**Waiting is quietly killing Canada’s productivity**

<https://troymedia.com/viewpoint/everyday-delays-are-quietly-killing-canadas-productivity/>

*Turns out one of the biggest drains on Canada’s productivity might be all the time we spend just waiting*

Canada’s productivity is declining—but not only for the reasons economists usually cite. The real drag on our economy isn’t just tax policy, innovation gaps or labour shortages. It’s something far more ordinary yet universally experienced: the staggering amount of time Canadians waste every day just waiting.



**All that wasted time isn’t just annoying—it’s quietly draining Canada’s productivity.**  
Photo by [Icons8 Team](https://unsplash.com/@icons8?utm_content=creditCopyText&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=unsplash)

Every year, the average Canadian loses more than two weeks doing absolutely nothing. At red lights. On hold. In lines. Watching ads. These delays may feel trivial, but over a lifetime they steal years of time—and they’re quietly crushing our productivity.

We’ve come to accept passive waiting as part of modern life, but the cost is staggering. These lost minutes add up—stealing time that could be spent with family, learning new skills, building businesses or simply resting. Multiply that across the country, and it’s not just a personal inconvenience. It’s a national economic problem.

Productivity means using our time and resources efficiently—whether to earn a living, deliver services or enjoy life. When systems waste that time, the loss becomes structural. And it’s one Canadians feel every day.

Consider how much time the average Canadian adult wastes each year in routine, passive waiting. According to time-use surveys, consumer behaviour studies and media analytics, Canadians spend roughly 36 hours at red lights, 80 hours on hold with government or customer service, and more than 120 hours watching ads—often embedded in streaming platforms. Add time lost to packaging, hot water delays, queues and event buffering, and the total comes to nearly 400 hours a year. That’s close to 16 full days—gone.

| **Activity** | **Annual Hours Lost** |
| --- | --- |
| Red lights and pedestrian signals | 36 |
| Sealed packaging | 9 |
| Waiting for water to heat | 24 |
| Elevators, buses, trains, airplanes | 48 |
| On hold (government, customer service) | 80 |
| Ads (TV/streaming) | 122 |
| Grocery and retail lines | 20 |
| Restaurant wait times | 22 |
| Waiting for entertainment to begin (e.g., previews, buffering, event delays) | 18 |

Over a lifetime, the picture is even worse. The average Canadian adult loses more than 1,180 days—or over 3.2 years—doing nothing but waiting.

| **Activity** | **Lifetime Time Lost (Days)** |
| --- | --- |
| Red lights and pedestrian signals | 112.5 |
| Sealed packaging | 28.1 |
| Waiting for water to heat | 75.0 |
| Elevators, buses, trains, airplanes | 150.0 |
| On hold (government, customer service) | 250.0 |
| Ads (TV/streaming) | 381.2 |
| Grocery and retail lines | 62.5 |
| Restaurant wait times | 68.8 |
| Waiting for entertainment to begin (e.g., previews, buffering, event delays) | 56.2 |

While each instance feels minor, the cumulative effect is significant. These passive delays add up to years of lost time that could be spent on learning, connection, creation or rest.

We’ve normalized these delays. We blame safety concerns, system limitations or advertising models. But multiplied across the population, they become a hidden tax on national productivity and well-being.

Economists have warned for years that Canada’s productivity growth is stalling. Yet few are paying attention to the everyday time drains that quietly erode our potential. Multiply that wasted time across the country and it adds up to millions of lost workweeks—a drag on the economy and on our lives.

This isn’t about blaming individuals. It’s about recognizing how our systems—how cities are built, how services operate, how companies monetize our attention—shape how our time is spent.

Improving productivity doesn’t mean working harder. It means living smarter and wasting less.

Canada must act. Urban design should ease traffic congestion and reduce red-light delays. Packaging rules should eliminate frustrating, over-sealed containers. Government and service providers must offer real digital alternatives and call-back systems. And we need reasonable limits on ad density in both traditional and streaming media.

These are not luxuries. They’re the infrastructure of a more productive and livable society.

Canada doesn’t lack talent or ambition. What we lack is a system that protects time as a resource worth defending.

If we’re serious about progress, we must look beyond tax credits and innovation grants. We need to design daily life so Canadians can spend more time doing things that matter.

Billions of hours are gone—time we will never recover. That’s not just lost GDP.

We’re losing time that makes life worth living.

Canada’s economic productivity is slipping—and the cause may not lie where economists usually look. It’s not just about tax policy, innovation gaps, or workforce participation. It’s also about something much more mundane yet universally experienced: the sheer amount of time Canadians spend waiting.  
  
At stoplights. On hold. For hot water. In grocery lines. At restaurants. Through streaming ads. Over a lifetime, these delays quietly consume a shocking amount of time—time that could otherwise be used for family, learning, meaningful work, or personal well-being.  
  
And these calculations reflect only adults. The time lost by children to boredom, idleness, and digital distractions is a separate, likely significant cost—but not included here.

# What’s Stealing Our Time? Here’s how much time the average adult Canadian wastes annually in routine, passive waiting:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Activity | Annual Hours Lost |
| Red lights & pedestrian signals | 36 |
| Sealed packaging | 9 |
| Water heating (showers/taps) | 24 |
| Elevators, buses, trains, airplanes | 48 |
| On hold (help desks, government services) | 80 |
| Ads (TV/streaming) | 122 |
| Waiting in grocery/retail lines | 20 |
| Restaurant wait/service time | 22 |
| Waiting for entertainment to start | 18 |

That’s almost 16 full days every year—over three years across a 75-year adult lifespan—devoted to doing... nothing.

**Annual Time Wasted per Canadian Adult**

Bar chart if needed

# A Lifetime Lost to Waiting. The same data projected across a 75-year lifespan reveals that the average Canadian adult loses more than 1,180 days, or over 3.2 years, just waiting passively.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Activity | Lifetime Time Lost (Days) |
| Red lights & pedestrian signals | 112.5 |
| Sealed packaging | 28.1 |
| Water heating (showers/taps) | 75.0 |
| Elevators, buses, trains, airplanes | 150.0 |
| On hold (help desks, government services) | 250.0 |
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# Lifetime Time Wasted by Activity (Adults Only)

Pie chart if needed.

# It’s Not Just Inconvenience—It’s Structural Waste. We’ve grown numb to these delays. They’ve been normalized under the labels of safety, system limitations, or monetization. But we must now treat these delays as what they are: a productivity tax on everyday life. These delays aren't just minor frustrations. Across Canada’s adult population, they scale into billions of wasted hours—time that will never be recovered.

# A National “Time Audit”. Productivity is not just about working more or harder. It’s about reclaiming time from waste. Canada must commit to: • Smart city planning that optimizes flow and reduces dead time. • Packaging standards that prioritize accessibility without compromising safety. • Public service modernization with call-back options and real digital solutions. • Limits on ad density in both traditional and digital media.

# Valuing Time as a National Resource. Canada doesn’t lack ambition or talent. What we lack is a system that respects and protects our most precious resource: time. A national strategy for productivity should begin not with spreadsheets and incentives—but with a commitment to eliminate waste in how Canadians live every day. Because it turns out, we aren’t just losing GDP—we’re losing life.

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