

# URBAN SHARING IN TORONTO

Country: CANADA  
Population (city): 2,750,000  
Population (metro): 5,930,000

City area: 630,21 km<sup>2</sup>  
Government: Toronto municipality,  
6 districts; Ontario Province



**SHARING & THE CITY**  
Cities – Sharing – Sustainability



**URBAN SHARING**  
Sustainability & Institutionalisation

## Urban Sharing at a Glance

Toronto is a multi-cultural metropolis and an international centre for business, finance, arts and culture. The population is rapidly growing, and suburban areas are expanding. The development of urban infrastructure struggles to keep up with this growth resulting in the lack of affordable housing and efficient public transit. Seemingly to cope with these challenges, Toronto residents have access to ride-hailing, food delivery, luggage storage services, and sharing of homes, parking lots and bikes using smart phone apps. Digital commercial platforms dominate the urban sharing landscape. Airbnb is the most prominent home sharing platform although other platforms such as VRBO are also present. Ride-hailing apps Uber and Lyft dominate shared mobility while the use of other car sharing platforms is marginal. There is a municipal bike sharing scheme, Bike Share Toronto. Toronto Tool Library exists in three locations in the city. Important urban sharing actors include national, provincial and local authorities, knowledge institutes and universities.

## Municipal and Provincial Governance of Sharing

The City of Toronto does not have a citywide agenda on the sharing economy. Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS) department sets registration and tax requirements for short-term rental platforms and their hosts. It also allows hosts to rent out only their primary residence. MLS regulates vehicles-for-hire, taxi, limousine services and ride-hailing platforms, i.e. Uber and Lyft. These regulatory provisions are stipulated in **the Vehicle-for-Hire Bylaw**, and they mainly concern passenger and pedestrian safety. Transportation Services at the City of Toronto issues parking permits for free-floating car sharing organisations under **the Traffic and Parking Regulation**. There is a cap on how many parking spaces one organisation can own. Ontario Province bans e-scooters but municipalities may opt-in to allow e-scooter use. MLS investigates the introduction of e-scooters in Toronto including the location for e-scooter placement in the city as well as their potential to fill the last mile for multi-modal trips and reduce private car use. The City does not engage directly with the sharing of physical goods. Since 2016, research by the MaRS Solutions Lab and the Mowat Center (University of Toronto) informed municipal and provincial governance of urban sharing in the city. In 2018, Ontario Ministry of Finance developed **Sharing Economy Framework** and produced **The Home Sharing Guide for Municipalities**. The city has been a member of the **Sharing Cities Alliance** since 2017.

## Drivers for Sharing

### Drivers for the sharing economy in Toronto include:

- High penetration of digital technology and smart-phone apps
- Dedicated and knowledgeable personnel at the municipality working with licensing short-term rentals and shared mobility
- Presence of knowledge institutes and lobby organisations that inform local and regional policy making on the sharing economy
- Congestion and long commuting times, regulatory certainty for vehicles-for-hire and gaps in the public transit system supporting extensive use of ride-hailing
- Expensive parking in the city centre, urban densification and a need to decentralise parking drive the sharing of private parking spaces



## Barriers to Sharing

### Barriers to the sharing economy in Toronto include:

- Mainly reactive approach and little strategic coordination across municipal and provincial governmental units in response to the sharing and platform economy outcomes
- Negative impacts from home rentals on the availability and affordability of housing, and competitiveness of the hotel industry
- Limits to growth for free floating car sharing due to high municipal parking fees and a competition with public parking
- Lack of cycling infrastructure impedes the use of bike sharing
- No municipal support of non-profit or community-based sharing initiatives
- Challenging conditions for goods sharing due to limited access to resources: space, volunteer time and money

## Toronto Citizens and Sharing

Digital technology is accepted and used among citizens and visitors of Toronto for sharing and other services, e.g. food delivery. Using smart-phone apps for ride-hailing with Uber and Lyft is as normal as taking a ride with a taxi. Key motivations for this include reduced cost, convenience and time efficiency, while environmental and social reasons are less important. Citizens of Toronto seem to be well aware of short-term rentals (Airbnb in particular), as well as about the existence of Toronto Tool Library. Bagbnb bag storage sharing service is widely used. There were several attempts to establish goods sharing platforms. However, their business models were not profitable and failed to operate at the scale needed to retain their communities. In part, this is likely due to the relative affluence of citizens in the city, who can afford to buy and consume new goods rather than access shared goods. If people reuse second-hand goods, this mainly happens informally in their communities without using a platform.

## Sustainability and Sharing

### Environmental sustainability

Toronto's **Long Term Waste Management Strategy, Resilience Strategy** and declared climate emergency put climate change, growing inequities, zero waste and circular economy on the municipal agenda. However, any clear links between these policies and the sharing economy are absent. According to views by some researchers, ride-hailing increases the number of cars in Toronto. At the Toronto Tool Library, many tools are donated or captured from waste drop-off points and repaired, which avoids them being thrown away. Thus, sharing extends their lifetime.

### Social sustainability

The municipality does not use the sharing economy strategically to address its social challenges. Toronto faces a housing shortage, which is exacerbated by short-term rentals. To ensure the availability of affordable housing, Fairbnb produces reports, organises events and lobbies the municipal government. Drivers of ride-hailing platforms rely on precarious employment and low wages. Toronto Tool Library has created a strong and diverse social community, where people experience a sense of belonging and acceptance. Members learn new skills by using the available tools themselves or by getting help from others.

### Economic sustainability

Digital commercial platforms dominate Toronto's sharing landscape. It is the only city in Canada benefiting from investments by ride-hailing platforms. Short-term rentals contribute to the hotel industry stagnation, with some of the largest hotels in the city centre closing due to reduced demand. Goods sharing platforms do not seem to be more convenient or cheaper than buying new products and owning them. Many goods sharing platforms closed or were integrated by other businesses because of their economic struggles.

