THE PROBLEM

One of the biggest challenges confronting Canada is the fight to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. To meet Canada’s commitments under the United Nations’ Paris Climate Accord, provincial and territorial governments across the country will need to find new ways to reduce GHGs. The transportation sector makes up 23% of annual emissions, but reducing on-road emissions can be a challenge in car-dependant communities.

Green alternatives to diesel buses and trains could be deployed in transit systems today to reduce on-road emissions. Unfortunately, the cost of testing and upgrading to these new technologies is often too steep for transit systems to undertake on a large scale.

THE SOLUTION

Transit reduces GHG emissions by being more energy-efficient per passenger than cars, by reducing congestion and vehicle idling, and by supporting denser forms of development that lead to shorter trips and greater use of sustainable transportation. From an air quality perspective, transit plays a major role in reducing air pollution from cars, particularly nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds. This decrease in air pollution leads to reduced rates of respiratory illness and a reduction of annual public healthcare expenditures of $137 million in Canada.

The way you travel can have vastly different environmental impacts. Sustainable modes of travel include transit, walking, cycling or carpooling, whereas traveling alone in a vehicle emits much higher GHG-emissions-per passenger. Growing the share of trips taken using sustainable modes of travel represents a largely untapped opportunity to reduce national GHG emissions and should be a priority of any government looking to meet Canada’s climate targets.

From an industry perspective, transit systems recognize that while the industry has a net positive impact on overall GHG emissions, it must also strive to green its own operations further. A green shift to Canadian transit fleets would occur sooner if the federal government provided an incentive to offset the cost of upgrading to low-carbon vehicles, and their associated fixed infrastructure costs.

WHAT CANADIANS THINK

9 out of 10 Urban Canadians (88%) believe that using public transit is good for the environment

More than 8 out of 10 Urban Canadians (82%) say that transit systems help reduce greenhouse gas emissions

8 out of 10 Urban Canadians (78%) think that more needs to be done to deploy more green buses (not using gasoline) in [their] community

*Leger, 2019

QUICK FACTS

For every ton of CO2 emitted by the Société de transport de Montréal, the system saves the city 20 tonnes of emissions. (STM)

Canadian transit reduces annual GHG emissions by 4.7 million tonnes. (CUTA)

Currently, only 1/3 of Canadian commuters (about five million people) go to work using sustainable transportation, such as walking, cycling, transit or carpooling. (StatsCan)

Transit saves about $137 million in annual healthcare costs related to respiratory illness. (CUTA)