

PUBLIC TRANSIT IN MEXICO

Car ownership in Mexico is one-fifth of Canada's level, so the vast majority of the people are dependent on public transportation.

Mexico is rapidly becoming urbanized. According to government estimates, the 1993 population of 86 million was 62 percent urban, with 11 percent being semi-urban. The nation now has 15 cities with more than one million people and roughly 100 cities between 200,000 and 1 million. The four largest cities, Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla, have one-third of the population but about 90 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Mexico City alone is home to eight million people and there are 20 million in the metropolitan area.

Automobile ownership in Mexico is a luxury that is not available to the bulk of the population. About 80 percent of Mexican families have annual incomes below \$10,000 pesos. Even before the devaluation, that was less than C \$2,000. According to official government statistics, about 29 percent of the population is classified as *popular*, with incomes below \$1,000 pesos. Although the clogged streets of Mexico City might suggest otherwise, there are only about 10 million registered passenger vehicles in the whole country, compared to 15.5 million in Canada. On a per capita basis, Mexico has only one-fifth as many cars.

Public transit, on the other hand, is relatively inexpensive. The average urban transit fare in Mexico City in early 1995 was only \$0.40 pesos. Although an increase to one peso later in the year was large in proportionate terms, and provoked much protest, the fare is still very low by Canadian standards. For these reasons, public transit is used by the vast majority of Mexicans. Fuel prices are expected to rise rapidly under the 1995 stabilization plan, and this can only increase public transit ridership.

The large cities have publicly-operated mass transit systems. Mexico's *metro*, as the subway system is known, is more than 25 years old. It carries more than 4.5 million passengers daily. More recently, Guadalajara and Monterrey have built light rail transit lines, and a new rapid transit system for Puebla is in the planning phase. Urban buses are operated mainly by private concessionaires, although Mexico City also has a subsidized public system called *Ruta 100* that carries three million passengers daily. The system was rocked by scandal in early 1995, when the incoming government conducted financial audits and there were allegations of corruption on the part of the system's trade union. It was subsequently forced into bankruptcy and is now operated by non-union employees at one-third of its former cost. Recent developments suggest that *Ruta 100* will be privatized.