expected results for this very reason:

- The public transit service level, measured in vehicle service kilometers per person, is now 7% lower than it was in 2016, the year that the federal government introduced it;
- There were fewer buses in service in peak periods across Canada in 2022 than there were in 2013; and
- An estimated 1,700 buses across Canada are sitting idle (as 'excess spares') when they could be in service if cities had additional operations funding.

A recent report shows that with immediate investment in the right policies, Canada can double public transit ridership by 2035 and reduce carbon

<sup>66</sup> Équiterre and Environmental Defense, "Putting wheels on the bus to help public transit." 2024. [https://cms.equiterre.org/uploads/Fichiers/Full-report\\_Putting-wheels-on-the-bus.pdf](https://cms.equiterre.org/uploads/Fichiers/Full-report_Putting-wheels-on-the-bus.pdf)

emissions by 65 million tonnes. Achieving these outcomes requires expanding federal and provincial funding for public transit operations, implementing more public transit priority lanes, and establishing zero-emission bus procurement requirements. More specifically, doubling public transit ridership by 2035 requires an additional \$3 billion per year on average up to 2035 for direct transit service improvements and bus fleet electrification, in addition to the existing commitment of \$3 billion per year for major capital projects.<sup>67</sup>

### Recommendations [HICC]:

- Ensure that funding is available from the Canada Public Transit Fund in the 2025–2026 fiscal year, instead of waiting until 2026–2027; and
- Expand the Canada Public Transit Fund to include support for public transit operations, by **\$3 billion per year until 2035**.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Photo: Luke Michael

