

History of the Canadian Travel Survey (Extract from Statistics Canada catalogue no. 87-212 – Canadian Travel Survey, 2003)

The Canadian Travel Survey, which is conducted as a supplement to Statistics Canada's monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS), was first conducted in 1979 and, beginning in 1980, has been conducted every two years up to 1996. Since 1997, the survey has become annual. The CTS was developed to measure the volume, characteristics and spending of domestic travel, which is defined as same-day or overnight travel by Canadian residents to Canadian destinations with a one-way distance of 80 km or more from home.

From 1980 to the first quarter of 1992, the survey had been conducted on a quarterly basis, that is, the respondents were contacted at the end of the three-month period and were asked to recall all trips ending in that period. Because it was hard to remember all the trips that ended during such a long period, starting with the second quarter of 1992, the reference period was shortened to a month as the same respondent was contacted for each month in the quarter. This method led to trips being under-reported for the second and third months of the quarter. To further improve the data quality in 1994, the collection method was changed again to have a new sample of respondents for every month. This method has been used since. However, the improvement in the collection method caused a break in the series. The data from 1980 to 1992 are not comparable to data collected since 1994. In 1996, no major methodological changes were made to the survey but a number of smaller changes, however, occurred. For example, 1996 was the first year the CTS was conducted using Computer-Assisted Interviewing (CAI) technology. Also, the sample included two LFS rotation groups in 1996, compared to one group in 1994 (some provinces purchased additional rotation groups for the summer months in 1994). Because of these small changes, 1996 data are not comparable to those of 1994 and earlier years.

In 1997, the implementation of the Project to Improve Provincial Economic Statistics (PIPES) resulted in new requirements for the CTS, namely the collection of more reliable annual data on interprovincial trips. In order to comply, the CTS sample was increased to three rotation groups. Members of one group were asked about all trips, while respondents in the other two groups were only asked about out-of-province trips. Except for the sample size, no changes were made to the survey.

In 1998, a few changes were implemented to the CTS concerning the sample size and the questionnaire. The sample size went back to what it was in 1996. In all provinces except Newfoundland and Labrador, the sample was drawn from just two rotation groups. Following an agreement reached with the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the sample from that province was drawn from three rotation groups. Changes to the questionnaire were related to activity participation and accommodation type.

In the summer of 2000, there was a change in the way the CTS data were collected. Rather than being gathered by interviewers working out of their homes (a decentralized method), the majority of the collection was done in all regional offices (centralized method).

In the following months, the trip levels remained somewhat higher than those previously obtained in a decentralized environment. It was concluded that some under-estimation had occurred due to the decentralized collection and, consequently, an adjustment to previously released data was required.

Furthermore, it had been acknowledged that the second time a person or household is interviewed in the CTS, the respondent may have learned they can shorten the interview by reporting fewer trips. It was decided the adjustment to previously released data and the production of current data should take into account this concept of "respondent conditioning".

Provincial logistic regression models were used to adjust the data for 1996 and 1998 to 2001 as part of the project "Historical adjustment for the Canadian Travel Survey – 2001". The data prior to the centralization were adjusted to indicate what the level of travel would have been if the data had been collected from a centralized environment. Prior data were also adjusted for the respondent conditioning phenomenon. However, the data that were collected from a centralized environment were only adjusted for the respondent conditioning. For more information on the project "Historical adjustment for the Canadian Travel Survey – 2001", consult the 2001 edition of this publication.

At the beginning of 2002, a more systematic interviewer monitoring system was put in place in the regional offices. However, since the start of the year, substantial increases in the estimates of 2002 over 2001 were observed. Although there is some volatility in the CTS estimates, the changes were too important to be considered acceptable.

As a result of a comprehensive analysis of the data, Statistics Canada concluded the new monitoring system was in a large part responsible for the increases registered in 2002 and the 2002 estimates could not be compared to those from previous years. Consequently, the project "Historical adjustment for the Canadian Travel Survey – 2003" was put in place to adjust once again the 1998 to 2001 data.

Using a methodology similar to the one used for the project "Historical adjustment for the Canadian Travel Survey – 2001", the data from 1998 to 2001 were adjusted to take into account not only the effects of centralized collection and respondent conditioning, but also the effect of an enhanced monitoring system for the interviewers.

Consequently, the revised 1998 to 2001 estimates released in this publication were produced using the adjusted data that came out from the project "Historical adjustment for the Canadian Travel Survey – 2003". These revised estimates are comparable with those of 2002 and 2003.

For more information, see "Historical adjustment for the Canadian Travel Survey – 2003" in the Appendix.