

Commuting Time



Noteworthy:

- The number of registered personal automobiles in Alberta increased by 200% between 1961 and 2003.
- According to Statistics Canada's General Social Survey, 77% of commuters traveled alone in 1998, while 69% were alone in 1986.
- Commuting cost Albertans an estimated \$442 million (1998\$) in 1961, rising to \$5,417 million (1998\$) in 2003. That is a 1,126% increase in the cost of commuting in just 42 years.

Commuting in Alberta: How Much?

The number of registered personal automobiles in Alberta increased by 427% between 1961 and 2003.

While there were 0.46 vehicles for every person in Alberta (15 years and over) in 1961, by 2003 this figure had risen to 0.83 vehicles per Albertan. This number also exceeds the number of registered vehicles per person in Canada.

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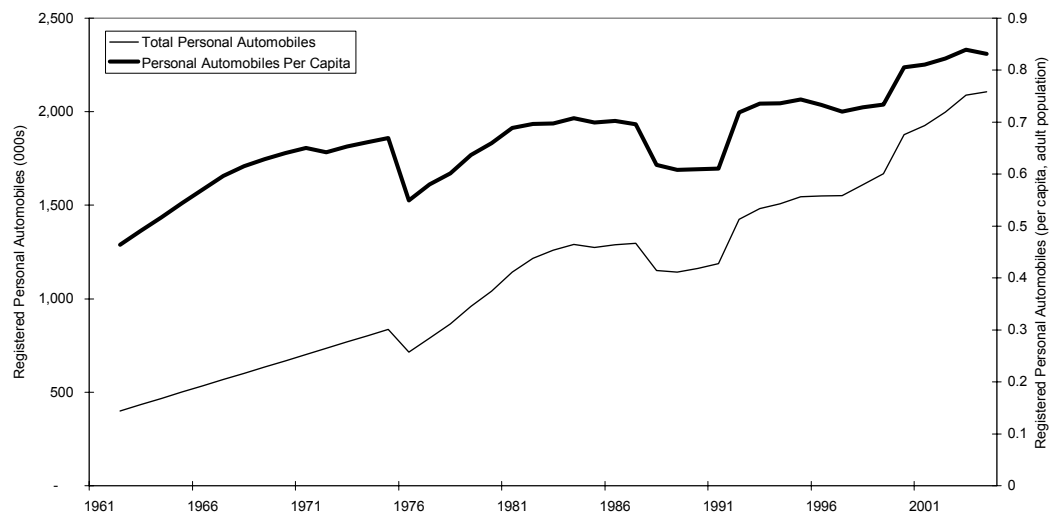
The cost of commuting includes both the direct expenditure that is incurred to travel to and from work every day by vehicle or transit, and the value of the time devoted to such travel. The cost of commuting in Alberta has increased substantially since 1961. While commuting cost Albertans

an estimated \$442 million (1998\$) in 1961, it cost \$5,417 million (1998\$) in 2003. That is a 1,126% increase in just 42 years. The cost of commuting accounted for 2.02% of provincial GDP in 1961. By 2003, that figure amounted to 4.25% of Alberta GDP.

The Cost of Commuting in Alberta: What is included?

- The cost of commuting includes both the direct expenditure that is incurred as a result of traveling to and from work every day by vehicle or transit, and the value of the time devoted to such travel.
- Those costs combined totaled 2.02% of provincial GDP in 1961, and 4.25% of provincial GDP in 2003.

Commuting in Alberta: Number of Registered Vehicles, 1961 to 2003



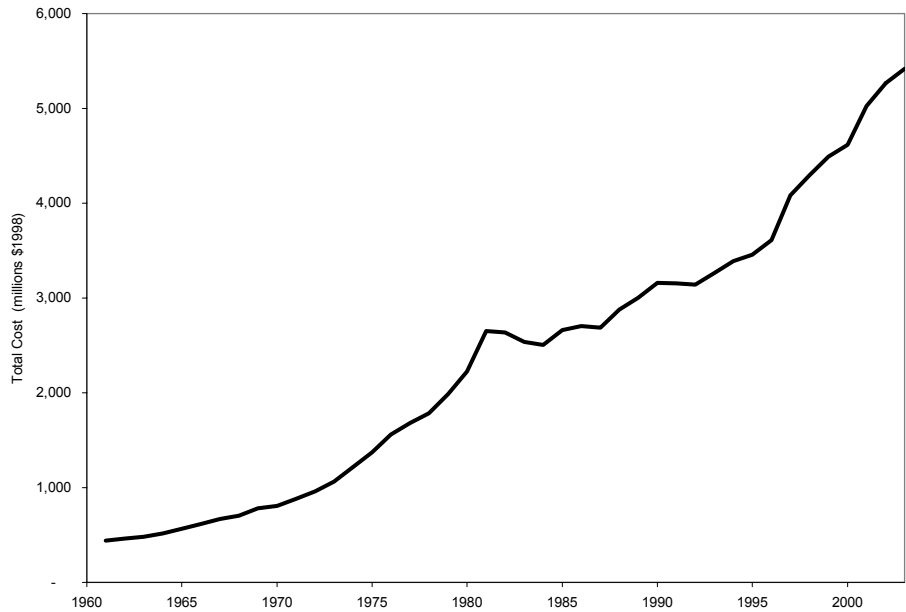
Source: Trend extrapolated from Statistics Canada data

So What?

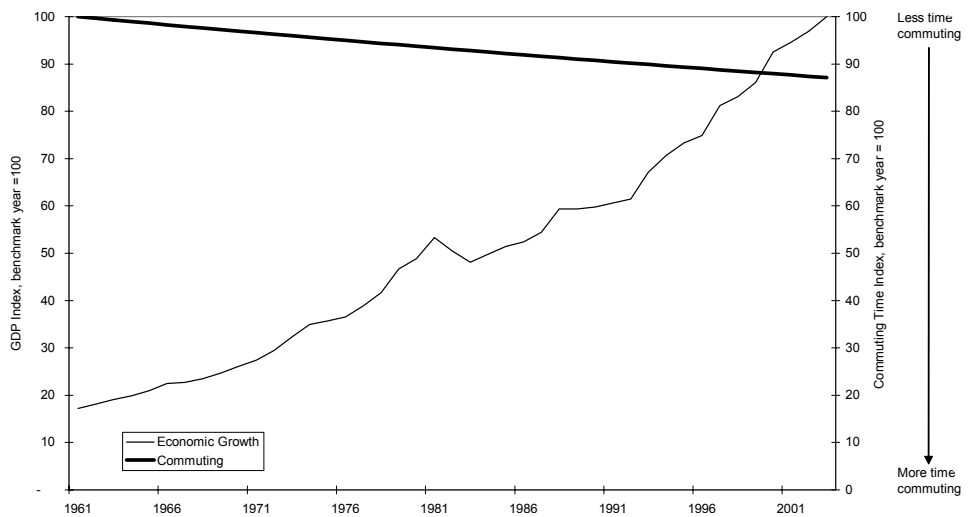
If we were to use the GDP as a measure of well-being, it would tell us that the more money people spend getting to and from work, the better off society is. The further people have to travel and the more time they spend in transit, the more they spend on gasoline, oil, and vehicle maintenance and repairs, the more the GDP increases. In contrast, the GPI accounting framework distinguishes “regrettable” expenditures from other types of expenditures. According to the GPI, expenditure on commuting is regrettable and is therefore deducted from the GPI income statement. The more people commute and the more time and money they spend related to commuting, the more the GPI declines. As the figure to the right shows, the cost of commuting increased substantially in Alberta over the study period.

The figure to the right shows time spent commuting as an index over the study period. Here we set 100 equal to the least amount of time spent commuting over the study period and measured change from that year as an index over time. We call the year in which the least amount of time was spent commuting in the province the benchmark year. In the case of commuting in Alberta, our benchmark year is 1961. In 1961, we estimate that Alberta workers spent an average of 22 minutes per day traveling to and from work by vehicle and transit. The index indicates that commuting time increased rather steadily from 1961 to 2003 (demonstrated by the downward sloping trend line for commuting). In 2003, Albertans spent an average of 25 minutes traveling to and from work. In the figure to the right, we also compare the trend in the commuting index with the trend in a GDP index. The same approach was taken to develop the GDP index. Specifically, the year in which GDP was the highest is set equal to 100 and change is measured from that year over the study period. The figure demonstrates that as GDP has increased, time spent commuting has also increased.

Big Bucks: The Cost of Commuting in Alberta, 1961 to 2003



Time Spent Commuting Index: Where are we today?



The cost of commuting in Alberta in 2003 was an estimated \$5.4 billion-4.25% of 2003 GDP.

As an index, time spent commuting in Alberta in 2003 ranked 87 on a scale of 0 to 100, where 100 is the least time spent commuting from 1961 to 2003 (see figure above).

