

# **Getting Around to Age in Place**

Meeting Older Canadians' Mobility Needs  
via Public Transportation

## **Greater Montreal**

Summary Report

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All photos and maps used in this report have been sourced from the Transportation Research at McGill (TRAM) lab.

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## Territorial Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge that McGill University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. Tiohtià:ke/Montréal has long served as a site of meeting and exchange among Indigenous peoples, including the Kanien'kehá:ka of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Huron/Wendat, Abenaki, and Anishinaabeg, among others. TRAM recognizes and respects these nations as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters. We respect the continued relationship these diverse Indigenous peoples have with the territory upon which we now gather.

## Research Acknowledgment

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## Summary

Older adults represent a rapidly-growing age group in Canada, and many rely on private vehicles as their main mode of transportation for their daily travel. Despite the risk of having to give up driving as they age, the impact of driving cessation on older adults' mobility and wellbeing is still poorly understood. The Getting Around to Age in Place project, conducted by the Transportation Research at McGill (TRAM) research lab and funded by the National Research Council of Canada (NRC), centers on older adults' perceptions of their travel patterns and how daily mobility affects their lives. The Aging in Place survey (N=3,551) was conducted in six metropolitan regions across Canada in 2023. This report presents a summary of the survey findings from Greater Montreal (N = 1,435). For further details about the project, and comparative data for all six regions please see the [Aging in Place Final Report 2022-2025](#).

## Key Findings

- A majority of older adults in Greater Montreal believed that daily travel contributed positively to their **quality of life**, and stated that continuing to travel **independently** is very important to them. However, many older adults are concerned about whether they will be able to remain in their current neighbourhood due to changing mobility needs as they age.
- While driving remains the main mode of transport for many older adults, over two-thirds of Montreal respondents believed the public transit system allows them to satisfy their **daily needs**. Over one-third of respondents were **frequent transit users**, taking transit at least once a week.
- Older adults in Montreal commonly considered **30 minutes** as the most reasonable travel time for a public-transit trip.
- The most common **destinations for public-transit trips** were recreation and leisure activities, medical appointments, and visiting friends and family.
- Among transit users in Montreal, overall **satisfaction** with the service was generally high, however there were some **concerns** about comfort, convenience, reliability, and safety of transit.
- One-quarter of older adults reported having some type of **disability or health condition** which limits their mobility. A large number of respondents who identified as having a disability felt that the transit system does not meet their needs.
- One in five older adults in Montreal lacked **knowledge about how the public-transit system works**, and awareness of reduced fares could be improved.
- In open-ended questions, some Montreal residents praised their transit service, especially those living in the downtown. The main sources of **concern** centred around the frequency and reliability of transit services, limited access to basic amenities such as elevators, escalators, and heated shelters, and the need for overall improvements to the user experience.

## Sommaire

Les personnes âgées représentent un groupe d'âge en croissance rapide au Canada, et plusieurs d'entre elles utilisent un véhicule privé comme principal moyen de transport pour leurs déplacements quotidiens. Malgré le risque de devoir cesser de conduire en vieillissant, l'impact de la cessation de la conduite sur la mobilité et le bien-être des personnes âgées est encore mal compris. Le projet Mobilité pour Vieillir Chez Soi, réalisé par le groupe de recherche en transport de l'université McGill (TRAM) et financé par le Conseil national de recherches du Canada (CNRC), se concentre sur les perceptions des personnes âgées concernant leurs habitudes de déplacement et l'impact de leur mobilité quotidienne sur leur vie. Le sondage Vieillir Chez Soi (N=3,551) a été mené dans six régions métropolitaines à travers le Canada en 2023. Ce rapport présente un résumé des résultats du sondage pour le Grand Montréal (N = 1,435). Pour plus de détails sur le projet et pour consulter les données comparatives des six villes, veuillez consulter le [Rapport Final Vieillir Chez Soi 2022-2025](#) (disponible en anglais seulement).

## Résultats clés

Une majorité des personnes âgées du Grand Montréal estimaient que les déplacements quotidiens amélioreraient leur **qualité de vie** et affirmaient qu'il est très important pour eux de continuer à se déplacer de manière **autonome**. Toutefois, beaucoup s'inquiétaient de leur capacité à rester dans leur quartier à mesure que leurs besoins de mobilité évoluent.

La voiture demeure le principal mode de transport pour les personnes âgées, mais plus des deux tiers des répondants montréalais estimaient que le transport collectif satisfait leurs **besoins quotidiens** et plus d'un tiers l'utilisaient au moins une fois par semaine.

Les personnes âgées considéraient généralement qu'un trajet de **30 minutes** en transport collectif est raisonnable.

Les **destinations** les plus fréquentes pour les déplacements en transport en commun étaient les activités de loisirs, les rendez-vous médicaux et les visites à la famille ou aux amis.

Parmi ses usagers, la **satisfaction** générale du transport collectif était élevée à Montréal, bien que des **préoccupations** subsistaient concernant le confort, la fiabilité et la commodité.

Un quart des personnes âgées ont déclaré un **handicap** ou un **problème de santé** limitant leur mobilité, et beaucoup estiment que le système ne répond pas à leurs besoins.

Une personnes âgée sur cinq à Montréal manquait de **connaissances sur le fonctionnement** du réseau de transport collectif et la sensibilisation aux tarifs réduits pourrait être améliorée.

Dans les questions ouvertes, certains ont vanté le service de transport en commun, mais les principales **préoccupations** concernent la fréquence et la fiabilité, l'accès aux ascenseurs, escaliers roulants, et abris chauffés, ainsi que le besoin d'améliorations de l'expérience utilisateur.

## INTRODUCTION

One in six people around the world will be 60 years or older by 2030 (World Health Organization, 2021). In Canada, older adults rely mostly on private vehicles as their main mean of transport (Newbold et al., 2005). However, not all older adults have access to a car, and, as they age, many have to regulate their driving or even stop driving altogether (Musselwhite & Shergold, 2013). Public-transit can play a crucial role in facilitating the ongoing mobility of older adults. However, research on older adults' public-transit use is limited, especially in the Canadian context (Ravensbergen et al., 2022).

The Getting Around to Age in Place project conducted by the Transportation Research at McGill (TRAM) research lab and funded by the National Research Council of Canada

(NRC) seeks to better understand older adults' perceptions of their travel patterns and how daily mobility affects their lives. This project examines how well public-transit services across Canada are supporting the needs of older adults and their ability to age in place.

In order to capture variations in regional contexts and differing transit service levels, the NRC, alongside key stakeholders, selected six Census Metropolitan areas (CMAs) as focus areas for the study: Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Halifax, Victoria, and Saskatoon.

This report presents a summary of the key findings for the Greater Montreal region. For a more comprehensive outline of the project, the methods used, and comparisons across regions we invite you to read the [Aging in Place Final Report 2022-2025](#).

## Greater Montreal

Greater Montreal is the second-largest metropolitan region in Canada, with a population of 4.3 million residents. In 2021, 18% of the population were aged over 65 (Statistics Canada, 2023). This is forecast to increase to 23% by 2051 (l'Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2024, p45).

The majority of Montreal residents commute using private vehicles (76%). Public transit is used by 15% of commuters, while 6% walk, and 2% cycle (Statistics Canada, 2023).

The regional transit service includes 4 metro lines, one light-rail service, 5 train lines and over 600 bus routes. Metro and Bus are the main modes of transport in the region with 215 million and 217 million passengers in 2023 respectively, compared to 6 million passengers on commuter rail services, 3.6 million paratransit passengers and 422 000 passengers on the seasonal river ferries. (ARTM, p7)

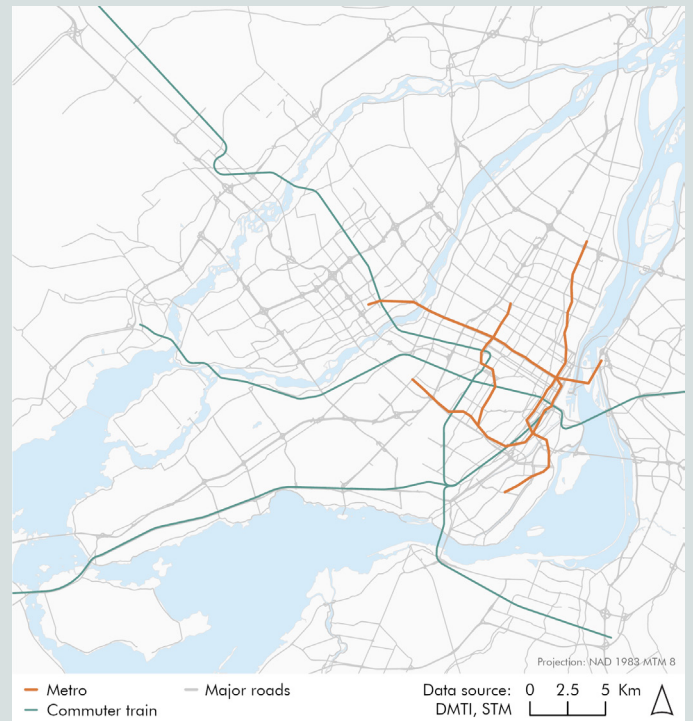


Figure 1 Study area: Greater Montreal CMA, with main public-transit routes highlighted

# SURVEY AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

## Survey Design and Recruitment

A survey was conducted to collect first-hand accounts of older Canadians' perceptions and experiences of public-transit in their region, as well as to better understand the impact of their daily travel on their wellbeing. The survey design process included the TRAM team, NRC project managers, the project advisory committee members, and the appointed Experts by Experience. It was estimated the survey would take respondents 20 to 25 minutes to complete, and was circulated in French and English.

Recruitment methods included a paid advertisement campaign on Facebook which targeted users aged 65 years and over. Leger, a Canadian firm specializing in public opinion and surveys, was also hired to recruit respondents.

The survey was launched in early February 2023 and remained open until mid-March 2023. This report covers the results of the first wave of the survey. Further details about the survey design, recruitment, the second wave, and data cleaning processes can be found in the [Aging in Place Final Report 2022-2025](#).

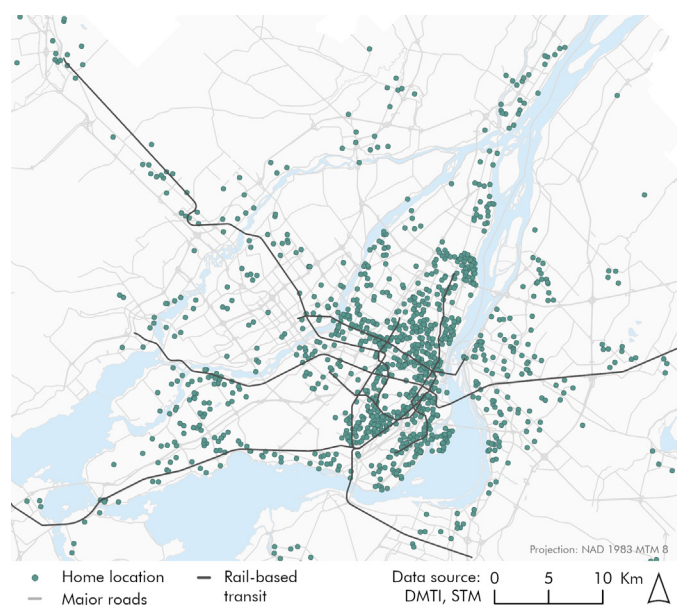


Figure 2 Home locations of survey respondents within the Greater Montreal CMA

## Sample Characteristics

A total of 1,435 responses were collected from Greater Montreal in the first wave of the survey. Respondents' home locations were well distributed across residential areas, with notable concentrations near the downtown area and along transit routes or highways (Figure 2).

Sample characteristics were compared with data from the 2021 census (Statistics Canada, 2023) in order to gauge how representative the survey respondents were of the older population of the entire CMA (Table 1). The gender distribution of the sample is consistent with the CMA average, and the sample is well distributed across incomes. Respondents tended to be younger, mostly aged 65 to 74, compared to the CMA average. Just over 85% of respondents were retired or not in the workforce.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics compared with the older population in CMA

		Survey Respondents		Greater Montreal	
<b>Total N</b>		1,435	100.0%	772,485	18.0%*
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Man</b>	641	44.7%	341,195	44.2%
	<b>Woman</b>	787	54.8%	431,295	55.8%
	<b>Other</b>	7	0.5%	-	-
<b>Age</b>	<b>65 to 74</b>	1,065	74.2%	424,870	55.0%
	<b>75 to 84</b>	353	24.6%	243,690	31.5%
	<b>85+</b>	17	1.2%	103,925	13.5%
<b>Household Income (CAD)</b>	<b>&lt; 30k</b>	258	21.6%	-	-
	<b>30k - 60k</b>	385	32.2%	-	-
	<b>60k - 90k</b>	277	23.2%	-	-
	<b>90k - 150k</b>	212	17.7%	-	-
	<b>&gt; 150k</b>	63	5.3%	-	-
<b>Work Status</b>	<b>Employed</b>	208	14.5%	-	-
	<b>Not in WkF</b>	1,227	85.5%	-	-

\* Represents the proportion of the older population (65+) of the total CMA population (2021 Census)

# SURVEY RESULTS

## Older Adults Travel Behaviour

Older adults in Montreal used private vehicles in large numbers. 84% of respondents held a valid driver’s licence and over half (56%) of respondents had driven a car in the last two days. Still, public transit remains a popular option for older residents, with 54% of respondents having made their last trip by public transit. Indeed, over one-third (38%) of respondents were frequent transit users, taking public transit at least once a week in the previous year. On the other hand, 30% of respondents had not taken public transit at all in the previous 12 months. Older adults aged 65-74 were more likely to be transit users (Figure 3).

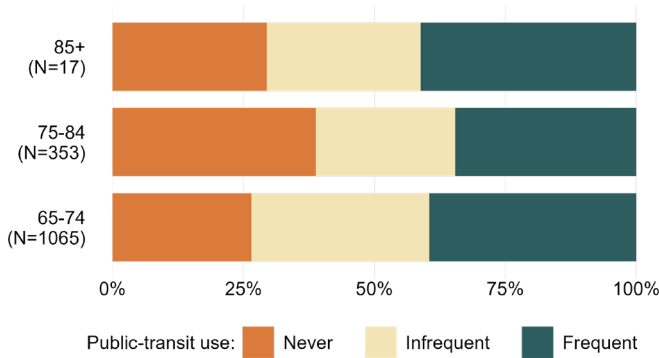


Figure 3 Frequency of public-transit use in previous 12 months by age

## Independent Travel and Wellbeing

The results highlighted the importance of daily travel to older adults’ wellbeing and continued independence. In Montreal, almost all respondents (97%) agreed to the statement “as I get older, it is important for me to continue to travel independently”, reinforcing the need to provide transport options that aid older adults to keep traveling independently, such as public transit, walking and cycling. 84% of older adults in Montreal agreed that “daily travel contributes positively to [their] quality of life.” Those who used public transit more frequently were most likely to agree with this statement.

## Ability to Age in Place

Older adults expressed a desire to be able to age in place. 83% of respondents agreed that “as I get older, it is important for me to continue to live in my current neighbourhood”. Despite this strong desire to age in place, over one-third (36%) agreed with the statement “I am concerned about whether I will be able to remain in my neighbourhood because of my changing transport needs and capabilities as I get older.” Non-transit users were more likely to be concerned (see Figure 4). Of those who had driven recently, 34% agree that there would be “no adequate travel alternatives” around their home if they had to stop driving.

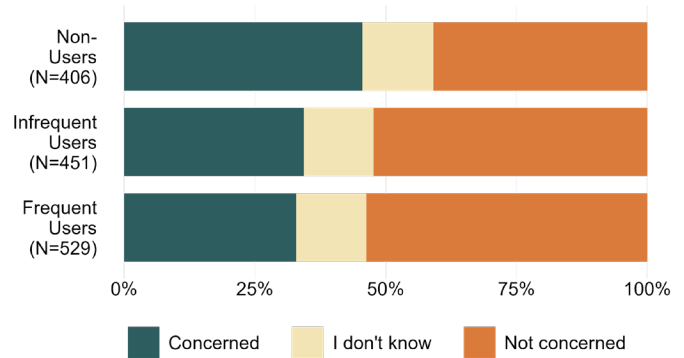


Figure 4 Concerned about ability to remain in current neighbourhood as they get older?

## Intention to move

Around 25% of older Montrealers indicated that they were considering moving in the next five years. Affordability was identified as the main factor in this consideration, chosen by 52% of respondents who are considering moving. Mobility and access to destinations were also key considerations for many respondents. Living in a region with better public transit was chosen as an important factor for 34% of those who are considering moving. Desires (or needs) to live in a more walkable environment (46%), and being in closer proximity to parks and nature (44%) also stood out as important considerations.

### Public Transit Modes

Among older adults who had used public transit in the previous 12 months, the most common mode was the metro (88%), followed closely by the bus (80%). The commuter train service was used by 8% of transit users compared to 3% for the paratransit services.

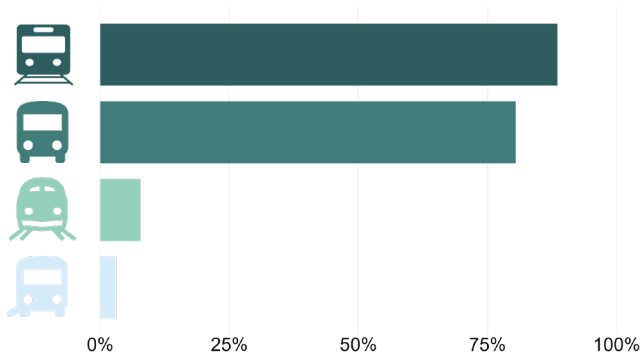


Figure 5 Transit modes used at least once in the past year in Montreal (transit users only)

### Destinations Reached using Transit

The most common destinations for older adults using public transit were recreation activities and medical appointments (both cited by over 60% of transit-users), followed by shopping and visits to friends and family.

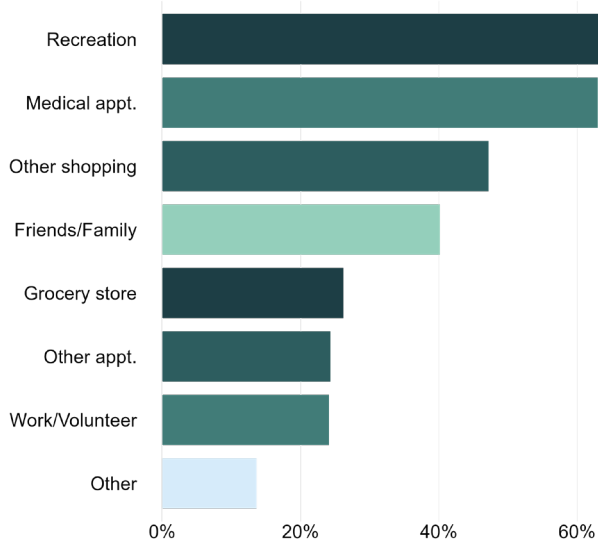


Figure 6 Destinations reached using transit in the past year in Montreal (% of transit users)

### Travel Times

The survey data revealed that older adults in Montreal primarily used public transit during off-peak times (Figure 7). This could directly impact older adults' experience, as transit services are often less frequent at off-peak times, and fewer connection and opportunities are possible.

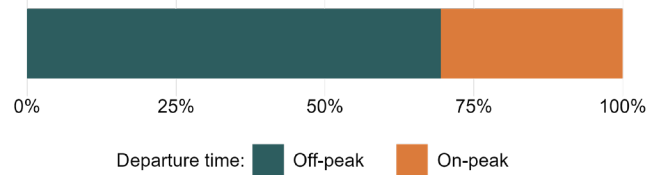


Figure 7. Time of most recent public transit trip

### Reasonable Transit Travel Times

When planning public transit for older Canadians, it is important to consider their specific daily travel needs, behaviours and expectations. Respondents were asked what they consider to be a reasonable time to reach their desired destinations by public transit. 30 minutes stood out as the most frequently chosen reasonable travel time, selected by around one-third (33%) of respondents (Figure 8).

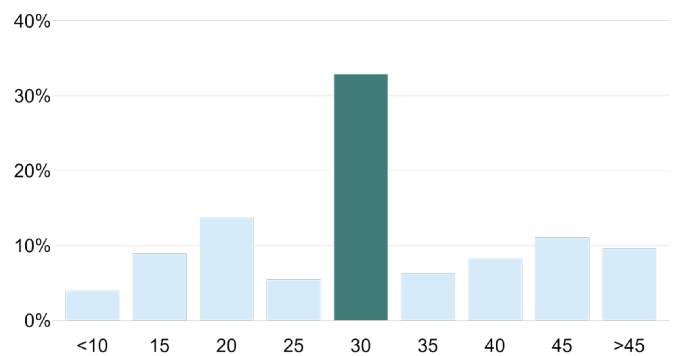


Figure 8 Reasonable public-transit travel time for older adults in Montreal

To ensure more older travelers can reach their destinations within 30 minutes, public-transit service frequency should be increased, especially during the day, outside of peak commuting hours. Increasing the number and variety of destinations available to older adults by public transit could also reduce their travel time as well as increase their travel satisfaction.

## Satisfaction with Public Transit

The majority of older adults expressed their satisfaction with the public transit system in Montreal. Just over two-thirds of older adults agreed that public transit in Greater Montreal meets their needs, and three-quarters of respondents (76%) were willing to recommend public transit to a friend or family member. Of those who used the public transit system (n=1,011), 83% agreed that public transit positively impacts their quality of life.

Respondents who recently used transit were asked about their satisfaction with the main mode of their last transit trip. The results concerning the two most frequently used services, metro and bus, are presented in Figure 9.

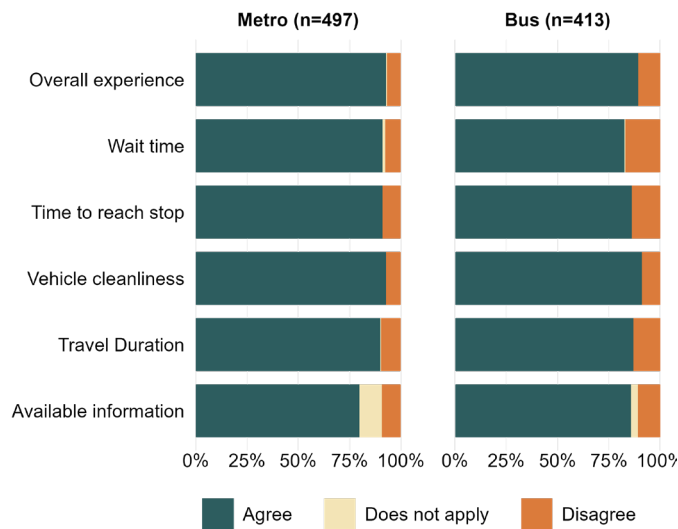


Figure 9 Satisfaction with last public-transit trip by metro and bus

Older adults who took the metro or bus on their last transit trip were highly satisfied with their overall experience. Bus users were slightly less satisfied with their wait time (83%) compared to metro users (91%). Users of both modes were generally satisfied with the time it took them to reach their respective stop or station, and were highly satisfied with the cleanliness of transit vehicles. Bus users were slightly less satisfied with their travel duration (87% satisfied) compared to metro users (90%). Many respondents indicated that information about transit, such as schedules, was lacking.

## Accessibility to Destinations by Public Transit in Montreal

Using respondents' suggestion of 30 minutes as a reasonable travel time by public transit to reach destinations, an accessibility analysis was conducted to compare access to destinations across Greater Montreal. The total number of jobs was used as a proxy for the number of destinations that can be reached from someone's home (Census tract). Further details can be found in Rodrigue et al. (2023).

Accessibility by public transit was found to be higher for those living in the downtown core of Montreal, where the number of activities tends to be the highest, as well as those living along major rail transit lines (Figure 10).

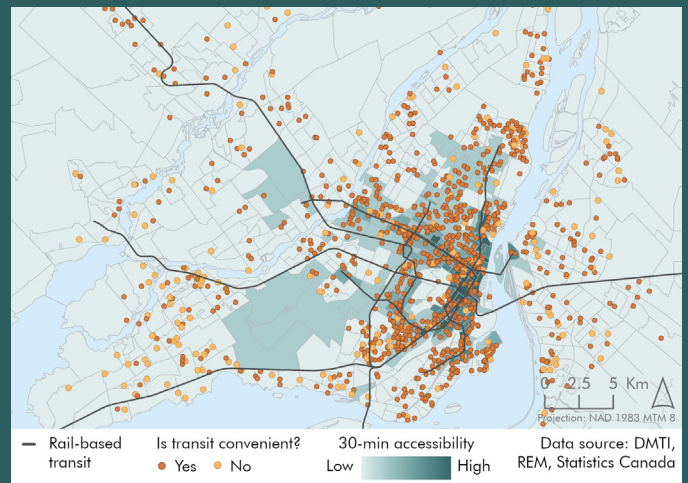


Figure 10 Accessibility of jobs by public transit (30-minute travel time, departing at 10am)

## Accessibility and Perceived Convenience of Public Transit

The results suggests that the more accessible an older adult's neighbourhood is, the more convenient they find public transport. For residents living in the most accessible census tracts, 90% agreed to the statement "Public transit in my region is a convenient way of traveling". On the other hand, for those living in census tracts with medium and low accessibility, agreeance was 82% and 55% respectively.

## Challenges for Public–Transit Use

A perceived lack of convenience (19%), poor comfort (17%), and unreliability (16%) were the largest causes of concern for older adults regarding the public-transit system in Greater Montreal. In comparison, only 10% of respondents believed public transit to be unaffordable in Montreal. Among existing public-transit users (n=1011), safety was also a key concern, with 16% of respondents stating that they did not feel safe “from crime and unwanted attention” on public transit in Montreal.

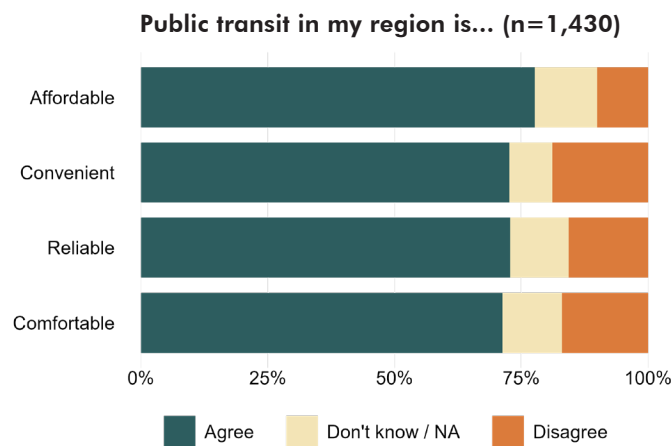


Figure 11 Older adults perceptions of the public-transit system in Montreal

Among those who were not currently using transit (n=419), there was a prevailing opinion that transit is not capable of transporting them to their required destinations. Only 26% agreed that they would be able to get to all the destinations they need using public transit.

## Who Does not use Transit?

Non-transit users do not necessarily have a negative view of the mode. Indeed, respondents who do not use transit vary greatly in their perceptions towards transit, and their intentions to use it in the future. A cluster analysis of survey responses revealed several distinct profiles of non-users, from those who have a generally positive view of transit, but just feel that it is not

for now, to those who are staunchly transit-averse and have no intention of ever using the service. Respondents shared their main barriers to transit use, including concerns about the access to and from transit stops and stations and perceptions of transit being infrequent, unreliable and slow. Many stated that driving was simply a more convenient option for them.

Given the heterogeneity of non-users, a range of strategies must be implemented with different timescales to facilitate and encourage transit adoption. For more information please refer to Alousi-Jones et al. (2025b) and the [Aging in Place Final Report 2022-2025](#).

## Knowledge of Public–Transit Offer

A lack of knowledge about the public-transit services on offer to older adults was apparent. Over 1 in 5 (22%) of older adults in Montreal either disagreed with the statement “I know how my local public transit system works” or responded neutral. Of those who had not used transit in the previous year, less than half (44%) agreed they knew how the public transit system works, representing a significant barrier for mode shift.

Despite all seniors aged 65 or over being eligible for discounted transit fares in Montreal at the time of the survey, only 87% of transit-users in the sample reported receiving them. Targeted information campaigns could therefore yield important benefits as public transit has been free for older adults on the Island of Montreal since July 2023. Off-island transit authorities also offer free transit for seniors but with more restrictions on modes and times (ARTM, 2025).

Several survey respondents expressed enthusiasm for the announcement of upcoming free fares, while others prefer to keep paying a reduced fare for better service quality:

**“I’m very grateful that [public transit] will be free soon and I will certainly use it more often.”**

**“[...] paying \$1 or \$2 per ride would make me happy if I could depend on frequent service.”**

## Disability and Mobility Challenges

Some older adults face added mobility challenges which may impact their ability to perform desired or necessary everyday tasks. In our survey, one-quarter of respondents reported having a disability or health condition that limits their mobility. Among those, 58% reported their disability to be permanent while 27% stated their condition to be recurring. The most reported forms of disability are presented in Figure 12.

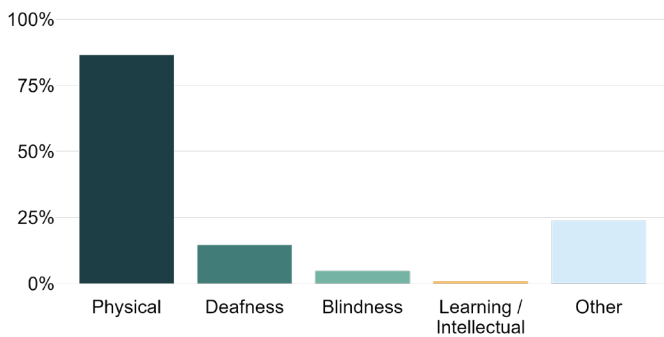


Figure 12 Most common forms of disability (as % of respondents reporting a disability, n=366)

Over 1 in 10 (11%) respondents reported requiring a mobility aid device such as a cane or a wheelchair, to assist them in their daily activities. Mobility challenges associated with public-transit use were raised by many respondents:

**“It is difficult to get on a bus with a walker. [...] And sometimes all the handicapped spots are full.”**

**“More benches [...] close to bus stops. And most importantly, these seats should be available year-round!”**

## Transit Use and Disability

Older adults in Montreal who stated having a disability or mobility-limiting health condition were more likely to be non transit users (43%) compared to other respondents (25%).

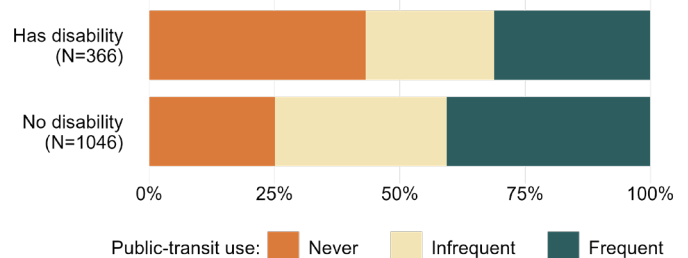


Figure 13 Transit-use frequency by disability status

## Public-transit’s ability to meet the needs of older adults with disabilities

People with disabilities were more likely to feel that their public transit needs were not met compared to people without disabilities. As seen in Figure 14, 55% of Montreal respondents who stated having a disability stated that the public-transit services in their region met their daily travel needs, compared to 73% for those who reported no disabilities. This disparity indicates a need to better grasp the transit needs of older adults with disabilities.

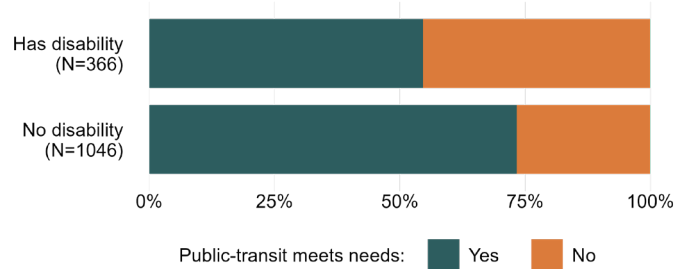


Figure 14 Perception that public transit meets older adults’ needs by disability status



# **Older Adults’ Recommendations on how Public Transit can be Improved in Montreal**



## How do Older Adults in Montreal Think Transit can be Improved?

The survey results suggest that older adults are generally quite satisfied with the transit system in Greater Montreal. Nevertheless, it was important to ask older adults directly about their experiences and how they thought the service could be improved. Respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments and suggestions via open questions. A wide range of comments were provided, with some of the main themes summarized here:

### For some, the system works well

As suggested by the relatively high levels of satisfaction, some respondents expressed how the transit system serves their needs and benefits their lives.

**“Very happy with the 165 service as it is, comes often, on schedule. As a senior, I am usually offered a seat by a younger person.”**

**“I rely totally on paratransit [...] and would be unable to travel without them. Quality of life is much better because of them.”**

### More frequent and reliable service

Some of the most common feedback was related to the frequency, reliability, and difficult connections of services. Bus bunching leading to long waits in cold weather was often mentioned. Many respondents noted that the system does not consider common destinations and off-peak travel hours of older adults.

**“It would be more encouraging to use public transportation if they ran more frequently [...] there is often 30 minutes between busses.”**

**“[...] infrequent at night, when many seniors might want to go to a concert or cinema [...]”**

**“We don’t go to the same locations as the workforce and the youth, so the bus schedules are often inconvenient to us”**

### Improve basic amenities

A very common complaint was a lack of basic amenities both onboard transit and at stops and stations. Respondents noted a need for functional elevators and escalators, more comfortable seating, access to washrooms, clearer signage, and easily accessible timetables.

**“Most escalators do not work. Elevators also often out of order or non-existent. Bus stops in snow banks.”**

**“In some buses, the seats are not forward looking but one sits at right angles to the direction of the bus, and this can make the jerky ride more difficult and dangerous for seniors.”**

### A better experience

Respondents raised concerns about safety in metro stations and noted issues with bus driver behaviour. Others brought up cleanliness issues in stations, busses, and metro cars. Some mentioned that they did not feel safe travelling when other passengers were unmasked.

**“Before the pandemic, older adults greatly appreciated the Navette Or. The personnel listened to our needs, but the service was removed. Many people in my residential complex don’t go out anymore because we don’t feel safe in the regular transit.”**

**“Many, many times, I have seen bus drivers pull out at Roxboro train station when a train was coming in and/or people are running to catch it leaving people out in rain, freezing cold, empty parking at night.”**

### Improving the service for older adults will benefit all users

While these comments arise from the mobility concerns of older adults and their specific travel needs, it is evident that any intervention which seeks to improve the transit experience of older adults, will ultimately benefit all transit users.

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A complete list of the publications from the Getting around to Age in Place project can be found on the [TRAM website](#). The full questionnaire is available for consultation [here](#).

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