

The benefits of riding the bus

Although I've been aware of the benefits of public transit for a number of years, it really hit home this past month. I've had no choice but to ride transit because of a neck injury that has resulted in my wearing a neck brace 24 hours a day. I am thankful that public transit has been available. The more I ride it, the more I realize the benefits.

There are societal benefits. My riding transit means one less car on the road. If more people took transit, even just one day a week, there would be fewer cars on the road, therefore less traffic, and reduced stress for drivers. The reduction in stress would lead to less road rage and possibly fewer automobile crashes.

Additionally, public transportation access and corridors are natural focal points for economic and social activities. These activities help create strong neighborhood centres that are economically stable, safe, and productive. A number of studies have shown that the ability to travel conveniently in an area without a car is an important component of a community's livability. Public transportation provides opportunity, access, choice, and freedom, all of which contribute to an improved quality of life.

There are the obvious environmental benefits. By relying on public transportation I am reducing my automobile use and helping promote cleaner air, the opposite of which can

exacerbate smog and respiratory illness in our patients. For each kilometre traveled, fewer pollutants are emitted by transit vehicles than by a single-passenger automobile (buses emit 80% less carbon monoxide than a car). Opting for public transit just two days out of five will cut personal greenhouse gas emissions by 25%. Public transit creates less noise and pollution, and lowers parking demands.

There are personal benefits. By riding the bus, I avoid the hassle and cost of parking. My time is important to me, and riding public transit means I can read, catch up on work, or effectively ponder the issue of the day without having to pay attention to my surroundings. With the increasing price of fuel, not to mention insurance rates, servicing, and parking, it just makes sense economically to make use of public transit. In addition, public transportation continues to be one of the safest modes of travel in Canada. In fact, riding a transit bus is 91 times safer than car travel. Transit vehicle operators are highly trained to anticipate and avoid problems. Most transit vehicles are larger, newer, and more substantial than autos or vans.

The bottom line is, using public transit to get to the office and back makes me feel good because I know what I'm doing is good. And it will make you feel good, too, if even just one day a week you ride the bus and in turn reduce your carbon footprint. Not only will your at-risk patients thank you, but your children and your children's children will thank you too.

—**Bill Mackie, MD**
BCMA President