

Article rank ■■■■■

Study awards Victoria urban transit kudos

GREENEST PRACTICES

BY KATHRYN YOUNG *CanWest News Service*

JOHN MCKAY / CANWEST NEWS SERVICE



Even though Victoria was lauded for its green transit practices, the study said there is still room to improve, which is why no Canadian city was awarded an "A" grade.

<i>GREEN TRANSIT</i>	
HOW CITIES RATED IN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY	
	GRADE
Victoria	B
Vancouver	B
Ottawa-Gatineau	B
Winnipeg	B
Montreal	B
Toronto GTA	B
Sherbrooke	C
Hamilton	C
Quebec City	C
Kingston	C
Halifax	C
London	C
Saguenay	C
Abbotsford	D
Kelowna	D
Kitchener	D
Calgary	D
Windsor	D
Edmonton	D
Saskatoon	D
Regina	D
Oshawa	D
St. Catharines-Niagara	F
Barrie	F
Moncton	F
Sudbury	F
St. John's	F

SOURCE: GREEN APPLE CANADA
ANDREW BARR / NATIONAL POST

Victoria has the greenest urban transportation practices in Canada, followed closely by Vancouver, Ottawa-Gatineau and Winnipeg. But none of the 27 cities surveyed received an "A" on their report card, says a study to be released today.

And while the top cities only received Bs, five others got Fs.

"It's amazing how many shades of green there are in this country," said Toronto international trade lawyer Barry Appleton, whose private Appleton Charitable Foundation funded the study, conducted in co-operation with the University of British Columbia's business school.

The study examined 17 factors, including public transit ridership, number of vehicles per capita, number of hybrid or alternative-fuel vehicles in public transit and municipal fleets, policies such as anti-idling and trip-reduction programs, new housing density, greenhouse gas emissions, employer-sponsored eco-transit pass programs and hybrid taxis.

"We set a 10-year achievable target as to where every city could be at and none of them were able to make their target at this point, so none of them got an A," Mr. Appleton said.

"That which gets measured gets done," said Daniel Muzyka, dean of UBC's Sauder School of Business. "There's really room for improvement across the board. They're tough graders," he said about the study's panel of experts that included economists, climatologists, urban designers, architects and transportation planners. Why the failures? "What gives them all F grades is they're really not making efforts," Mr. Appleton said, pointing to St. John's program called STEER — Smart Taxis Encouraging Environmental Respect.

"Great name but when I look at the number of hybrid or alternative-fuel taxis in the fleet," he said, "Zero.

"A lot of cities have announced things, but they haven't done them. If you don't do them, you don't get points in our studies. You can't just talk it, you gotta walk it."

The low grades are not simply a function of city size, since the study assessed the various factors on a per-capita basis, although larger cities can take advantage of economies of scale. However, size does not stop any city from taking action on housing density, anti-idling, transit passes, hybrid and alternative-fuel vehicles or free downtown transit, the report said.

Calgary and Edmonton both received Ds for their heavy use of cars, urban sprawl and high carbon emissions.

Calgary has the highest level of vehicle ownership in Canada, and a great climate-change action plan that hasn't been acted upon.

Edmonton can improve by putting more of its Environmental Strategic Plan into effect.

Winnipeg came fourth because it has free transit in the downtown core and affordable transit passes. About 26% of taxis are hybrids — the second-highest city after Victoria. Winnipeg also boasts relatively low carbon emissions and vehicle ownership.

Regina and Saskatoon tied for 20th spot and D grades because of low density, negligible employer transit passes and few hybrid or alternative-fuel vehicles.

"Both Vancouver and Victoria really did well because not only did they announce policies, they actually did something about it," Mr. Appleton said.

About 30% of Victoria's taxis are hybrids and 36% of its municipal vehicles use alternative fuels.

Carbon emissions and ozone levels are among the best. High housing density means transit systems can be more cost-effective, and 61% of Victoria's housing starts are row houses and apartments, compared with the average of 39% across the 27 cities.

Vancouver also has better air quality, hybrid taxis and 66% high-density housing starts, but fell behind Victoria on the number of people who walk, bike or take the bus to work.

Ottawa-Gatineau did well because 25% of workers don't drive to work, and it has employer-sponsored eco-transit passes, anti-idling bylaws and 48% high-density housing starts. However, the region lost points because it has zero hybrid taxis, for example.

"Ontario cities didn't do so well," Mr. Appleton said, pointing to Windsor, London and Kitchener, which are affected by pollution from the Ohio Valley.

Toronto benefits from the lowest number of cars per capita, and high transit use, high density and anti-idling bylaws. Montreal took top honours for housing density and number of people walking, biking or taking transit to work.