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Chair: Mr. Peter Schiefke



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• (1530)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 45 of the Standing Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities.

Today's meeting is running in hybrid format, pursuant to the order of the House of Commons dated Thursday, November 25, 2021. Members may participate in person or with the Zoom application.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), the committee is meeting today to consider a request, received by the clerk and submitted by five members of the committee, to discuss the travel delays and treatment of air and rail passengers over the last month. Since the time that letter was received, there have been private discussions going into this meeting. My understanding is that there is a broad consensus on the motion that I will read following my remarks and the statements by members.

Members of the committee, poor services received by Canadian travellers over the holiday, particularly from Sunwing and VIA Rail, but from others as well, were completely unacceptable. Many of our constituents had their holiday plans disrupted or ruined, and they spent long periods of time in airports, hotel lobbies or train cabins waiting for updates that were too slow in coming. Thousands of individuals and families had particularly miserable experiences that were compounded by futile attempts to get clear explanations or to secure compensation for the time and money that they had spent.

Although weather delays are a part of winters in Canada, some of the poor service travellers received cannot be explained solely by weather. Canadians deserve better service. Canadians deserve better, period.

In recent days some explanations and apologies have been offered, but this committee has important roles to play: first, in helping Canadians understand what happened, what their rights are and what kind of compensation they may be entitled to; second, in holding those responsible accountable; and third, in seeking answers about what will be done to avoid a repeat of these problems in the future. The purpose of the meeting today is to discuss how it will undertake this work and provide direction to committee staff on next steps.

I will now open the floor for remarks. We will begin with Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Strahl, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We are here today because the opposition has demanded that this meeting be conducted urgently, that we urgently consider the matter of the travel that occurred over the holiday break, when we saw people sleeping on the floor of airports, when we saw people being shuttled around, in foreign countries, from hotel lobby to hotel lobby, when we saw people trapped on trains, etc. This followed, of course, the disastrous summer travel season, when people were also separated from their baggage, when they were sleeping on airport floors, when the system completely failed. We were promised, quite frankly, by the Liberal minister, that these matters were addressed, that he had it under control, that the broken system had been fixed.

Clearly it has not been fixed. There are still massive problems. Quite frankly, I think we in the Conservative Party are tired of hearing Liberal ministers say that things are unacceptable when they have the power to make change.

That's what we want to get out of this meeting here today. We want the minister to appear before us, to answer questions about how he allowed the system to stay broken, how he allowed airports to fail to serve their customers, how airlines failed to communicate with their customers, how once again we had the same failures, in many cases, with baggage delivery, etc., and communications nightmares in which passengers were an afterthought, quite frankly.

We need this committee to do some serious work and to hold people accountable, starting with the minister. That's why we believe, as was said in the letter that we sent to the chair to demand this meeting, that the minister should appear for two hours to discuss what he has done and what he hasn't done. Quite frankly, whatever he has done has not gotten the job done. We need to get to the bottom of this here at this committee. We are the body that is charged with holding the department, the minister, accountable on behalf of all parliamentarians and on behalf of all Canadians.

We intend to take that work seriously. These hearings we have proposed should be conducted seriously. They should be conducted thoroughly. We should make sure that we don't simply scratch the surface here but that we once and for all get to the bottom of why this has happened now for two travel seasons in a row and what can be done to prevent it from happening in the future.

Quite frankly, Canadians deserve better. It's up to this group to make sure we get the answers we deserve. That, again, starts with the minister coming to answer for his department and to answer for his actions. That will be the focus we want to see going forward.

In addition, we want to hear from not just the airlines. They do have to answer, but so does every other part of the federally regulated system. We need to hear from airports. We need to hear from the Canadian Transportation Agency, which currently has a 30,000-person backlog. It takes 18 months to have a complaint heard from passengers who are experiencing problems with airlines. We need to talk to VIA Rail and CN Rail about how they are going to address the concerns that were raised with respect to the delays that happened with those entities. This isn't just about airline passenger protection; we need to talk about other modes of transportation that were impacted as well.

We don't intend to allow the buck to be passed, to have more tweets about how things are unacceptable. We need to make change. We need to demand change. We need to demand accountability. That's what we're here to demand today.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1535)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Strahl.

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by saying that we co-signed the letter calling for this urgent meeting of the transport committee because, like so many other MPs, we were receiving communications from constituents who were stuck in incredibly difficult and stressful situations over the holidays.

I thought I would set the stage for my remarks by reading a brief excerpt from one of the emails I received from the mother of a constituent whose son was stuck in Mexico and unable to get home. She writes to me that, "He is getting no reliable information from Sunwing as to how long this may last. Every day he has to check out of the hotel and wait in the lobby to see if he is included in the passenger list that will be provided a room for the next night. He is frantic. From my end, I have made countless phone calls to Sunwing and have not been able to talk to anyone. There is no reliable information and no communication from Sunwing representatives. He cannot afford to book a return flight with another airline and then fight with Sunwing to get his money back. I know there are certain rights he has, but they seem to be difficult to access and our government does not seem interested in their constituents' dilemmas. He is not alone, there are hundreds of Canadians in the same situation. Something has to be done for these people. I am a senior on pensions that are very limited. I cannot afford to fly him home either. Please, please help."

This person ended up having to fly her son home on another airline at huge personal expense, and this is one of many stories that I believe this committee needs to get to the bottom of. We obviously need to hear from the airlines and from the different parties in the

transportation system that failed to uphold even the most basic level of customer care that Canadians deserve. Most important, we need to hear from the Minister of Transport, the person who is charged with overseeing Canada's transportation system and upholding the rights of Canadian passengers.

We know from the work of the transport committee—and I'll note that the committee is currently studying the issue of air passenger rights—that Canada's approach to air passenger rights is deeply flawed and that from the very beginning it has fallen short of the model set by the European Union and others around the world. This needs to change.

We now have an admission from the minister that the system isn't working. We have a backlog of over 33,000 complaints in front of the CTA, and we have thousands of passengers across Canada who, since the beginning of the pandemic, have faced delays and cancellations that have upended their lives and cost them money and convenience.

We need to situate this discussion not only in the context of the travel chaos that happened over the holidays and get answers about when the minister intervened, what actions he took and how the airlines allowed this to get so bad and failed to deliver basic customer care. We need to address the larger context as well, and that context is the fact that we have a failed system in Canada for dealing with passenger rights.

We have a clear road map for making changes to the legislation and the regulations, which would allow us to catch up with the example set by the European Union, and we need to know from the minister when he plans to act, when he plans to table those changes. After all, we are just a few months after the last revisions to air passenger protections in this country, and now we're facing another delay in getting the change that Canadians so rightly deserve.

Mr. Chair, I very much look forward to Thursday's meeting. I look forward to holding this government accountable. I look forward to getting answers on behalf of the hundreds of Canadians who were stuck in such difficult situations over the holidays. I hope, through the work of this committee, that we can improve Canada's air passenger protections once and for all so that no one has to face these kinds of experiences again.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vignola, you are the next speaker and I give you the floor.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I agree entirely with my colleagues about the unacceptable situations that travellers experienced.

Yes, we're in Canada, and a storm is a storm. Nonetheless, carriers have responsibilities under the Air Passenger Protection Regulations. According to accounts from many customers, these responsibilities were not met, to the point of wondering why a regulation even exists if it's not applied.

Does the Canadian Transportation Agency have enough support from the government to do its work effectively? Are there enough officials to apply regulations effectively? Familiar with the situation and timelines for processing complaints, are carriers choosing to ignore regulations, telling themselves that customers can just go file a complaint and they, the carriers, can keep making money until those complaints are processed? The question is warranted, but it's a shame to be asking it. We shouldn't have to ask it, but it's a legitimate question that people are wondering about.

It's not a matter of judging the reasons for delays. As I said at the beginning, a storm is a storm, and protecting passengers and staff is and must remain a priority. This is therefore not about making planes take off in a storm. That said, the treatment of passengers, the lack of communication and the inability to register for other flights once the storm was over are certainly aspects worth looking into. To shed light on them, not only must the Minister of Transport appear for the full two hours, but carriers must do so as well.

We must determine why the Air Passenger Protection Regulations seem so difficult to apply. They are relatively clear, even if they aren't strong enough, in my humble opinion. In fact, there are jurisdictions where legislation is significantly more powerful and protect passengers much better. That said, the regulations lay out very clear obligations for carriers in case of delays, if only to provide an update on the situation every 30 minutes.

If the situation is not expected to improve overnight, hotel accommodations must be offered. However, in many cases, that didn't happen. If the carrier thinks they may be able to get the plane up before the end of the night, a clause in the legislation says that hotel accommodations are not required. Nonetheless, everyone knew full well that the storm wasn't going to last just two or three hours, but all night and into the next day. Those who were stranded at airports should therefore have received compensation as outlined in the legislation.

In the list of people that we need to meet there are, of course, service providers, airports, the minister, the agency. But we mustn't forget one extremely important person that we must hear from and listen to: the customer. I'm not asking to meet all the customers adversely affected during the holidays. We can, for instance, call on consumer and passenger rights advocates, which have relevant expertise. They heard complaints that are important for the committee to hear, because we represent those people as well.

At the end of the day, what do I expect? I expect real, sustainable and effective changes that will require airlines to take responsibility for their actions and their decisions about their source of revenue: their customers.

Furthermore, this is a matter of honour. When we buy a ticket, we enter a contract. In my opinion, it is then normal to have that contract honoured. If a carrier is unable to honour it, it's normal to offer adversely impacted customers any compensation required and to support their claims.

• (1545)

Our role also includes reminding carriers about all this. The situations we experienced with the airline industry over the last several months have made Canada an international laughingstock. These

situations are recurring, and proposed solutions do not seem to be effective. That is an unpleasant reality, but that is what is happening. It has to end, as much for our customers as for our reputation.

As my party's critic for tourism, I must say that being an international laughingstock is not good news. Tourism is a critical sector of our economy. It brings in a great deal of money to our country. Those are all reasons to hold a meeting soon. We must have a good meeting.

I'll conclude by highlighting that we must, however, avoid the trap of moving too quickly and giving the impression that we want to dismiss the subject. Yes, we must act quickly and with diligence, and we have to focus on the subject. However, if we do it in only one day, even during a long meeting, I wonder if that would send the right message, and if it would provide an opportunity to thoroughly question all the players involved. We must ensure that citizens' and parliamentarians' voices are heard and respected. We must be open to the possibility of holding two long meetings to cover the subject thoroughly and make recommendations that will be followed.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

Ms. Koutrakis, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to say a few words. Thank you, especially, for being the first one to suggest that we hold meetings on this topic.

I note, with some amusement, having listened to my esteemed colleagues, that our opposition colleagues demanded we hold this meeting after you had already indicated your intention to hold one. We had already started the process of organizing it. Nonetheless, I will be brief in my remarks.

Like many MPs, I have constituents who were adversely affected by the travel disruptions over the holidays and received poor service. Canadians have had a rough few years going through the pandemic. Many were looking forward to a break in the holidays and a return to normalcy.

I'm very disappointed that many had their plans altered or ruined. As the minister remarked, this was completely unacceptable.

[*Translation*]

Like many other members, I heard comments from passengers hit hard by disruptions during the holidays and who received bad service. Canadians went through some difficult years during the pandemic. Many were eagerly looking forward to relaxing during the holidays and returning to normal. I am therefore disappointed to find out that many saw their plans fall apart. As the minister said, it is entirely unacceptable.

[English]

I am sincerely and eagerly looking forward to getting work under way and to having witnesses appear and answer the tough questions. Hopefully, we will provide the answers to all Canadians that they deserve, and ensure that this does not happen again.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Koutrakis.

Are there other members who would like to share their remarks?

[Translation]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't quite know where to start. This meeting comes at a critical time for Canadians, especially those who travelled during the holidays, but also those who will travel during the next two break periods and those who will travel during future snowstorms. Indeed, we are in Canada, and it so happens that there are snowstorms in Canada.

The Liberals seem to be claiming that they convened the meeting before anyone else. Canadians want us to solve the problem, which is perfectly legitimate. This meeting was therefore convened in response to a request signed by opposition party members, which the notice of meeting clearly states. I invite Ms. Koutrakis to check it, since that is indeed the case. The committee met as quickly as it did because we didn't wait. We said that a meeting absolutely had to be held as quickly as possible, because people deserve answers.

Canadians had to wait in planes for 12 hours. Canadians were stranded on trains for 18 hours. Canadians tried to reach airline companies without ever getting an answer, not knowing when they would be able to come back home or what happened to their luggage. The situation was disastrous.

We thought we were reliving the airport crisis we went through when airports and airlines all over the world reopened their doors to Canadians. You'll remember that Canada was everyone's laughing-stock, there were so many delays. I share the point of view of my colleague, Mrs. Vignola, on the subject: Canada is a G7 country. Its infrastructure should be able to accommodate travellers, but it earned a bad reputation, and that hasn't changed.

A major objective of calling this meeting, which the Liberals have forgotten, is an appearance by the Minister of Transport. He is the ultimate authority for air and rail transportation, and he must appear first to answer our questions. Why did he fail yet again to set up a system that works for Canadians? It's not very surprising if we come back to some of the minister's statements. I have one here that I want to bring to the attention of committee members. On May 11, 2022, the minister stated that travellers were out of practice after two years of pandemic, and some were causing slow-downs at security checkpoints. So, according to the minister, slow-downs were travellers' fault.

Since then, there's been many events and many tweets—they communicate a lot on Twitter at the Department of Transport—to state that such a situation is unacceptable. However, does anyone

understand that the minister is the one responsible? If it is unacceptable, why did he do nothing? Why does this continue to happen? Does anyone understand that if he does nothing, if the minister doesn't answer all of our questions, this will continue to happen? Why say that it's unacceptable while doing nothing?

First and foremost, we must hear what the Minister of Transport has to say. He must come and explain the summit and meetings with airline companies. The minister represents Cabinet and the Prime Minister in discussions with airlines. Why, with all the power and ability to act at the minister's disposal, did Canada go through yet another crisis like the one we experienced over the holidays?

That is why it is important to hear the minister's point of view and take the time to talk with him. I think that a one-hour meeting with him is not enough. Canadians who waited for 12 hours or 18 hours deserve at the very least for the Minister of Transport to answer questions from all parties.

The Liberals also have travellers in their ridings who were stranded at airports for hours at a time. Members of the NDP or the Bloc Québécois also have questions that need answers. It's not about political stripes, it's about travellers. Unfortunately, travellers from all over the country were caught up in this storm, which wasn't caused by weather, but by chaotic administration of our system.

● (1555)

The Minister of Transport has his role. He must intervene, he must do what he does. He must take steps to handle the situation.

That is why, Mr. Chair, it's important to hear from the minister first, for him to come and explain which steps were taken, which airlines were called, when they were called and, above all, what real action was taken before Canadians waited for hours and hours in trains, or in planes, or on the ground in airports all over the country.

For these reasons, it is important for us to have this meeting. Like my colleagues, Mrs. Vignola, Mr. Strahl and Mr. Bachrach, I definitely want answers from the minister. We must take the time to do things right, because it's time to resolve the situation once and for all. Suffice it to say it's unacceptable to do nothing. Canadians deserve better, that's true, but they also deserve better from their government.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Berthold.

[English]

We will go to Ms. Koutrakis followed by Ms. Lantsman.

Ms. Koutrakis, the floor is yours.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I simply want to make a few comments with regard to the minister and state that he has never refused an invitation to appear at this committee. He has already indicated publicly more than once—several times—to media and in written media and also in radio interviews that he will accept this one.

I simply want to remind everyone that he appeared five times at this committee last year, most recently in December. That being said, I am sure the minister will accommodate us as much as possible. As we all know, ministers' schedules are incredibly busy. I'm sure, given the availability in his schedule, this will be the case this time as well.

The only thing I would kindly request, then, and ask my colleagues, is that we treat him with the same respect with which he treats our committee. It's not as though this minister has been difficult and hasn't been accepting invitations. I think, if anything, he's been more than willing to appear and to provide answers to the questions Canadians have for him.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Koutrakis.

I don't see Ms. Lantsman's hand anymore.

Ms. Lantsman, do you still want to speak? No.

Okay, Mr. Strahl, we'll go with you.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Just to jump back in there, quite frankly, I don't think that we, as members of this committee, need the parliamentary secretary to instruct us on how we should question the minister. I think he's quite capable of coming before this committee to defend himself. We will question him as we see fit. We are here representing Canadians, who had their lives turned upside down, and who, with small children, were on planes for 11 hours, trapped on the tarmac or who were sleeping on the floor of a cold airport. If we're upset and we want answers from the minister, we're going to ask for them. We're not going to soft-pedal that. We're not going to have him shielded by other members of this committee.

I, as a parliamentarian and a member of this committee, take offence to being instructed on how we should treat the minister. What we need to talk about here is the minister's treatment of Canadian passengers, not our treating the minister with kid gloves if he deigns to appear before this committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Strahl.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor, Mrs. Vignola.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just take a few minutes.

This is not about attacking anyone, from any party, but simply about asking questions in the interest of the public we represent. We're not here to represent a party. That's not the case for me, at least, because I am not representing my party. I represent the people who voted for me or not, and who have questions. I think we need to refocus on that.

Indeed, there are questions we need to put to the Minister of Transport. It must be done respectfully. That seems obvious to me,

but we still must ask those questions. We're not talking about asking questions peppered with curse words and insults, but simply asking what is going on, and why it's still not working. We need to reflect and work together for the good of the public, and not indulge in political navel-gazing, no matter how magnificent the navel. I'm making jokes, but I am very serious.

The minister may find it challenging to schedule the two hours we are asking of him; I'm well aware of that. However, I think that the public deserves two hours of answers. The same applies to airline companies who, all too often, don't answer questions, preferring instead to ask what we want them to do, or say that it's not their fault, it's someone else's.

We need to get in problem solving mode. In problem solving mode, it is not Julie Vignola, all alone in her office, who will come up with something. It is not Sunwing, all alone in their offices, who will come up with something. Rather, it's about teamwork. We each have our fields of expertise, just like the airlines. It is with everyone communicating together that we will find viable solutions to serve the public we represent, truly and fully. That is what I would like us to focus on today.

Basically, unless I'm actually living in a fantasy world, I think and I hope every single one of us wants to represent the public and its interests. Not the interests of big CEOs and big companies, but those of 99% of the people we represent. Asking questions is part of that objective, not attacking each other for the way we've pronounced a sentence or articulated an idea.

Now we must meet and act responsibly. That is what I expect of us. That is what the public expects of us. The more we respect each other, the more I think we will find solutions that airlines will want to implement, because they won't be painted with any political stripes, be they sky blue, darker blue, red, orange or green. They will be sensible, reasonable, sustainable and respectable.

I know that we have 53 minutes or a little more time left. Earlier, I suggested that we not rush our study. It would therefore be good to hold a first meeting on January 12, and a second one the week after, to cover the subject thoroughly and take the time to see all the people the committee deems necessary to consult.

I'm interested in your opinions on the subject. I could also send you a proposal through the clerk to have it translated quickly.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Vignola.

I think the aim of the motion I will read shortly is to make Thursday's meeting just one part of our study on air passengers' rights, which will continue once the House returns on January 30. Everything the witnesses tell us on Thursday will be part of this study.

That said, it is up to members of the committee to decide if they want another meeting on the subject before the House returns, because our goal is to hold several meetings to hear from all the witnesses needed to publish a report.

Do any other members want to take the floor?

[English]

Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I'd just flag for the committee that Ms. Lantsman has lost her connection. Certainly, before we have any votes or anything of that nature, we would want to make sure that it was re-established. I'm not sure what the procedure would be.

Also, I think at this point, we are certainly open to Madame Vignola's suggestions. I think they are good ideas to study this thoroughly. I would suggest, perhaps, that at this point we need to work from the motion in order to make specific suggestions, as Madame Vignola has. We would certainly be open to hearing a motion that we can then move into a subsequent discussion on.

I'm not sure what the process is for moving that. I know we have had some discussions regarding a framework to start discussions. I would suggest, if committee members are okay with it, that we move to that phase of the meeting in which we can start to get down into the details of what we'd like to see for those meetings.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Strahl.

I will ensure that no vote is called until Ms. Lantsman has re-established her connection.

With the consent of members, I'd like to read the following motion. It is my understanding there is broad consensus on this motion, which reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee commit to undertake a special meeting to study the travel disruptions that occurred during the December 2022-January 2023 holiday period with a view of understanding why the disruptions occurred, holding those responsible accountable and identifying what actions are being taken to avoid a recurrence of the problems in the future.

That, as part of the study, representatives of industry, including Sunwing, VIA Rail, Air Canada, and Westjet; the Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver airport authorities, the Canadian Transportation Agency, Transport Canada and the Minister of Transport be invited to testify.

And that, in consultation with the Committee Members, the Chair be empowered to coordinate the resources and scheduling necessary to hold the special meeting on Thursday, January 12th, 2023 and that the testimony recorded at the special meeting become part of the Committee's ongoing study on Air Passenger Rights.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vignola, I give you the floor.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I agree with most of the motion. That said, the cause of the disruptions is clear: it was bad weather. Unless we claim to be Mother Nature and manage to change anything whatsoever about it, we can't do much.

I propose, however, to amend part of the motion. I will slowly read my amendment, which should be sent to the clerk in the next few seconds for circulation to members of the committee. After the

words "December 2022 and January 2023", I propose to change the text so that it reads:

[...] to study how companies responded to these disruptions, determine carriers' responsibility for the slowdowns and delays caused by these disruptions and review required actions to avoid a recurrence of the problems in the future.

In the original motion, there is mention of a meeting lasting several hours on January 12. I do not disagree, but I would suggest that, on January 12, we hold two meetings lasting 2 hours, so 4 hours in total. A first meeting with the minister and his officials would be followed by a second meeting with civilian witnesses and passenger protection organizations. The next week, as early as January 16, I suggest there be a third four-hour meeting with carriers and airport authorities. Finally, we would hold a fourth two-hour meeting with the Canadian Transportation Agency and the Minister of Transport.

This suggestion would give us a complete overview. We'd have the opportunity to ask questions of every stakeholder involved in the situation that occurred over the last several weeks, which we hope won't happen again in the coming weeks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

[English]

Mr. Strahl, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that we can accomplish what Madame Vignola is talking about with a couple of simple amendments to the motion you read out. Again, I would beg the indulgence of the clerk and the analysts to capture what I'm going to try to say.

We could simply list among the witnesses consumer advocates or affected passengers, however it is we want to indicate that we want to expand this to include passenger rights advocates or passengers themselves. Perhaps we could add them to that long list of people we want to invite to testify.

I think we should also invite CN Rail, which had a role to play in the VIA Rail issue. I believe there are some track management concerns. I would request that.

Rather than getting into how the meetings would be structured or how many we'd have, we could say in the third paragraph, "the chair be empowered to coordinate the resources and scheduling necessary to hold special meetings beginning on Thursday, January 12". We could then work behind the scenes, with the chair and with each other, to determine how many meetings we would like, how those should be structured, etc.

I agree with Madame Vignola on both cases that we should hear from passenger rights advocates and that we should consider the possibility that we will not be able to conduct all of the business that we wish to in a single meeting on a single day. This allows for that possibility, but it allows more flexibility for the chair, in consultation with members, to move forward.

Those would be my friendly amendments. The first is to expand the witness list by two. Namely, they are CN Rail and passenger rights advocates—if we want to call them that—or passengers themselves. I'm not sure how we would structure that. The second is “beginning on January 12”, which would allow us more flexibility.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Strahl.

Essentially, no fixed date on future meetings above and beyond January 12 gives us that flexibility to work out what works best for members, as well as witnesses. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with what Mr. Strahl has proposed. I think it would allow us to hear from a number of other affected parties.

I would offer that it's important that we hear from the minister in the first meeting on the 12th. That would be my expectation. He may have mentioned that, but I didn't catch it.

I believe that dealing with the rail issues somewhat separately from the air passenger issues would have merit. This is because the context of passenger rail is quite different from air transport, particularly when it comes to the existence of the air passenger protections and the situation with CN.

I don't know if that amendment has been typed up at this point. I would be happy to support moving in that direction.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

I'm looking at the clerk's face. I do not believe it has been typed up.

Members, if you'll indulge me, perhaps we'll give some time for the clerk to type it up or to ask questions of clarification to ensure that she better understands exactly what's being asked by Madame Vignola, as well as the amendments by Mr. Strahl and Mr. Bachrach.

Madame Clerk, I will turn it over to you.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Ariane Gagné-Frégeau): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have received the amendment from Madame Vignola.

[*Translation*]

I received it in French, and I will have it translated before sending it to members of the committee.

[*English*]

I would need clarification on the friendly amendments from Mr. Strahl to Ms. Vignola's amendments.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Is Madame Vignola okay with what I proposed?

Perhaps that's the question, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mrs. Vignola, do you agree with Mr. Strahl's proposal?

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Yes, I agree with what Mr. Strahl proposed.

In my amendment, I specified civilian witnesses and rights protection advocates. I suggested setting dates, but I agree with having some flexibility based on members', witnesses' and company representatives' schedules. I see no inconvenience. I think both of our amendments are relatively similar.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Bachrach, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we're coming toward agreement here. The challenge is going to be getting the words over to the clerk and making sure that the words work.

I have some proposed wording that I believe captures what Ms. Vignola and Mr. Strahl have offered. If it pleases the committee, I'd be happy to read the proposed wording.

The Chair: I'm looking over at the clerk. I think she's waiting with bated breath.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: It is, “That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee commit to undertake special meetings to study the travel disruptions that occurred during the December 2022-January 2023 holiday period with a view of understanding why the disruptions occurred, holding those responsible accountable and identifying what actions are being taken to avoid a recurrence of the problems in the future;

“That, as part of the study, air passenger advocates, affected travellers; Sunwing, Air Canada and Westjet; the Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver airport authorities; VIA Rail and CN Rail; the Canadian Transportation Agency, Transport Canada and the Minister of Transport be invited to testify;

“And that, in consultation with the committee members, the chair be empowered to coordinate the resources and scheduling necessary to hold the first special meeting on Thursday, January 12, 2023, and that the testimony recorded at the special meeting become part of the committee's ongoing study on air passenger rights.”

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

Madame Clerk, do you need any further clarification?

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bachrach, could you repeat the first line of the second paragraph that starts with “That, as part of the study, air passenger advocates”? What follows that?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Yes. I'd be happy to.

It is, “That, as part of the study, air passenger advocates, affected travellers; Sunwing, Air Canada and Westjet; the Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver airport authorities; VIA Rail and CN Rail; the Canadian Transportation Agency, Transport Canada and the Minister of Transport be invited to testify”.

I apologize if the commas and semicolons aren't in proper order there. It's something to that effect.

The Clerk: We have the motion here.

I will circulate it to everyone, Mr. Chair, if it's your request.

The Chair: Yes. Please do, unless members feel that they understand the motion as it was spoken. At that point, we can proceed to the vote.

Do we have any objections to that, Madame Vignola or Mr. Bachrach?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vignola, you have the floor.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I don't disagree. I just wanted to make sure that after “2023” in the first paragraph, the sentence was amended to reflect what I proposed to “study how companies responded to these disruptions”.

I also want to know if Mr. Bachrach's proposed amendment opens the door to holding another meeting next week, the week after January 12. It wasn't clear to me if this proposal included holding another meeting.

The Chair: I can clarify. The proposal only mentions that January 12 will be the first meeting, but there will be more. The dates are not set, however, which gives more flexibility to communicate with witnesses and coordinate committee members' schedules to see which dates work for everyone.

• (1625)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Are we talking about holding meetings only after the House comes back?

The Chair: I think the committee wants to look at this issue as quickly as possible. The January 12 date is a priority. Afterwards, as much as possible, the committee wants to hold meetings before the House returns at the end of January.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Is it necessary to include that aspect in the motion?

The Chair: If you want to. You are the members of this committee.

We are publicly stating that we really want to hold our meetings as soon as possible. If we are able to confirm witnesses' availability, and committee members agree to hold another meeting next week or the week after, we will do so.

The decision is in the committee members' hands.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you for clarifying.

Indeed, just as you did, I concluded that members of the committee want to give this file due diligence before the House resumes, while respecting everyone's scheduling constraints. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

[*English*]

Madam Clerk, I think there are no objections from members to proceeding with a vote on the motion by Madame Vignola as amended by Mr. Strahl and Mr. Bachrach. If you want to proceed with a recorded division, it would be greatly appreciated.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As mentioned, the vote is on the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Clerk.

Not to get too technical—I just want to make sure—was that a vote on the amendment or was that a vote on the motion itself? Were we required to vote on the amendment first and then the motion as amended?

[*Translation*]

You have the floor, Mr. Berthold.

[*English*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: If I may,

[*Translation*]

the clerk requested a vote on the motion as amended.

The Chair: Very well. Perfect.

[*English*]

That is a good day's work, colleagues.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank you sincerely for giving your time today to discuss this very important subject for all Canadians.

[*English*]

I'm looking forward to seeing many of you at Thursday's meeting, when we will begin the special meetings with witnesses.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.

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