



On March 7, the CloseCommute.com global initiative to radically reduce commuting will be launched, with Metro Vancouver and Victoria/Southern Vancouver Island as the first target cities. Toronto and Seattle will follow this summer.

CloseCommute's national campaign aims to reduce unnecessary commuting times and distances for millions of Canadians. The process is simple to understand and implement: Employers will allow and encourage workers who commute long distances – and would prefer to work closer to home – to switch workplaces with someone doing the same job at another location so both can reduce their daily commuting time. Certain teachers and bank tellers, for example, are obvious candidates for peer swaps since they perform standardized work. Employers will also consider candidates' commuting distances during hiring and internal transfer selection.

A demonstration project and other studies in the banking sector indicate this process can reduce an organization's overall employee commuting burden by about 25 per cent within a year. The expected wider impact as many larger employers update their HR practices: *a five to 10 per-cent reduction in overall daily vehicular traffic* in each metro region.

The implementation cost for an employer is minimal, yet the benefits are significant:

- For long commuters – more quality time each day; reduced stress and improved health; and reduced commuting costs.
- For the employer – reduced costs for absenteeism, hiring, training; lower costs for extended health benefits; happier employees; higher productivity; and the potential to create carbon tax offsets.
- For the economy and the environment – potentially hundreds of millions in regional economic benefits; reduced traffic load on roads and highways; faster commercial deliveries due to reduced congestion; and less pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

During the launch of the CloseCommute initiative, media and public attention will be directed to the education and financial sectors. There are more than 33,110 teaching professionals in Metro Vancouver; according to a Statistics Canada dataset we commissioned, only one in six of these professionals works at a school close to their home. Voluntary job exchanges among peers would save Metro Vancouver teachers more than one million hours of needless commuting annually, and could remove as many as 5,000 vehicles from the region's roads. The reduction of vehicles from the education sector alone would boost B.C.'s economy by \$50 million per year, using a standard transportation planning metric.

Peer-reviewed studies have linked long work commutes to a plethora of negative outcomes (see attached summary of the research; an annotated bibliography is available). To cite only some of the effects, longer commutes are linked to increased worker stress; chronic fatigue; accidents and illness; job dissatisfaction and reduced productivity; and higher absenteeism. Long commutes contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and traffic congestion which government economists calculate is slowing B.C.'s economic activity by billions of dollars annually.

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From “*The Effects of Long Commutes and What To Do About Them: An Annotated Bibliography*”

Published research has identified correlations between long commutes and these outcomes:

Physical health

- obesity or adiposity [severe or morbidly overweight] ^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6}
- higher daily exposure to particulate matter and black carbon ^{7, 8}
- more visits to general practitioner ⁹
- lower cardiorespiratory fitness ⁴ and higher cardio-metabolic risk ^{4, 6}
- higher blood pressure ¹⁰
- chronic fatigue ¹¹
- diabetes mellitus ²³
- self-reported poor health, serious backache, headaches, sleep disorders and fatigue ¹²

Mental health

- anxiety and depression, lack of energy and optimism ¹²
- chronic stress, being in a sympathodominant state ¹¹
- increased stress and anxiety ¹³
- lower sense of well-being ¹⁴

Activities

- reduction in sleeping, physical activity and food preparation which over time may contribute to obesity and other poor health outcomes ¹⁵
- less physical exercise ^{4, 9, 16}
- fewer sleeping hours ¹⁶

Work Performance

- increased sickness absence ^{9, 17}
- longer average paid time loss days due to work-related injury ¹⁸
- fewer working hours ¹⁶
- more accidents ¹³
- lower job satisfaction, decreased intention to stay with same employer ¹⁹

Social life

- less access to social capital ²⁰; less time with friends ²¹; and social isolation ¹³
- higher time- and strain-based work-life conflict [WLC] ¹²
- strain on relationships and likelihood of divorce ²¹
- low social participation and low general trust. ²²

[Note: *Part 2 of The Effects* provides various methods for **quantifying the financial effects** of long commuting on the commuter and on the economy.]

¹ Jacobson et al., 2011. ² Jilcott et al., 2010. ³ Lopez-Zetina et al., 2006. ⁴ Hoehner et al., 2012. ⁵ Sacker et al., 2014. ⁶ Sugiyama et al., 2016. ⁷ Karanasiou et al., 2014. ⁸ Shekarrizfard et al., 2016. ⁹ Künn-Nelen, 2016. ¹⁰ Novaco et al., 1979. ¹¹ Kageyama et al., 1998. ¹² Hämmig et al., 2009. ¹³ Pohanka et al., 2004. ¹⁴ Stutzer et al., 2008. ¹⁵ Christian, 2012. ¹⁶ Nomoto et al., 2015. ¹⁷ Ala-Mursula et al., 2006. ¹⁸ Fan et al., 2013. ¹⁹ Steinmetz et al., 2014. ²⁰ Besser et al., 2008. ²¹ Sandow, 2011. ²² Mattisson et al., 2015. ²³ Tsuji et al., 2015