

ANALYSIS: How do Canadians want infrastructure dollars spent? It depends on where they live

By [Ian Holliday](#)

January 5, 2016 – In [our recent poll](#) regarding the federal government’s proposal to run budget deficits in order to invest more money in infrastructure, the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians how they would spend the money if it were up to them.

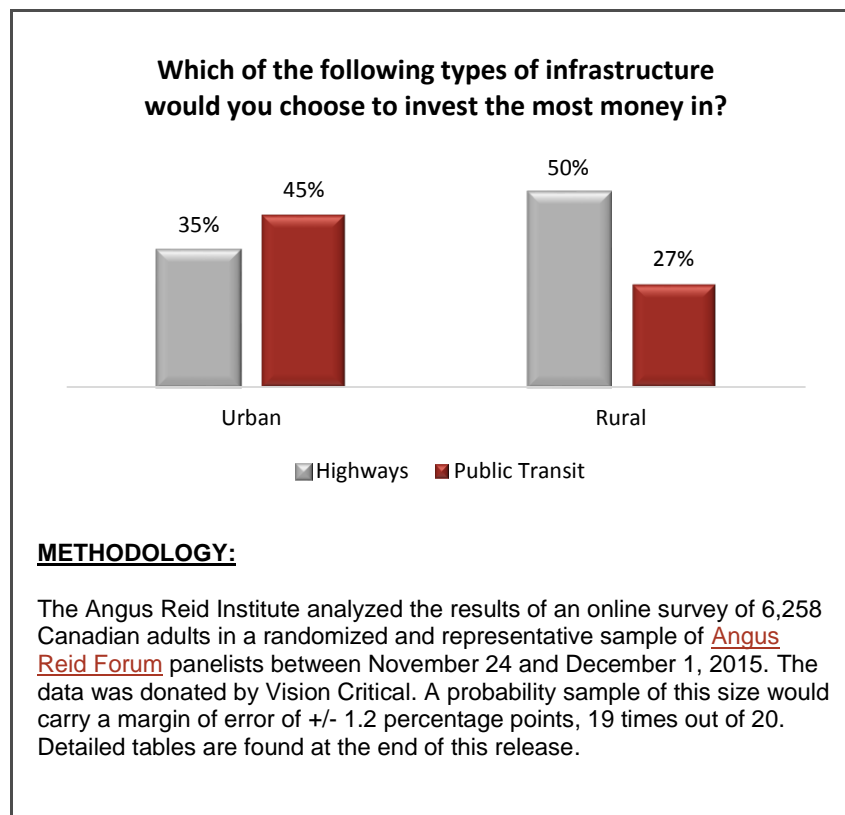
Transportation-related infrastructure topped the list, with 41 per cent of Canadians choosing “public transit,” and 39 per cent choosing “highways” (respondents were asked to pick the two areas in which they’d invest the most money). “Local streets” were the third-most-chosen type of infrastructure for investment (29% chose it).

As might be expected, respondents from urban areas were more likely to choose public transit, while respondents from rural areas were more likely to choose highways (as seen in the graph in the methodology box)

But not all cities (or rural areas, for that matter) have the same priorities, and the large sample size of this poll allows for some interesting comparisons between them.

In Metro Vancouver, for instance, public transit is the top infrastructure priority by a huge margin. Nearly three-quarters of residents (73%) choose it, compared to just one-quarter who choose the next-most-popular option, bridges (25%).

The overwhelming desire for greater federal investment in transit in Metro Vancouver comes after voters in the region rejected a 0.5 per cent sales tax that would have gone to transit [in a referendum last spring](#).

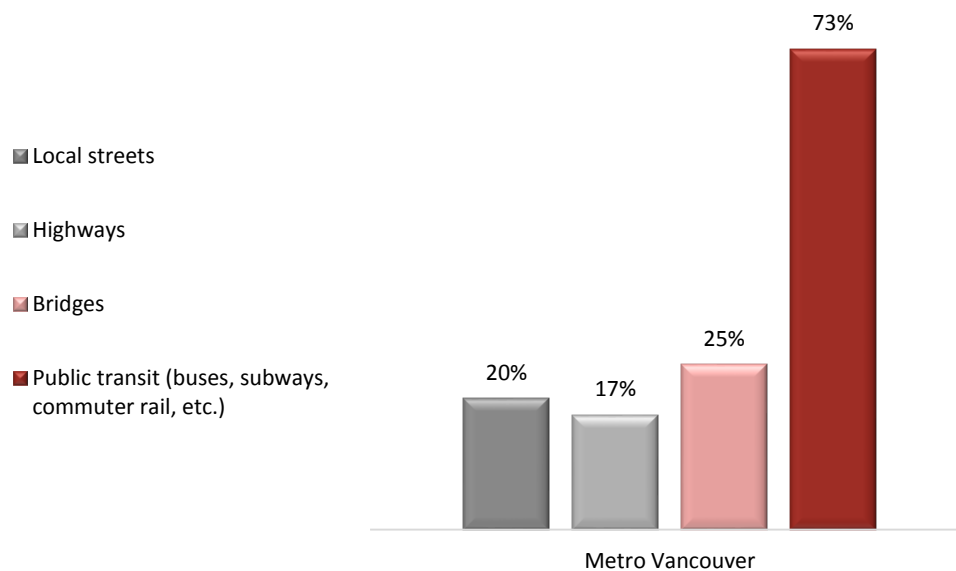


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Obviously, the region's residents want improved transit, but not so badly that they were willing to vote for a plan they didn't like in order to get it.

Which of the following types of infrastructure would you choose to invest the most money in? (choose up to two)



Public transit is also an infrastructure investment priority in the Greater Toronto Area – a finding that comes as little surprise given that residents see getting around as [the number one issue facing the GTA](#) these days, according to our follow-up poll of people in Canada's largest urban centre.

But the size of public transit's lead on highways (the second-most-chosen GTA infrastructure option) varies dramatically depending on what part of the region respondents live in.

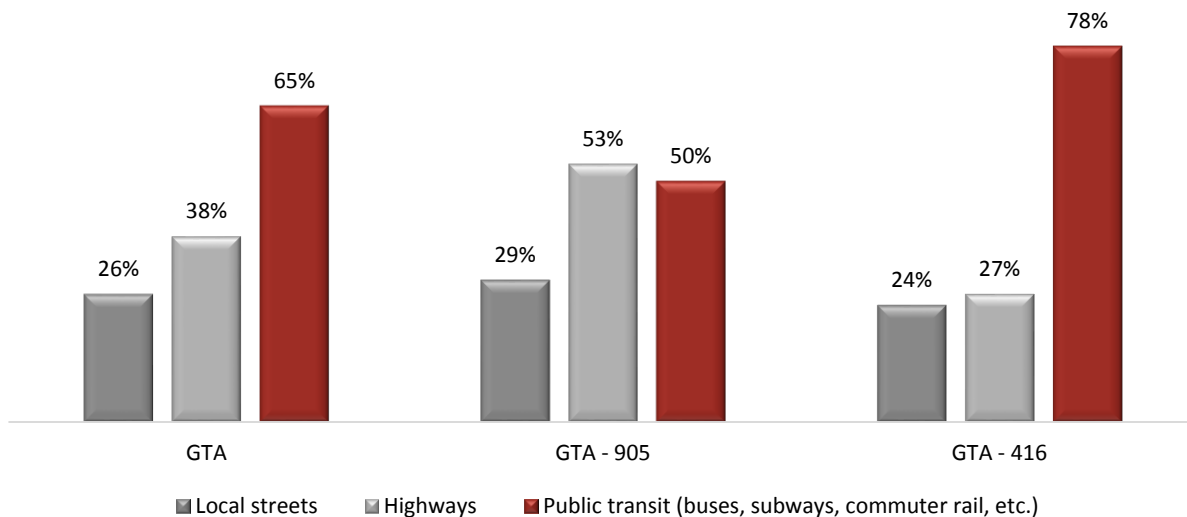
Residents of central Toronto's 416 area code are overwhelmingly likely to say the federal government should spend more on public transit (78% say so), while fewer than three-in-ten respondents there say the money should go to highways (27%).

In the suburban 905 area code, highways are the top choice, though transit is still popular. Some 53 per cent of 905 residents choose highways, while half (50%) choose transit.

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Public transit isn't at the top of the infrastructure agenda in every Canadian city, however. In Winnipeg, roughly one-quarter of respondents (24%) choose it. The majority there would like to see investments in local streets (53%), and larger numbers would like to see federal dollars go toward highways (34%) and water/sewer projects (33%) than transit.

Likewise, transit is not the most popular choice in Montreal. Nearly half of respondents there (46%) favour investment in the city's bridges, [which are notoriously crumbling](#). Fewer than two-in-five (37%) Montrealers choose transit.

Residents of Alberta's two major cities identify similar infrastructure needs, with roughly equal numbers choosing transit (58% Edmonton; 53% Calgary) and highways (40% Edmonton; 38% Calgary) in each city. Notably, however, Edmonton residents (39%) are considerably more concerned about local streets than Calgarians (25%).

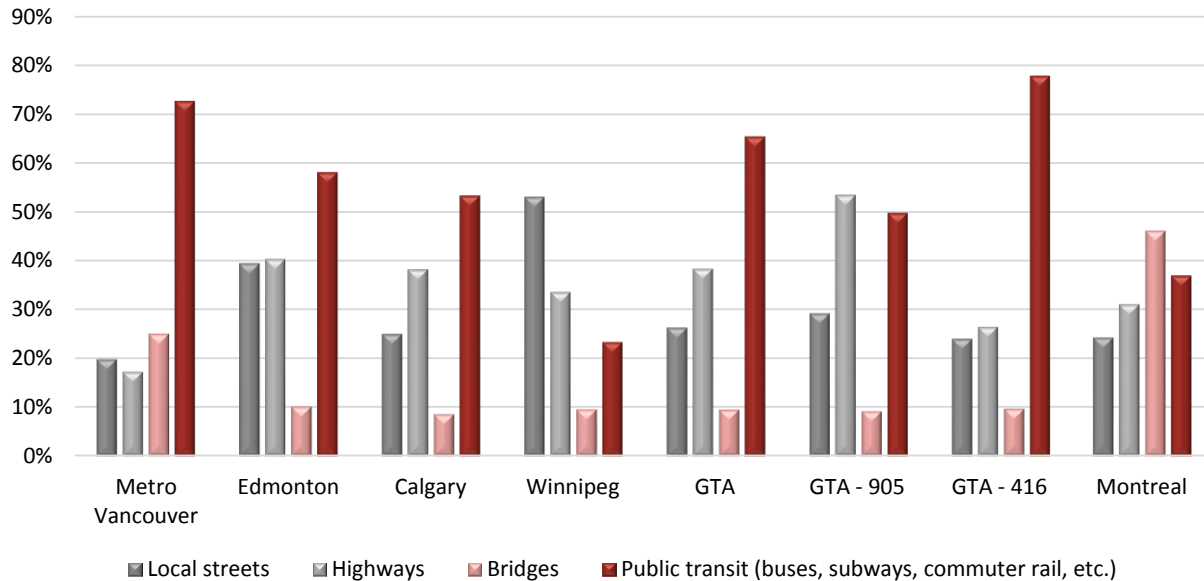
All of these differences between cities are fairly predictable: Places with harsher winters are more likely to choose local streets; places on islands or peninsulas are more likely to choose bridges; places that are more suburban are more likely to choose highways, etc.

But the fact that these differences are predictable doesn't mean they're insignificant. Rather, they're likely to form the basis of each city's lobbying efforts when the time comes for money to be handed out.

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*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

Now, thinking specifically about the infrastructure needs of your own province, suppose you were in charge of deciding how federal infrastructure dollars are spent. Which of the following types of infrastructure would you choose to invest the most money in?
(choose up to two)

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (6258)	City							
		Metro Vancouver (384)	Edmonton (209)	Calgary (214)	Winnipeg (141)	GTA – Total (813)	GTA – 416 (454)	GTA – 905 (359)	Montreal (733)
Public transit (buses, subways, commuter rail, etc.)	41%	73%	58%	53%	24%	65%	50%	78%	37%
Highways	39%	17%	40%	38%	34%	38%	53%	27%	31%
Local streets	29%	20%	39%	25%	53%	26%	29%	24%	24%
Water/sewer	27%	18%	20%	23%	33%	19%	18%	20%	24%
Bridges	20%	25%	10%	9%	10%	10%	9%	10%	46%
A local special infrastructure project (such as moving railyards or viaducts, or a special sewage treatment facility, etc.)	12%	13%	9%	10%	19%	6%	7%	5%	10%
Recreation facilities	7%	9%	6%	9%	6%	10%	10%	10%	3%
Ports/shipping routes	5%	4%	4%	6%	3%	2%	1%	3%	3%
Airports	3%	2%	2%	7%	1%	5%	3%	7%	1%

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