



## *NEWS RELEASE*

### ***High Gas Prices: Fuel for the Political Fire***

- **Canadians Cutting Down on Driving and Changing Their Lifestyles**
- **Governments Can and Should Do Something, Most Canadians Say**

Most Canadians are either cutting down on the amount they drive, making other significant changes to their daily lives, or doing both, as a result of soaring fuel prices, a new EKOS poll has revealed. Fifty-eight per cent of Canadians say they have reacted in some substantial way. Forty-six percent of Canadians say they are driving less, and 23% say they have made other adjustments, such as taking fewer trips, carpooling or changing their vehicle. (Some people of course, are both driving less and making other adjustments).

Meanwhile, most Canadians (65%) believe that their governments have it within their power to cushion the effects of the rising gas prices, though there are big regional variations among Canadians.

“Westerners, Atlantic Canadians, and to a lesser extent Ontarians, overwhelmingly believe that their governments could take action against higher gas prices,” said EKOS President Frank Graves. “Only in Quebec does a majority think that governments are powerless”.

There are also big differences among people in different regions over what government actions would be appropriate to combat rising fuel costs. Most British Columbians and Albertans believe governments should lower taxes on gasoline. A plurality of Ontarians and Atlantic Canadians feel the same way. Those Quebeckers that feel governments can cushion the public from rising prices are more likely to call for government regulation. In most of Canada, price regulation is the second most favoured option for government, but trails a cut in fuel taxes by a wide margin.

“The claims Canadians are making about the impact of rising gas prices on their behaviour are startling,” said Graves. “Given the entrenched nature of consumption patterns it is astonishing that the majority of Canadians say they have made such major alterations.”

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“We might well speculate that this combination of pervasive pain and the widespread belief that governments can and should do something could vault this issue into major significance in the coming federal election,” he said. “If car insurance can reshape electoral outcomes at the provincial level, this rise in gas prices could become a combustible issue for Prime Minister Martin and the Liberals.”

When it comes to how Canadians are adapting to higher gas prices, there are big differences between men and women, older and younger Canadians, the rich and poor, and the different regions of the country.

Although men and women both report a reduction in the amount they drive, women are much more likely to say they have started carpooling or walking more. Men are far more likely to say that they are cutting down on trips in general.

Among those reporting recent changes to their lifestyle as a result of gas prices, about a quarter of those under 25 years of age reported that they had increased their use of public transport. However, among other age groups, the numbers turning to public transport were negligible. Baby boomers and the elderly are more likely to report simply making fewer trips.

Intriguingly, prosperous Canadians are the most likely to report resorting to carpooling, though less surprisingly they are the least likely to say they have reduced their trips overall. Many lower-income Canadians say they are walking more, turning to public transport, or cutting down on trips.

Among those reporting changes to their daily lives as a result of rising gas prices, there are striking regional variations. While some Albertans in this category said they have reduced other household spending, almost no Quebeckers reported that they had. Many of those making changes in their daily lives on the Prairies said they were making fewer trips, but this was much less common among the Albertans we surveyed. Our Quebec respondents were the most likely to say they are changing to a better vehicle.

The poll was conducted by EKOS Research Associates between September 13 and 19. 1031 people were interviewed. National results are considered accurate plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, nineteen times out of twenty.