



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 046**

Thursday, January 12, 2023

---

Chair: Mr. Peter Schiefke





## Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Thursday, January 12, 2023

• (1030)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 46 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 3, 2022, the committee is meeting to discuss Air Passenger Protection Regulations.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

Members of the committee, appearing before us today as witnesses from Air Canada, we have Mr. Kevin O'Connor, vice-president of system operations control, and Mr. David Rheault, vice-president of government and community relations. Both are appearing by video conference.

Also by video conference, we have from Sunwing Mr. Len Corrado, president, as well as Mr. Andrew Dawson, president of tour operations with the Sunwing Travel Group.

Appearing from WestJet Airlines in person, we have Mr. Andrew Gibbons, vice-president of external affairs, as well as Mr. Scott Wilson, vice-president of flight operations.

I would like to begin by thanking our witnesses in advance for their time today.

I also thank the members of this committee for the reference to ensure not only that this meeting took place, but that it took place as quickly as possible. It is my hope as chair that this meeting and the subsequent meetings will provide the answers that Canadians and this committee are looking for, and that actions can subsequently be taken to ensure that the experiences faced by travellers over the holidays never happen again.

With that, I would like to turn it over to Air Canada for opening remarks.

Air Canada, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Rheault (Vice-President, Government and Community Relations, Air Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the committee for inviting us here today to talk about Air Canada's operations over the holiday season.

[*English*]

I am pleased to be accompanied by Kevin O'Connor, vice-president of system operations control. Kevin is responsible for the operations at Air Canada.

[*Translation*]

First, let me say that all of us at Air Canada sincerely sympathize with customers whose travel has been disrupted. We understand the importance of travel during the holiday season and the disappointment people feel when things don't go as planned.

More than 2 million people travelled with Air Canada during the period from December 22 to January 8. Most importantly, they did so safely.

It was the dedication of our 35,000 employees, more than during the same period in 2019, that allowed us to transport our customers and restore our operations quickly following the weather events. On behalf of Air Canada, I want to acknowledge their exceptional work, which was often done in very difficult conditions, in the cold and the storm. I thank them for taking care of our passengers.

[*English*]

Kevin will now give you a main overview of our main challenges and accomplishments.

**Mr. Kevin O'Connor (Vice-President, System Operations Control, Air Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Air Canada went through the holidays very well prepared. We were fully staffed, our people were trained and our schedule was prudent. We also had a great deal of resiliency built in. As an example, we set aside 15 aircraft—including wide-body aircraft—that were not scheduled to fly, but could be used for recovery or redundancy.

As a result, we operated nearly 1,000 daily flights on average. An Air Canada plane took off almost every 90 seconds of every day of the holidays, and we did this despite the extreme weather.

How extreme was it? In Vancouver, four-foot icicles formed on aircraft and bridges, making it almost impossible to move customers. In Calgary, at one point, it got so cold that de-icing fluid was not able to be used to remove contamination. In Toronto, certain airport baggage systems started to freeze.

Across the continent, we faced the types of delays and slow-downs familiar to anyone who travels in harsh winter weather. Because we are a network carrier that operates interconnected flights, severe weather can drastically impact our schedule and our movement of people and their baggage.

A delay in one part of the country has a knock-on effect across our network. For example, aircraft can be scheduled to fly from Toronto to Calgary in the morning, then on to Vancouver, and then to a southern destination later that day. However, if it is held up by weather in one place, it is late for its next flight, or its final flights may be cancelled if the crews go over their legislated duty day.

In such situations, we prioritize international flights, which are more difficult to recover because of the long flight times. Overall, we operated 98% of our international flights during the holiday period. Our ground operations can also be affected, because the employees' work schedules are tied to the planned operating schedule. This in part accounts for misconnected and delayed baggage.

We move bags parallel with our customers, but if a flight is delayed, bags can misconnect. They also accumulate in airports, because our ability to move them on the next flight is limited on those later flights, given that they're full during the holiday period.

Finally, I'll say a word on customer communications. During a storm, with its unknown duration and impact, it's not always possible to immediately re-book customers. We must wait until the weather improves enough that we can assign aircraft and crew. Still, even at the peak of our bad weather—December 23 to December 27—Air Canada re-booked more than 107,000 customers who were affected by flights.

We also implemented a very flexible re-booking policy. We gave refunds and waived fees for our customers who chose not to travel. It's noteworthy, though, that the vast majority of customers chose to not re-book and travelled as planned, even when they understood their travel might be slower than normal.

I'll pass it to you, David.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Rheault:** I would like to conclude this presentation by asking a question that we are all seeking to answer. How can we improve the situation in the future, at least as far as Mother Nature will allow?

First, there has been a lot of talk about the Air Passenger Protection Regulations. As we have done and will continue to do, we comply fully with the regulation obligations. However, recent travel disruptions have been the result of major weather events. There is no protection regime in the world, including the regulations, that requires air carriers to be liable for financial compensation in cases of force majeure.

[*English*]

As well, the air transport system consists of many stakeholders working together to move passengers safely and efficiently. Each entity has an independent role to fulfill to make the system work, but airlines are the only ones with enforceable standards and financial obligations. There needs to be shared accountability.

The government should also take a broader view on policies to support the industry, and invest in and modernize infrastructure. At present, hundreds of millions of dollars are taken from passengers and the industry in taxes, fees and airport rents, and put into general revenue. This money should be reinvested in air transport infrastructure.

We need to move forward with digitization, facility upgrades and other improvements. These would benefit people by making everyday travel easier, and ensuring that the system is robust enough to withstand irregular operations.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your attention.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Rheault.

[*English*]

Thank you very much, Mr. O'Connor.

Next, from Sunwing Airlines, we have Mr. Corrado.

The floor is yours, Mr. Corrado. You have five minutes.

• (1040)

**Mr. Len Corrado (President, Sunwing Airlines):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the committee for allowing me to appear here today. My name is Len Corrado, and I'm the president of Sunwing Airlines. I'm joined today by Andrew Dawson, president of Sunwing Vacations.

Let me begin by apologizing that we failed to deliver to the level that we had expected to and that Canadians had expected from us over this holiday season. We had planned that this holiday season would be a return to normal in a postpandemic world for our flying program. We built a robust plan to meet the high demand for travel to sun destinations. While many of our customers enjoyed their holidays with minimal disruption, we had some failures in execution, for which we are very, very sorry.

Three primary issues caused disruption to our schedules. First, several storms severely impacted our operations across the country. This included the virtual shutdown of Vancouver's airport and caused major delays in Ontario and Quebec. These weather events impacted not only our ability to service our customers flying through those airports but also our ability to position the necessary crew to service our own operations at other departure locations due to the cancellation of flights by other carriers impacted by these events.

The second issue was staffing. In anticipation of a busy winter season, Sunwing began recruiting pilots last spring. We went from a low of 40 pilots during the pandemic to over 475 pilots in preparation for our winter flying. Sunwing also applied to hire 63 foreign pilots on a temporary basis to supplement our crewing levels. These pilots would have been based in Regina and Saskatoon, where we run service only during the winter months, as we have since 2007. Unfortunately, our application was unexpectedly rejected. We took action and made alternative arrangements. These included subservicing aircraft into our schedule to make more of our own crew available, rebidding and rebuilding the pilot schedule and bringing subserviced aircraft specifically into that market.

Third, these challenges were compounded by airport infrastructure issues, such as a malfunctioning baggage belt system at Pearson, de-icing fluid shortages in Vancouver and various other issues that affected several carriers.

I would also like to take a moment to share features of our unique business model. Among our customers, 95% are leisure travellers who have purchased their flight as part of a fixed-duration vacation package. You may recall that earlier this summer, other carriers experienced operational challenges as they ramped up to their peak operational season. Uniquely, Sunwing's peak flying occurs in the winter. Our ramp-up coincided with the first of the storms. Unlike traditional airlines, we don't have the flexibility in our network to adjust our schedule and shift passenger itineraries. We almost always have customers waiting in a southern destination with a very fixed timeline to return to Canada, and often on routes where alternate flights do not readily exist.

While many of these factors were out of our control, I want to be clear with this committee and Canadians that our team immediately jumped into action to try to make things right for our customers. We worked around the clock to minimize customer disruptions while recovering our schedule. We provided customers with hotel accommodations, food and beverages, and local support at destinations, all at our expense, regardless of the reason for delay.

With respect to compensation, I want to assure committee members that we fully understand our obligations under Canada's AP-PR, and we will fully comply with these regulations. We are actively accepting claims for compensation under the APPR. Customers may submit their claims for review at our website.

With respect to passenger communications, we have immediately implemented changes to address some of the technical issues with flight alert notifications to improve communications with our customers.

With all this said, the bottom line is this: We know we could have done better. When even one customer is let down by their experience with our airline, I consider that a failure. We'd like to reassure committee members and Canadians that we are committed to providing the quality of service and experience that they've come to expect from us over the last 20 years.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Corrado.

Next, from WestJet Airlines, we have Mr. Gibbons and Mr. Wilson.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons (Vice-President, External Affairs, WestJet Airlines Ltd.):** Good morning, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to members of this committee for having us here today. My name is Andy Gibbons. I'm the vice-president of external affairs at WestJet. I am joined today by two of my colleagues—Captain Scott Wilson, who is our vice-president of operations, and Jared Mikoch-Gerke, who is our director of government relations and regulatory affairs.

We are here today to take questions on public policy, operations and the APPR. You have questions, and we are here to give you and Canadians answers.

I'd like to begin by speaking directly to our guests who are listening today: We thank you for choosing our company for your travel and thank you for your patience during a period that was stressful to us all.

Our record and success over 26 years is because of you. Everyone in our organization knows this and lives by it. Every single WestJetter feels the weight and anguish of not being able to meet your travel expectations.

I also want to offer a sincere thank you to our incredible WestJetters and contract service providers across the country and our network who worked long hours and extra days and gave up time with their families to support our guests during what was the most challenging winter season experienced in Canada in recent memory. Thank you.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

This was a once-in-a-generation event. We experienced record cold and freezing rain driven by winds more typical of a hurricane.

On December 23, Canada's busiest travel day of the year, all but one province received extreme weather advisories. This is not a normal Canadian winter.

[English]

WestJet proactively took many additional steps over and above our regulatory obligations to help our guests. We offered a full refund for anyone who wanted to cancel their travel in advance. We offered three nights of hotels at our expense for any guest stranded mid-journey in a connection city. We completely opened our flexible change and cancel guidelines and absorbed hotel cancellation fees for our vacation guests.

Additionally, our corporate and frontline staff stepped in and stepped up to work across our system in service of our guests. We worked with our service partners and labour groups to provide incentives and bonuses to our frontline employees in acknowledgement of the work they were doing in a situation that none of us, or them, created.

**Captain Scott Wilson (Vice-President, Flight Operations, WestJet Airlines Ltd.):** Thank you, Andy.

Good morning, everyone.

In addition to being vice-president of operations, I'm also the Transport Canada designated representative tasked with ensuring safe operations as WestJet.

Our preparation efforts began early in the fall for this winter's peak season. We held weekly meetings and tracked our preparedness towards the peak. What we could not have foreseen in this preparation was the compounding scale of the weather events that we encountered in our system between December 18 and December 24. In my 22 years at WestJet, this was the most significant weather-induced disruption that I have experienced.

Canadian air carriers have some of the most significant experience in cold weather and winter operations. Mother Nature, however, always has the ability to show us where our limits are. In our particularly harsh climate and operating environment we will always take the time to ensure the safety of our people and our guests. The most difficult part of making a safe decision is ultimately knowing that it impacts our guests and the travel plans that they've entrusted to us. That notwithstanding, during this peak season, WestJetters worked hard to safely carry over 1.2 million guests and operate a significant number of additional flights in support of recovery operations. We very much regret that we had thousands of guests whom we could not get to their destination for Christmas due to weather disruptions. We were thankfully able to stabilize and recover our operation by December 26, which allowed us to refocus our efforts on providing recovery options for our guests, even as challenging weather conditions continued in many areas across our country.

Given the scale of disruption we just experienced, we recognize that for meaningful improvements to happen, we need a holistic approach that brings together the entire aviation system. Aviation is an ecosystem that relies on the capability of all partners to deliver effectively, reliably and safely.

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** Given last month's events, we have identified two main areas for improvement as part of an overall lessons-learned exercise. These areas are improving guest communications when things go wrong and improving our overall baggage performance. These areas are a priority for our company, among others,

and we'd be pleased to share the details and updates with committee members as we go forward.

Importantly, we also believe that the government must address the most glaring gap in consumer protection in Canada today. This is the fact that your delay or cancellation can be caused by many groups, yet only airlines have regulations governing their activities. We believe this committee should demand equal policies for all entities that provide a service that can result in a delay or cancellation. These include government entities, airport authorities, NAV Canada and others. Strengthening overall accountability across our entire aviation system will improve service for all, bring down complaints and provide the transparency our guests and all travellers deserve.

• (1050)

[Translation]

We will be pleased to answer your questions and look forward to the discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Gibbons.

Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson.

We'll now begin our line of questioning.

I'd like to point out to members that I'll try to be as diligent as I can today and as strict as possible with the time, as I know that we all have questions. At the five-minute, six-minute or two-and-a-half-minute mark, I will be cutting you off and turning it over to the next questioner.

With that, we will begin with Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Strahl, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here for this emergency meeting to discuss the failure of the Canadian transport system and the impact that it had on Canadian travellers over one of the most important travel seasons of the year. Of course, we recognize that this is now the second travel season in a row in which there have been major travel disruptions, in which passengers have been stranded in airports, stranded abroad and separated from their baggage. It's a situation, quite frankly, that the minister told us in the fall had been resolved. He was convinced and had confidence that there would not be a repeat of the travel chaos from the summer. Of course, we've seen horror stories that, I would argue, were even worse.

My first question is for Sunwing, for Mr. Corrado.

On what date did Minister Alghabra reach out to you directly to discuss Sunwing's failure to return Canadian passengers home on their scheduled flights? On what date did you first discuss this with the minister directly?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** We were updating the CTA from December 26 on and then Transport Canada from December 27—

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** My question was about the minister directly. When did the minister get in touch with you about this matter?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** Again, checking my notes, I believe our first contact with the minister was on December 29.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Okay, so it was about a week after things had started.

I'll ask the same question to Mr. Gibbons from WestJet.

On what date did you speak with the minister or his office directly?

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** I don't have the exact date, Mr. Strahl.

I know that our chief executive texted the minister very early on in this to advise him that the storm was coming, so to speak, and that they would be needing to have regular conversations. He also offered to the minister to make his entire team available to the department should they have any questions or concerns about our operations and our decisions; that was fairly early on. I would say that was December 20 or 21, whenever the incidents really started to take shape.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Is that when you reached out? Did you hear back immediately? Did you hear back in a week, as we've just heard from Sunwing? What sort of timeline did you have for the minister to respond?

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** With respect to times of crisis, we've had to develop very close relationships as this isn't the first time there have been disruptions. We've had communications with his chief of staff, their team and their department probably every day throughout the crisis at every level of our company and every level of the department and the minister's staff. They've been fairly heavily engaged every step of the way.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** I'll ask the same question to Air Canada.

Were you in contact with the minister's office from the outset, and how quickly was he able to respond to your direct contact with him?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Rheault:** We were in contact with the minister's office and Department of Transportation officials on a regular basis throughout the fall. When the December events occurred, we had regular, almost daily, contact at various levels with the minister's office and with the department to provide updates and exchange information.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Thank you.

Mr. Corrado, I'll come back to you.

Obviously, I think what happened with your passengers abroad is very concerning. We've heard your reasoning for that.

I want to talk specifically about your operations in Saskatchewan. I find it very troubling that you would have booked travel and taken money from Canadians when you didn't have pilots lined up for the flights that you were selling.

Can you advise this committee when you learned that you wouldn't have these pilots available? How did you possibly book

travel for Canadians when you did not have crews or planes lined up to service them? This is a catastrophic failure, with heartbreaking stories of people cancelling weddings, losing trips of a lifetime, and abruptly pulling out of an entire province.

How do you explain a business model that allows you to take money from Canadians while you don't have the crews to deliver that service?

• (1055)

**Mr. Len Corrado:** As we began to prepare for this winter's operations last spring and identified our pilot requirements, we identified the requirement for 63 additional pilots that would fall under the temporary foreign workers program. We had previously availed ourselves of this program, several years back. We had a certain amount of assurances from our legal team that this should be a successful application, and we proceeded down that road, the road to that application.

Unfortunately, on December 9 we were informed by the ESDC that they were not going to give us a positive opinion on that and, as such, could not use the foreign pilots. We immediately took action. We rebuilt our schedule, rebid our pilot rotations, brought in additional subservice aircraft to free up our own crew to bring into that marketplace, and we put some aircraft specifically into that marketplace from a subservice provider.

Unfortunately, even with all this, in the midst of the storm, with the inability to position, with the inability to recover from the various locations due to the limitations, we failed to deliver to the level we had expected to and—

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Corrado.

Next we have Ms. Koutrakis.

Ms. Koutrakis, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you especially for convening this emergency meeting for questions that we owe to Canadians. I'm really hoping that in today's meeting we will do just that.

My questions are directed to Sunwing.

I'm wondering what is a reasonable amount of time to ask your clients to remain on standby in hotel lobbies or airports while your company figures out how to get them to their destination. I'm curious to know if you have a policy on this. If so, what is it?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** Clearly, we don't want any passenger ever waiting in a hotel or ever delayed. Unfortunately, as the situation evolved, and with the various challenges of weather, infrastructure and the ability to respond to those, the delays were knocked on and ran for quite a while.

The answer is, we never want one of our passengers delayed. Unfortunately, once the delays started to happen, as you've heard from my colleagues, with airplanes out of rotation everywhere, limited subservice availability and the holiday season, recovery became difficult, but we did everything possible both to repatriate passengers as quickly as possible, but also to make sure they were taken care of in destination—again, regardless of the reason for delay.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Besides reimbursing expenses, what kind of compensation do you think is appropriate for those who had holiday plans ruined due to Sunwing's poor service over the holidays? Do you think this should be determined so that the compensation is consistent and fair for all of those who were affected?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** I think that compensation is well defined in Canada's APPR, in the regulation. Sunwing fully intends to comply with all of our obligations under that regulation.

As I've stated previously, we've done all possible to take care of passengers in destination, making sure they have hotel accommodation—food, beverage—and additional local support was provided.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you for that.

If I may go back to my initial question, I'm not sure that you touched upon whether or not Sunwing has a policy. Obviously, everybody knows that it's never the intention that passengers receive services less than par, but do you have a policy in that regard?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** I'm not sure I understand the question. A policy to recover passengers...?

• (1100)

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Well, what is your policy? How long is it okay for passengers to be stranded in hotel lobbies and airports? What is the time frame that is—

**Mr. Len Corrado:** Zero: Zero is acceptable, because clearly I need to get the airplanes continuing their rotation so that other passengers can continue on their trip. We don't plan extensive delays. It's not feasible and it just doesn't make any sense.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Finally, I truly appreciate that you apologized to Canadians who received poor service from your company, but the sincerity of that apology is best judged by the actions you take afterward. I'm sure you will agree.

What actions are you taking to ensure this does not happen again? Please be as specific as possible. That is what Canadians are expecting from us today, so I think that being as detailed as possible in your response is the way to go.

**Mr. Len Corrado:** We will continue to meet all of our APPR—the regulations, the regulatory requirements—as stated previously. We have actively looked to reduce our schedule for the remaining season to ensure we have more slack in the schedule.

We've undertaken enhancements and a review of our communications system to ensure we have a more open line of communication and there is less opportunity for failure, and we will continue to focus on our business, as we have done for 20 years of making vacation dreams come true for people.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** What are the lessons learned, would you say, Mr. Corrado? What are you and your team doing as we speak

right now? Since this happened, in the next second what happened, and what are you doing to ensure this doesn't happen again?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** I think that as I've mentioned we're pulling down our schedule in order to give ourselves more slack in the schedule, so that if we have additional weather events or infrastructure events we have more ability to respond. As well, we've already made actual changes to our communication tools.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** I'd ask WestJet and Air Canada to chime in on some of the questions that I asked of Mr. Corrado.

Do you have policies as to how much is an acceptable length of time that passengers can be stranded in hotel lobbies or airports? Is this something that you look at when you're putting your policies in place for superior client service?

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** There's no acceptable time for our guests to be stranded anywhere. There's no acceptable time for a Canadian customer to be sleeping on a sidewalk or on a hotel airport floor or anywhere else. That's as unacceptable to us as it is to any member of Parliament or any customer of ours.

**Mr. Kevin O'Connor:** From Air Canada, I would say it's exactly the same, and we don't spare any expense. Whether we have to send in a rescue aircraft or put customers on other airlines, we will do whatever it takes within our...with whatever we can do. So we don't have the exact timeline, but nothing is acceptable, and no expense will be spared.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Koutrakis.

[*Translation*]

We now go to you, Ms. Vignola, for six minutes.

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

Gentlemen, I thank you for being with us. You know full well, I'm sure, that the committee is not meeting today to find fault with your response to the storm. You don't control the weather, any more than I do, although we all wish we could control it a little.

It's really the customer service that's the problem.

In the case of Sunwing, we're talking about people having to wait for seven hours on a plane, without adequate food, when section 8 of the Air Passenger Protection Regulations requires that when a delay lasts more than three hours, passengers must be allowed to disembark the aircraft.

There are also stories of people being stuck in airports and having to sleep on chairs, which is not the worst, or on the floor. Also, people couldn't get through to the line to find out what was going on and lacked information, even though the regulations call for updates to be given to passengers every 30 minutes.

These are the things we are discussing, because they are your responsibility. The point here is to find, not culprits, but viable solutions for everyone. That was the point I wanted to make.



Mr. Corrado, from Sunwing, I'll start with you. How will you ensure that people are never again stuck on a plane for seven hours on the tarmac, and that section 8 of the Air Passenger Protection Regulations is respected at all times, regardless of the conditions?

• (1105)

[*English*]

**Mr. Len Corrado:** I'm unfortunately not in a position to comment specifically on the event. We are well aware of what the tarmac delay limitations are and have a very robust policy on how we manage that. Without knowing the specifics, I can't comment on that. Clearly that is not in the interests of the operation. It's not a good outcome for our crews either.

Without understanding all of the dynamics of that situation, I can't comment on it, other than to say that we understand what our obligations are under regulation. We have a robust policy to ensure tarmac delays are managed, including an emergency snack kit on board our airplanes for those situations where we can't avoid them, but we understand our obligations and do all possible to comply with that.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

You mentioned in your opening remarks that many of Sunwing's trips were organized by travel agencies or independent travel agents. It was brought to my attention that these agents' commissions were not going to be paid to them by Sunwing, despite the fact that they had done their job well, that is by selling the trip, and even offered customer support afterwards.

Is it common policy for your company not to pay people who sell your packages and continue to provide services even in situations where the flight is cancelled?

[*English*]

**Mr. Len Corrado:** Ms. Vignola, I think my colleague Andy Dawson is best to respond to that. I'll leave that question for him to respond to.

**Mr. Andrew Dawson (President of Tour Operations, Sunwing Travel Group, Sunwing Airlines):** Good morning.

It is common practice within the industry to only pay commission on completed trips. We very much sympathize with our partners that were unable to receive a commission in these cases. We have lots of incentives and other schemes to reward agents, and we will look at ways to make them whole and to work with us in the future, but it is an industry practice, yes.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Indeed, this would be important. Most independent agents are women and this is their only income. Let's say it's highly damaging that people do their work without receiving compensation. We would like these people to be compensated.

Mr. Rheault, as I said at the beginning, no carrier can be reasonably held responsible for a weather bomb affecting all of Canada, that is clear. However, we are not here today to talk about the weather, but to talk about the resources and information that Air Canada passengers want to have access to.

How are you going to organize things so that there are no more inordinate wait times? People try to call agents, but there is no answer or even an offer of a return call or an answering machine. People are on hold. They have to wait for hours in line at the airport to get answers. How are you going to ensure that customer service in emergencies or crises is adequate and better planned?

**Mr. David Rheault:** Thank you for your question.

As I mentioned in my remarks, we have no financial obligation, but we obviously have an obligation to communicate with passengers, provide information and "reprotect" them. We are sorry for the passengers who had to wait to be "reprotected", and we sincerely apologize.

The difficult thing about these situations is that they create an influx of calls that are all redirected at the same time to the call centres, which increases waiting times. I can tell you that we have made sure to offer employees overtime and many have volunteered. We have more employees than we had in 2019, but we will continue to review our practices. We will continue to hire people to improve that part of our service. Still...

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Rheault. Unfortunately, that is all the time you had.

Ms. Vignola, I can confirm that the Association of Canadian Travel Agencies has requested to appear at our next meeting.

[*English*]

Next, we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to all our witnesses for appearing before us today to answer our questions.

I want to start by trying to channel the dismay, the frustration and the anger of hundreds of Canadian passengers who were stuck over the holidays because of the incidents that we've been talking about already at this meeting. Among those groups, I don't think there's a group that feels more frustrated and more angry than the passengers of Sunwing, who were stranded in international destinations for days.

I want to set the stage by reading for you the same email that I read at our last meeting and then directing some questions to Mr. Corrado from Sunwing. This is from the mother of a Sunwing customer stranded in Puerto Vallarta.

She writes, “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....”

Well, she did end up flying him home on another airline, at their own expense. At the end of all of this, Sunwing has offered this family \$150.

My first question is for Mr. Corrado.

I appreciate that it is in addition to paying for the expenses that were incurred, but why \$150?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** First of all, as you read that detail.... I'm a father as well. That's a story that tugs at one's heart. I don't know the specifics of that story today, but as a parent, as a Canadian, that's a story that's unacceptable.

Without understanding the specifics of this, I can't comment on the \$150. What I can tell you is that if the flight falls within our APPR obligations, all of those obligations are being met. What I can tell you is that we had representation in destinations. We paid for hotel, food, beverages, and we had people supporting in destination. If we failed specific to this, again, without understanding the specifics, I can't comment.

We were fully committed to doing all possible to support passengers who did not depart as planned. We're sorry for this, and we've spoken about the various reasons, but we will do right by our passengers as per regulation, and we've done right by our passengers in destination.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** In a January 5 *mea culpa*, you wrote, “We also understand our obligations under Canada's Air Passenger Protection Regulations and will ensure full compliance with these regulations.”

In your mind, what does “full compliance” mean? Does that mean that passengers who wish to access compensation can wait in line with 33,000 other Canadians for a year and a half?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** I don't understand the “wait in line”. We have a portal open through our website. We're processing those passenger claims for APPR and following the regulation. We have a time limit by which we have to settle those: to provide compensation or decide whether no compensation applies. I'm not going to get into adjudicating case-by-case here, because that wouldn't be fair to anybody, but we follow the regulation as prescribed.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Will Sunwing be proactively awarding compensation as per the terms of APPR?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** We will process claims through our APPR portal, through our website, as we normally have since the APPR began.

• (1115)

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I'm going to read you an email from January 2 to one of your passengers. This is going to sound awfully familiar to a lot of Canadian passengers, because frankly this is the kind of email that all the airlines have been sending out. It says, “We sincerely apologize for any disruption to your flight schedule. Please note the flight delays on November 2 and onwards were delayed due to an unforeseen operational restriction affecting our flight operations and it was out of the carrier's control. Your flight is not eligible for compensation or reimbursement for flight delay under Canada's air passenger protection regulations.”

This doesn't sound like you're ensuring full compliance and understanding your obligations. This sounds as though you're using the same loophole in the air passenger protection regulations and the Canada Transportation Act that all the other airlines have been using.

Can you explain how many people received an email like that, denying them compensation?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** I can't give you a number clearly, but if someone received that email it means that flight was adjudicated to be outside the carrier's control, whether that be due to weather or an airport facility or whether that be that an airplane could not operate for reasons prescribed for safety under the regulation.

Again, without knowing the specifics of the event, I can't comment, but clearly that flight's been adjudicated to be outside the carrier's control as prescribed by the regulations.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Mr. Corrado, if these situations were outside of your control, why did you apologize?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** The flight you quoted was November 2, and I've apologized for where we have failed to deliver to our expectations.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** No, it says November 2 and onwards.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Corrado and Mr. Bachrach. You can continue that line of questioning in your next round.

Next, we have Dr. Lewis. The floor is yours for five minutes.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC):** Thank you.

I just want to thank all of the executives here today for coming and answering questions. As you know, this last travel season was very tumultuous, and many people were anticipating travelling and meeting with their families. There are a lot of unanswered questions, and I'm happy that we're here to discuss this today.

My question is for all of the airline executives, but specifically I'd like to start with Mr. Corrado of Sunwing Airlines.

Mr. Corrado, how many complaints were filed as a result of this last holiday travel season?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** We're still receiving complaints.

I don't have a number to give you, but I'd be happy to provide one after the hearing today.

**Mr. Andrew Dawson:** I'm sorry, I was going to interject for Mr. Corrado.

I can tell you the current number we've received is 7,000.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Would you be able to tell me whether those are largely compensation-related?

**Mr. Andrew Dawson:** They are a mix of many factors. They are for compensation, for extra expenses incurred, and for refunds in cases where passengers chose to travel home at their own expense where they were able to. There's a real mix.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Would you say that the flight disruption situation that occurred over the holiday season has been resolved now?

**Mr. Andrew Dawson:** That situation was fully resolved by the airline shortly after Christmas, yes.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** You testified that you heard from Mr. Alghabra around December 27.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Andrew Dawson:** I'm sorry, Dr. Lewis. I'll have to hand it back over to Mr. Corrado because that's an airline conversation.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Thank you.

**Mr. Len Corrado:** We reached out to the minister's office from the 28th onwards and we had a meeting with him last week to review the overall operation. As I previously stated, we began reporting to CTA as of the 26th as to the status of our operation and to the Transport Canada policy department getting updates at the same time.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** I understand that the matter was resolved shortly after Christmas, so you met with him around the time that the matter was resolved. That was the first conversation that you had with him. Is that correct?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** I believe the first conversation was on January 5.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** The first conversation was on January 5?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** Directly with the minister it was on January 5, yes.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** That was after you had already resolved the situation on your own. Is that correct?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** Yes.

Our operation had stabilized, and we had recovered from the various events in play.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** You had the conversation with him, but did you ever have a physical meeting with him about this grave situation that Canadians faced?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** We had a virtual meeting with the minister on the 5th, and he expressed his concerns about the situation and our performance. We discussed, as I presented today, the various challenges we faced.

• (1120)

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Did he provide any solutions to you about how you were going to deal with these 7,000 complaints?

I'm certain that he asked about the number of Canadians affected by this very terrible situation.

**Mr. Len Corrado:** I don't have the notes from the meeting in front of me, so I'm not going to get into the specifics of that, but the minister did suggest that if there was any way that the government could help to move things along to avoid this, he offered his support.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** So you would have to get back to the minister about how the government should help. The minister did not propose any solutions to you about how the government could help?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** He did not at that time.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Did the minister contact your organization prior to this holiday season?

This was a unique travel season. We'd dealt with two years of travel disruption due to COVID, and Canadians were in high anticipation of travelling. Did the minister reach out to you prior to the holiday season to inquire about anything that you needed to make sure that this would be a smooth travel season and to anticipate some of the barriers and blocks that could have happened? Did you have that contact from the minister?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** Various parts of my leadership team are in contact with various parts of Transport Canada and other government agencies. I can't speak at this point to whether those engagements happened, although I'm sure that they did at some level.

I personally didn't speak to the minister, but I'm sure that many of the government departments were discussing this with my leadership team.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Lewis.

Unfortunately, there's no time remaining.

Next we have Mr. Chahal.

Mr. Chahal, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank all of the witnesses for joining us today and for providing testimony on this important topic.

I represent a riding in northeast Calgary, with the Calgary International Airport and thousands of employees who work at the airport, and thousands of new Canadians who make Calgary Skyview their home. This holiday season was a complete disaster across the country for my constituents and for Canadians.

I appreciate the opening testimony. Air Canada mentioned that they had built in significant resiliency preparing. I want to start with the 15 wide-body aircraft.

I want to start with Mr. Corrado. Did you build in a similar type of resiliency to avoid disruptions and impacts?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** We had some resiliency in the system. However, as I mentioned in my opening testimony, having to juggle the schedule to resolve some of our staffing challenges meant that that resiliency came down, but then that resiliency was even further eroded.

When we talk about events in Calgary, we had a couple of airplanes sitting in Calgary because they couldn't land in Vancouver because of weather. Now you have two airplanes and six sets of crews out of rotation with no way to move them. That resiliency gets eaten up quite quickly.

**Mr. George Chahal:** Mr. Gibbons from WestJet, can you answer the same question?

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** [*Inaudible—Editor*] operational considerations on the resiliency question.

**Capt Scott Wilson:** I'm happy to answer the question. Thank you.

As it was mentioned earlier on, when we take a look at building toward our peak season, we take a look at the schedule we intend to operate. We take a look at the fleet, we take a look at the crew and we take a look at all aspects. We build resiliency into the operation, so that we have the flex required. We had spare aircraft and we had no shortage of operating crew.

In Calgary, in particular, our primary issue with the weather wasn't what we saw in Vancouver and Toronto. It was the tail end of almost three weeks of extreme cold, and that takes its own toll on the fleet, in particular. From this perspective, we saw higher requirements to use our spare aircraft for recovery, maintenance issues and things like that.

We had strong resiliency built into our network schedule.

**Mr. George Chahal:** I've heard everyone this morning talking about how they support the APPR and would like to see the regulations strengthened for the airlines.

Maybe I'll start with Air Canada, then go to WestJet and Sunwing. Do you believe that we should further strengthen these regulations, as you stated, to all industries?

If you support the regulations, why are you taking the government to court regarding the APPR?

Let's start with Air Canada, go to WestJet and then go to Sunwing.

Please be very quick.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Rheault:** Our position before the committee is that yes, the Air Passenger Protection Regulations need to be reviewed, but the committee should take into account that there are a range of stakeholders in the air transport chain. Every stakeholder has roles and responsibilities to ensure that passengers, our customers, get good service.

At the moment, the regulations only apply to airlines, which are the only ones with obligations and service standards to comply

with. Our position is that the regulations need to be strengthened to take into account all stakeholders in air transport.

[*English*]

**Mr. George Chahal:** You support further strengthening and, possibly, additional fines and penalties if they're brought forward.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Rheault:** No. What we have said is that we support the idea of reviewing the regulations so that the review includes the responsibility of everyone involved in air travel.

The current regulations have very high penalties when compared to those imposed by other countries. For example, in the United States, there is no penalty or compensation for delay or cancellation. Penalties for denied boarding are up to three times higher in Canada than in Europe and are the highest in the world to our knowledge. Many voices are being heard...

[*English*]

**Mr. George Chahal:** If I can, I'll go to WestJet for a comment on that, as my time is running out.

I think Canadians who have faced disruptions would disagree that the penalties are too much. I don't think that's a consideration.

WestJet, please go ahead.

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** The issue at the core of our representation today and last month, Mr. Chahal, is that there are only penalties for one group. The minister has even said at committee that your delay or cancellation in Canada can be the result of many different groups. It could be because the customs hall was too full and the plane had to sit on the tarmac. It could be because Nav Canada had a staffing issue. It could be because of an airport failure.

This is not about a blame game. It is simply about improving the system overall and making sure that there's full transparency, so that the Canadian traveller understands what is the root cause of their delay or cancellation. What we've asked for—and what we submitted to this committee in late November as part of our recommendations—is that the priority be shared accountability.

We do not believe the priority right now should be additional penalties on the only group that has any accountability and regulations that govern it. It should be to apply them equally to everyone as the top priority.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Gibbons.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chahal.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Vignola, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

My first question is for the three carriers; please answer quickly as I only have two and a half minutes. I would like to know how many flights have been cancelled, not only because of the storm, but also for safety reasons due to lack of staff.

Let's start with Mr. Corrado.

[English]

**Mr. Len Corrado:** Through the period of the holiday season, from December 15 to the end of December 31, we had 67 flight cancellations.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Of these, how many were caused by lack of staff?

[English]

**Mr. Len Corrado:** I don't have an answer to that. I can get back to you.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

Mr. Gibbons and Mr. Wilson, you may answer the question.

[English]

**Capt Scott Wilson:** These are the numbers we have for cancellations for the period between December 16 and January 8. The total number of flights was just over 1,600.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** How many of these were caused by a lack of staff?

[English]

**Capt Scott Wilson:** We don't believe any were for staff, so they were for weather, both proactively and reactively, and the carry-on effect over the next few days.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Rheault, I'm asking you the same question.

**Mr. David Rheault:** I don't have the exact data for the holiday season. I will check and send the response to the committee.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

I want to cause some thinking. There may be situations where there is a lack of staff, but the fact remains that planning is the carriers' responsibility. I wonder about this: I understand that understaffing raises safety issues, but why sell a flight if, in the first place, the planning anticipates that there will not be enough staff for that flight?

This is really problematic and not the passenger's responsibility. It is not their fault that the flight was delayed or cancelled due to lack of staff. Nevertheless, it is the passenger who pays. There is no compensation for this, even if it is not caused by a lack of planning on the part of the passenger.

I would like to hear from you on this subject.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Ms. Vignola, your time is up and you will have to wait for your next turn to get some answers.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

The floor is yours. You have two and a half minutes.

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

I'll direct my next question to our witnesses from WestJet.

We received an email from a WestJet passenger who flew with you from Edmonton to Orlando. Their original flight on December 25 was cancelled. They received an email from WestJet saying that there was no option for the company to re-book them within the next 48 hours. They were then able to re-book their own ticket on the 29th on a WestJet flight. WestJet then refused to compensate them the difference in price; because they booked at the last minute, the flight on the 29th cost significantly more.

My first question is around the statement from WestJet that there was no option for the company to re-book them within 48 hours. Does that include on other carriers?

**Capt Scott Wilson:** Yes, it does—

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** Sorry, no.

Thank you for the question. If you have any specifics about a constituency case, we've obviously fielded dozens of these from you and your colleagues, so we're happy to take a look at that. We're happy to provide that service to you and other members of Parliament.

We booked many, many guests on other carriers, as other carriers did throughout the season. We did everything we could to get people moving.

With respect to the individual case that you're talking about, we do have an obligation to respond to a claim within 30 days as part of our regulation. If the guest does not agree with our interpretation or what we've provided to them, they have the opportunity to go to the CTA, which unfortunately has a long backlog. They do not adjudicate claims within 30 days, which is something that we are obliged to do.

I would encourage that guest, and would encourage you, if you have a constituency problem, to.... We'll make our best efforts to appropriately make sure they're looked after, but a lot of guests, because of the scale of the weather and the cascading problems that Scott walked through, sadly and unfortunately were not able to be re-booked within 48 hours.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I'd like to turn to the issue of reimbursing hotel expenses. You mentioned that you've reimbursed guests for hotels. In October 2022, the CTA issued a decision in which it stated that your policy of providing \$150 for reimbursement of hotel expenses was not as per the APPR. Have you changed that policy at WestJet? What is the current reimbursement policy for hotel expenses?

**Mr. Jared Mikoch-Gerke (Director, Government Relations and Regulatory Affairs, WestJet Airlines Ltd.):** With respect to the reimbursement of the hotels that we offered throughout the pandemic, I believe the decision that you're referring to is very specific to controllable situations or any situations for safety upon which we have to provide accommodations. We do continue to follow the regulations for that purpose and follow that decision.

With respect to this specific holiday season, we exceeded our regulatory obligations by providing hotels for up to three nights for what were uncontrollable disruptions to make sure that we were taking care of our guests in this instance.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, you now have the floor for five minutes.

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

I'm going to put a number of fairly short questions to you, because this has raised a lot of questions. We've heard many comments from people back home who have been stuck in airports and planes for hours and hours.

I would just like to give the airlines a piece of advice: don't do what the government did, with its lineups to get a number, as they did with the passport issue. At Air Canada, you have to wait in line to get a phone line. Yet everyone has access to a mobile phone. Put the number out there and make sure that people will answer the phone. I think that's the best solution in these situations.

I would like to ask each of the companies when the discussions with the Minister of Transport took place.

We know that Sunwing only spoke to him on January 5. As for WestJet, however, when exactly did you first speak directly to the minister?

[*English*]

**Mr. Len Corrado:** I think I'll go first, if the question is to both us and WestJet. I believe—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I already have your answer. I want the answer from WestJet and Air Canada.

Mr. Chair, I hope my time is not affected by the translation problem.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** It won't affect your time.

We'll go to WestJet first. Then we'll go to Air Canada.

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** As I indicated in an earlier answer, our chief executive, Alexis von Hoensbroech, was in touch with Minister Alghabra immediately when these issues started to arise and we knew, generally speaking, the scope and scale of the problems that we were going to have and that Canadians were going to face at particularly the worst time to face them. We were in touch immediately.

Then, of course, I'll repeat again that our teams at all levels of our company and all levels of the department and government...and

not just Transport Canada. Transport Canada is obviously the main department, but—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Perfect. Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Next we'll go to Air Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I just wanted to know when the meetings with the minister took place.

**Mr. David Rheault:** Yes.

I would just like to clarify that the number to reach the call centre is known, Mr. Berthold. In addition, there are applications through which people can change their reservations themselves.

As I said, we were in constant communication with the minister's office, throughout the preparation and throughout the period concerned. In terms of the latest discussions with the minister, I would have to check with our people.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you.

Mr. Rheault, I would like you to tell us exactly when the discussions took place between Air Canada and the Minister of Transport himself, not his office. The members of the committee would be very grateful.

On social media, there were several tweets from the minister. On December 23, he said he understood how frustrating the situation was for Canadians. That was the same day he allowed Santa Claus into the air, by the way. On December 28, he said that the situation was unacceptable and that Canadians needed to get the information they needed to get home safely. On the same day, he said that the government would continue to ensure that their rights were protected. Subsequently, on January 3, the committee chair said he was calling a special meeting of the committee, and the minister said Canadians deserve answers.

For my part, I wish to determine the extent to which the minister himself sought answers from the airlines about the situation. Rather than communicating with Canadians via tweets, did the minister actually set up and participate in a crisis cell to address the situation at the airports? Ultimately, the situation is his responsibility. So that would have been important.

We understand that the minister probably focused less on Sunwing because it is a smaller company. Yet we saw that there were many more problems.

I now have a question for Air Canada. You say that the federal government pockets much more money than it invests in air transport infrastructure. You seem to be saying that infrastructure was one of the causes of the problems all air passengers endured during the winter period. Is that correct?

In your opinion, how much more money does the government take in than it invests in infrastructure?

**Mr. David Rheault:** This issue has been raised for a long time by the industry.

I will quote from the 2016 Canada Transportation Act Review report, the Emerson Report:

[English]

Canada is unique among its competitors in charging onerous rents and taxes that undermine competitiveness. Airport rents, for example, can represent up to 30 percent of airport operating budgets....

[Translation]

This report follows analysis by a committee commissioned by the federal government. Airport rents are about \$400 million. You can discuss this with our colleagues from the airport authorities who will be appearing before you later today.

These are fees that are being charged to the airport authorities to use the land when several billion dollars have already been paid. Canada is the only country in the world with such a structure, as far as we know.

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

[English]

Ms. Damoff, the floor is now yours. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank colleagues for letting me join you here today. I'm not a regular member of this committee, but given the mess that was holiday travel and the impact it had on my constituents in Oakville North-Burlington, I felt it was really important to be here and get some answers for them. Many of them hadn't travelled since before the pandemic and they were excited. Then, as we all know, it was an absolute mess.

I acknowledge that, and my Bloc colleague said the same thing, you can't control the weather but you can control the plans you have to deal with it, as well as how you communicate with your customers. Both of those were sorely lacking over the holiday travel season.

I want to start with Sunwing. You've acknowledged that you were trying to get 63 foreign pilots and you were unsuccessful. Then you said that you had resiliency built into the system. With all due respect, sir, I would challenge that. You didn't have resiliency in the system and you were selling Canadians travel when you did not have the capacity to deal with it if there were any problems. Bad weather is not unique to our Canadian winters.

Did you have a warning from the Government of Canada that this application may not be successful?

• (1140)

**Mr. Len Corrado:** No, we did not. We didn't have any information until, I believe December 8 or 9—I can confirm the date—that the application was not going to be successful.

As far as your point on resiliency, in fact, we did have resiliency. Every single day all the carriers here build reserve coverage into

our schedules, have additional airplanes available and that's part of our standard plan, but when the airplanes don't move as planned, when there are no flights to position crews, that resiliency gets consumed quite quickly—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Sir, when you didn't have the 63 pilots that you had built your schedule on, did you cancel the travel corresponding to those 63 pilots and the flights they would be flying?

**Mr. Len Corrado:** We cut back on some of our flying. We hired three different subservice carriers to Canadians in Ontario to free up some of our own crews and we brought a carrier into that marketplace where the specific problem was. I would say that we covered all of that resiliency by making a significant investment in subservices to cover that.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I would suggest that you didn't build resiliency in there or people wouldn't have been stranded and you wouldn't have been selling flights that you weren't able to handle.

My next question is for WestJet. You've mentioned a couple of times today that you offered passengers three nights of hotel accommodation. Yet during this mess it was widely reported there were no hotels, so passengers were stuck in the airport. It was late at night, so there were no WestJet representatives available.

What are you doing to fix those issues going forward?

There is nothing worse than not even having the representative available and not being able to get through to somebody to find out what's going on.

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** That's a great question. We obviously empathize with those guests greatly and with your constituents who were impacted, and we have expressed that here today sincerely.

As I mentioned earlier in our opening remarks, we have conducted and are conducting a pretty significant lessons learned exercise. Part of that is how we communicate with our guests and how we co-operate with our partners when incidents of this scale occur.

I don't want to underestimate or understate the scale of what we encountered. I'll just note this because we were researching this for the committee. In Alberta, for example, the Alberta Motor Association wait times were three and a half days for roadside assistance. Sometimes it is weather, but the question you've asked is what do we do when things go wrong.

We have identified two main areas. One is our communications with our guests. Despite regularly updating media and getting our messages out twice a day, having more than 17,000 media requests and getting that information out, we have heard from you and others, from our guests specifically, that our guest communication was lacking, so we're going to do a better job of that.

The second, as you mentioned, is working with our airport authority partners—you're going to be hearing from them shortly—on how we work together in those moments to make sure there are beds and pillows in these unique, extraordinary circumstances because they should never happen—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I only have about five seconds left. Will you share with Canadians once you have done that review and let them know what you plan on doing differently?

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** We're happy to come back to the committee and share with you. That is our custom and we're prepared to do that.

Apologies again to your constituents.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Next we have Mr. Doherty.

You have five minutes.

**Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our guests for being here.

I have a unique opportunity. I've sat on both sides of the table, on all sides of this discussion. I've been on the front line of the airlines and I've worked in airports. I guess my frustration with this is that these circumstances aren't new; we have winter operations every year. My frustrations lie in the fact that we have winter operations debriefing in the spring on what we can do and what lessons we have learned that we can be better at for the next winter, yet we fell down this winter.

Given that perhaps it was extraordinary, I fail to see that. I guess one of the biggest questions I have is when is it ever acceptable that we have passengers sitting on aircraft for up to 12 hours, and in some circumstances, over 12 hours?

I'll open that up to our airline witnesses.

• (1145)

**Capt Scott Wilson:** I'm happy to take that question—

**Mr. Len Corrado:** The answer to that is never. I can't speak on the specifics.

**Capt Scott Wilson:** I'll take that question, if I could, Mr. Doherty.

I'll reiterate that the answer is never. The good news is that the tarmac delays you're speaking to are relatively rare events. We had a very significant situation. I think you're pointing to the night of the 19th in Vancouver where we had numerous airlines, numerous aircraft in gridlock and significant tarmac delays.

We hope to be a part of working through that with the Vancouver Airport Authority and all constituents to ensure that we can find a way to build resilience into that. It was unacceptable on many levels.

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** Currently under federal regulations as they relate to tarmac delays—and I think this is important for the committee in its work—the current tarmac delay policy and regulations only govern what airlines should or should not do in these instances. It is quite elaborate, and we actually submit a tarmac delay

plan to the government on an annual basis that lays out when we should update, when we should use spare food and other items. We are the only body in a tarmac delay situation that has any rules or expectations. Fundamentally, that should change.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** You are pre-empting my next question. I appreciate that, thank you.

Really quickly, from Air Canada, is it acceptable?

**Mr. Kevin O'Connor:** No, it's not acceptable.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** That's good right there. That's perfect.

I'm going to be very short. I only have five minutes. Pardon my brevity.

What specific policy direction did the minister give the airlines at the air sector recovery summit on November 24?

Anyone.

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** Sorry, Mr. Doherty, that is policy direction with respect to what areas?

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** For the air sector recovery summit that the minister had with the airlines on November 24, were there specific policy directions given by the minister to the airlines, expectations that the minister gave to the airlines in that summit?

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** We obviously do not speak for Mr. Alghabra, but my understanding is that summit was the first step and then he and his team and the Government of Canada are preparing policies to address those issues. That's my understanding, based on their public statements.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** That's perfect.

Again, as I said, I'm in the unique position of actually feeling for our airlines witnesses who are here because—I agree—there are more entities that are responsible. However, our airlines are in the line of fire right now.

I understand the unique situation you're in such that you have to dance that delicate dance.

Mr. Gibbons, perhaps I'll start with you. Who also bears the brunt of the responsibility here? Would it be airports and government? What has the government done in the last seven years to ensure that our transportation sector—specifically our ports and airports—is running smoothly?

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** Do you mean with respect to tarmac specifically?

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** I mean with respect to extraordinary situations such as the one that we just encountered.



**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** What the government actually did from Labour Day on was conduct a weekly meeting at the highest levels of Transport Canada with all airports and air carriers. That is a legacy piece that stems from COVID, but the Government of Canada, to its credit, has actually continued this. There is a high level of regular calls and identification of issues.

With respect to failure, there are the operational issues and the operational decisions we made, which we stand fully and squarely behind. Then there are questions that Ms. Damoff and others have asked, such as what we do when things go wrong and what our plans are when things go wrong. We're going to address that, and we're going to be doing a lot of that work.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Right.

Thank you, Mr. Gibbons.

Thank you, Mr. Doherty.

Next we have Ms. Diab.

Ms. Diab, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses who are appearing here today.

I flew this morning from Halifax. I think all of us across the country can acknowledge that what happened in December was a mess and was chaotic. The stand that I would like to take is similar to that of a couple of the members who have already asked questions.

None of us can prevent storms and weather, and we know things happen when they do. The issue that I want to concentrate on is the poor communication and lack of communication with customers and clients and whether the airline knows that the aircraft is going to be delayed or cancelled or whatever for minutes or hours. I personally was caught when I tried to leave Ottawa in December for Toronto but we couldn't depart due to weather. I had called in the morning and was told everything was going to be fine. Had I known, I could have had us rerouted and we could have gone to Montreal, because in Montreal things are usually a little bit better, as I was told. We got on a flight to Montreal 24 hours later and then we were stuck in Montreal because the international aircraft could not depart because of mechanical problems. Things happen; sometimes they're controllable and sometimes they're not.

The issue here is communication. I saw so many people lying down in the airports. People were getting angry and frustrated, and I felt for the staff who were there. There was no communication and none of them knew what was going to happen. Some people were lucky to have lounge access. A lot of people have apps and those said they were boarding. You're going there and you're left waiting for hours and there's no boarding.

I'll start with Air Canada, because it happened to be an Air Canada flight, but it was probably the same with other carriers as well.

What are you doing to improve this communication? Clearly it's not happening. People understand there are difficulties, but there's really no answer when there is no communication to customers.

**Mr. Kevin O'Connor:** I apologize for the disruption you suffered during your trip with us.

You're absolutely right. When we do things right, communication is the key thing. When you have weather events, especially winter storms, they generally don't just pop up. We have advance notice, which is why we put weather alerts out and we have goodwill policies alerting people to things that could potentially happen.

The one thing I will say is that there are a number of knock-on effects, so as the day goes on and as things change, flights can have further delays or cancellations for multiple reasons. There's not just one reason. I can see that being confusing. You brought up that there was a mechanical issue on a wide-body plane. That was not known in advance. It was not known in the morning, and if that's the case, that happened in real time. However, we have invested and are investing in lots of new technology to try to communicate with and train our personnel who have the responsibility to forecast flights, and it is something we strive for. One of our top priorities is that communication is key. Even if your flight is cancelled and the news is not great, it should be as far in advance as possible.

People have said that this isn't our first winter; we've had winters before. The key is that if we have to cancel—and we've cancelled in previous years as well—we cancel early if we are not able to operate, and that does keep people away. It does disrupt their travel, but the early communication is a tool that we try to use here and then we add as much capacity early on as possible.

I'll just make one point. December 23, Friday, is the busiest travel date, but we still carried 90,000 people that day. What we did know was that the storm was going to be continent-wide. We put alerts out early to try to move people on the Thursday. Thursday was not going to be our busiest day but it ended up being our busiest day of the entire travel period as we tried to proactively move people prior to the storm, not after.

• (1155)

**Ms. Lena Metlege Diab:** I would say the difficulty started back in mid-December, if not earlier, due to storms and everything else.

I'll go back to communication and staffing.

I sympathize with the staff, but it was an international flight. We were on the tarmac for quite a bit. Finally people were unloaded. The plane was packed. We had to go to customs, clear customs, get our luggage and get out, but there was no staff there to tell people what to do.

What are the policies and how do you do that? What should customers rely on to get proper communication? What is the policy with Air Canada?

If I have time, I'll go to WestJet next.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Ms. Diab, we're out of time for that.

We can ask our witnesses to perhaps submit a written response.

Thank you, Ms. Diab.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Vignola, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

Gentlemen, I spoke earlier about the notion of safety, which sometimes seems to be invoked for a host of reasons. When someone buys a ticket, they are entering into a contract with a carrier and therefore they expect their safety to be optimal. I think everyone here wants that safety to be optimal.

Now, if the lack of personnel justifies the use of this safety concept, would there not be a flaw in this concept here, which should be reviewed to properly frame it?

[*English*]

**Mr. Andrew Gibbons:** I think I have the point of your question. Obviously, our industry is one of the safest forms—if not the safest form—of travel around, and safety is first and foremost.

To your point, in a disruption when we, as an airline, start to back up and we have people in the halls, etc.... These become security concerns for our frontline staff and for others, so I absolutely agree. That's when we try to be proactive. One of the best things....

I'll bring up December 23, which had both a significant snow event in Vancouver, starting around nine in the morning, and a continual flash freeze and icing event in Toronto. On both of those days, we took a proactive approach. What we didn't want was that exact same situation with cancellations that can happen in the moment. That's always the worst-case scenario. You're right there and you have the expectation, and it's taken away from you.

What we tried to do from a compassionate perspective for our guests in those cases was cancel in advance. They didn't have to leave their homes, and we didn't put them in that state—

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I hear you loud and clear, and I thank you.

When an event like a snowstorm is expected, do you have a tactical crisis group to calm customers and give them the level of service they expect?

[*English*]

**Capt Scott Wilson:** Snow storms, like many things in our industry, are a constraint. We can have many constraints. Constraints are

what drive disruption and drive unintended consequences in a safe and effective journey.

If you look at an operational control centre, it's that team. It's their 24-7 job to look ahead 12 or 24 hours, and out to the five-day window that we have with our network schedule. Their job is solely to try to see as far ahead as they can, take a look at constraints—whether they be fleet constraints or scheduling constraints—and provide an optimum experience for the travelling public and our guests.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

[*English*]

Our last line of questioning for this panel will come from Mr. Bachrach.

The floor is yours. You have two and a half minutes.

• (1200)

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think one of the most glaring stories to come out of the holiday season involved passengers on an Air Canada flight at YVR who were stuck on board and waiting to deplane for 11 hours. For those of us who fly, I can't imagine what that situation must have been like.

My question is for Mr. O'Connor from Air Canada. The CTA requires you to allow passengers to disembark—to deplane—after three hours and 45 minutes on the tarmac. Why was that not done?

**Mr. Kevin O'Connor:** I remember the day well. You're absolutely correct that there is the APPR tarmac rule that we follow, not just in Canada; there are other tarmac policies around the world. However, in the case of safety, if it is not safe to do or if it jeopardizes...damage or injury, we do not have to take the three hours and 45 minutes.

In this case, if you look at the number of aircraft that were in Vancouver that evening for all airlines, we could not get to a gate safely. The airport could not keep up with proper apron clearing, employees could not tow aircraft, and we could not disembark using air stairs out to an open surface and transport the passengers to the terminal. All of these were explored. All of these questions were asked.

Nobody wanted us to have customers on board for 11 hours or for any time of a lengthy delay. However, in a situation like that night's, when it is unsafe and we could jeopardize making things worse, we will always take the side of safety.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Mr. O'Connor, I find it remarkable that there isn't some sort of contingency plan for getting passengers off an airplane in those circumstances. Obviously, the situation on board was stressful for passengers. I imagine people wanted to get off the airplane. I understand that communication with the passengers was really lacking. I am somewhat disturbed to hear that there was no plan to safely get those passengers off the plane using stairs or using some other situation.

Did you ask the airport for assistance in deplaning the passengers? At what point did that request go in to the airport?

**Mr. Kevin O'Connor:** We were in constant communication with our airport partner about clearing and about getting gates. There was no cutting through the gate gridlock. Nothing was leaving. The de-icing capabilities for aircraft weren't...departing. There is no question about it. The communication and the work in the background to try to get the customers off never stopped.

There are contingency plans. However, in the case of this type of snowfall and what happened in the Lower Mainland in Vancouver south... Again, I will stress that until it's safe to move the aircraft and get customers off, we will not make a situation worse, and we will abide by the APPR. We will always, as I said, abide by safety first and foremost.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of our witnesses for appearing before the committee today and for being a part of this ongoing study.

That concludes this portion of the meeting. We will now suspend for approximately five minutes to change panels.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, would you like to speak?

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Chair, during my speaking turn, there were some lags because of interpretation. So I would like to make sure that the airlines get back to us as soon as possible with their dates for meeting with the minister, if that is possible.

**The Chair:** We take note of that, Mr. Berthold. Thank you.

[*English*]

This meeting will now suspend for approximately five minutes as we change over to our next panel of witnesses.

• (1200) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1210)

**The Chair:** I call this meeting back to order.

For the second half of today's meeting, we have, from Aéroports de Montréal, Monsieur Philippe Rainville, president, and Monsieur Martin Massé, vice-president; from the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, Ms. Deborah Flint, president and chief executive officer, by video conference; and from the Vancouver Airport Authority,

Ms. Tamara Vrooman, president and chief executive officer, also by video conference.

Thank you in advance for your testimony today, and welcome to our committee hearing.

We will begin with opening remarks from Aéroports de Montréal.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville (President and Chief Executive Officer, Aéroports de Montréal):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss travel delays and the treatment of air passengers during the recent holiday season.

I have been with Aéroports de Montréal for 15 years now, and have been the president and CEO since 2017. I am accompanied by our vice president of public affairs and sustainable development, Mr. Martin Massé.

As an airport authority, our role is to provide adequate infrastructure and, to the extent of the powers entrusted to us, to ensure quality service delivery to our passengers. In December, 31 airlines offered direct flights from Montreal to 125 destinations, including 93 international destinations.

During the most recent holiday season, a daily average of 450 flights landed and departed at Montreal's Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport, code YUL. With the exception of the major impact of the December 23 storm on airports in the northeast and United States Midwest and Canada, causing flight delays and cancellations, overall operations at YUL went smoothly throughout the holiday season, except for one of our partners, Sunwing. I'll come back to that.

Planning for the holiday season began in October with numerous coordination meetings, particularly to ensure that our partners had the necessary number of staff to deliver the promised service to passengers. I can therefore say that the ADM team and the federal agencies were ready to face a particularly busy holiday season. They were also prepared for an exceptional, and, according to some meteorologists, historic storm. Once again this year, YUL distinguished itself for the efficiency of its snow removal operations. Despite the weather cocktail that hit Quebec, YUL remained fully operational at all times thanks to the proven expertise of our people in the field.

We can understand that weather or factors beyond the control of carriers can impact their operations. However, what is unacceptable is the lack of communication with their passengers, who are also our passengers. They have a right to be informed, especially when there is a delay of more than three hours. We must avoid people coming to the airport to wait unnecessarily when they could be in the comfort of their own homes. We need to avoid having hundreds of passengers stuck in our airport waiting for their departure.

In such situations, it is our employees, those of ADM and those of the carriers, who are faced with the understandable frustration of passengers. Naturally, that they want factual answers. We must therefore improve our internal communications with the airlines, because it is important to better understand the situation and, above all, to better explain delays to passengers. For example, they need to be given the precise time of arrival of the aircraft that will take over, and informed when it is en route.

So, back to our more problematic carrier. Last week we contacted them and demanded a plan of action to ensure that resuming normal operations did not take so long. We are awaiting a response from them and hope to have corrective measures in place in time for the late February and March school break.

In closing, let me give you an overview of the level of service that Montreal passengers should expect in the coming months and years. For next summer, considerable efforts are being made by all to ensure that we avoid another summer like 2022. I believe we will succeed, despite a still very difficult labour situation.

What we are more concerned about is the long-term situation. YUL saw tremendous growth before the pandemic, and an equally strong end to 2022. It is clear that, despite significant technological input, our infrastructure will not have the capacity to undertake the next decade.

Many of our infrastructures are outdated, Mirabel remains a collective asset for which ADM bears the annual losses, and decarbonization is becoming a necessity. Our debt level is too high to prepare for the future. We are therefore counting on a financial relief valve in the near future and we believe that it can be provided within the current governance model of major Canadian airports.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1215)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Rainville.

[*English*]

Next, from the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, we have Ms. Flint.

Ms. Flint, the floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Deborah Flint (President and Chief Executive Officer, Greater Toronto Airports Authority):** Thank you to the committee for this opportunity to appear.

We recognize that this very special holiday season was a difficult one for travellers. As airports, we are squarely focused on improving the traveller experience. This is what Canadians expect from us and as airports and across the industry we must deliver.

To put the magnitude of the operations at Pearson in perspective, on any given day during the holiday season from December 23 through to December 31, Pearson processed over 108,000 passengers per day. This took place during one of the most extreme weather events of the year.

We know that this summer was also very challenging, but very different than the circumstances over the holiday. With the summer restart, Pearson went from being one of the world's most shut down major hubs for the longest duration, to one of the busiest in the shortest amount of time.

For point of reference, back in December 2021, LAX was back to 55% of its prepandemic multi-tens of million passenger numbers, whereas Pearson was merely at 25%. Again our ramp-up was much steeper and much faster than many other complex, large-hub global airports.

Restarting and accelerating an air travel system has many moving parts, including airport facilities of billions of dollars of assets. Again, the summer restart challenges were very different than what was experienced during this Christmas. The airports and the system had modernized in a significant way and accelerated readiness in a significant way to move passengers more efficiently. Examples include technology tools that allow passengers to pre-book, and understand the airport environment and operating environment before they arrive at the airport.

Recognizing that this recovery period still had many vulnerabilities and anticipating that there would be weather challenges that typically come with winter, back in the spring and summer we elected to decrease the winter and holiday capacity of the airport by 17%. Reducing the number of aircraft that could take off and land from 90 to 75 movements per hour in the slot process was intended to reduce the risk of lineups and add resiliency to the airport operation.

We know that's not an easy decision. There are costs in terms of the economy, choice for Canadian travellers and business for the airlines, but we felt that was important.

This holiday, what happened? It was really a perfect storm of significant epic bad weather and an industry that was healing from the COVID extended shutdown. Labour is still very weak across the board of our partners. Cancellations due to weather have a compounding effect, leading to delays, backlogs and challenges with baggage. We know that airlines are in charge of taking bags on and off planes, and airports are in charge of the infrastructure.

At GTAA, we are transparent and recognize our part in providing the airport facilities, and when those facilities and issues with them do contribute to incidents. On December 24 and 25 specifically, the terminal 3 baggage-handling system was impacted by severe cold weather and an atypical wind direction, which resulted in an unusual freezing of sprinkler lines and conveyor belts. That glitch, as unfortunate as it was, impacted less than 10% of the overall bags that were in the system those two days, according to the preliminary reviews that we have conducted.

During those two days 28,000 inbound bags and 26,000 outbound bags went through terminal 3, which is where we had the mechanical issues. This is the equivalent of one bag per passenger who travelled during that period on a quantitative basis.

That said, we are absolutely committed to modernization, increasing the resiliency of our system for current conditions and current risks. We are well on our way to doing that from an operating perspective, and we are going to do that from an infrastructure and investment perspective as well.

That said, I will touch on a few things that we need and that we believe this hearing allows us to share. These will improve the travel experience for Canadians on a forward basis.

We must make more investments, not just at YYZ but across the airport infrastructure and airports in Canada. We ask the government to allow us to reinvest rent that we paid to them during 2020 and 2021, years where we took financial losses and we had very low levels of business. Airports across Canada took on \$3.2 billion in debt to get through the pandemic and operate the essential infrastructure that we needed for health and for Canadians.

● (1220)

The second of three is that we need better information and real-time data from our partners, especially during our regular operations. We need to get more information in real time to help communicate to passengers and run a more stable, situationally aware airport operation.

We also need to recognize thoroughly that labour today is not what it was. This is outside of the airport industry but absolutely in the aviation industry as well. An equivalent level of staffing to 2019 does not reflect the high attrition rate that we see in our partners, or the training and learning curve that new employees have in a complicated—

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Ms. Flint, I'm going to have to cut you off there. If you could wrap it up, I could perhaps give you another 10 seconds.

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** Again, labour and the resiliency of labour, making this industry an attractive one for the future, one with great careers, is important for us to get resiliency, and meanwhile ensuring that we all have contingency plans to address some of the softness as we restart the sector.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Flint.

Next, from the Vancouver Airport Authority, we have Ms. Vrooman.

Ms. Vrooman, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman (President and Chief Executive Officer, Vancouver Airport Authority):** Thank you very much.

Good morning, committee members. I welcome the opportunity to answer your questions. Thank you for the invitation to present to you today.

I'm coming to you from my office at the Vancouver International Airport, which is on Sea Island, the traditional territory of the Musqueam people. We have a deep and lasting relationship with the Musqueam through our sustainability agreement, and I'd like to pay my respect to elders past and present.

I will keep my opening remarks brief and focus on three things: first, an understanding of the weather events that impacted passengers at YVR; second, the immediate steps we took to support passengers and the help we provided to reunite people with their baggage; and third, what changes within the airport system will be made to ensure that what passengers experienced in December does not happen again.

YVR is prepared and able to operate safely in extreme weather. We remained fully operational during the atmospheric river in November 2021, for example. That was also true when the snow and ice storm came at the end of November, virtually shutting down the rest of the region.

That said, this holiday travel season was unique. The impacts to passengers from the multi-day weather event that hit Vancouver were worsened by extreme cold temperatures in Alberta. Storms across eastern Canada and the United States created challenges in the subsequent days. We were prepared for these weather systems in advance. We coordinated with air carriers and their ground handlers. Our de-icing facility and snow removal equipment were fully stood up and operational throughout. We published a departure management plan, or DMP, that would ensure efficient airport operations.

However, into the evening of December 19, the rate of snowfall increased significantly from a forecast of 10 to 12 centimetres to an actual accumulation of up to 30 centimetres, three times what was forecast. As CBC reported, our region received a year's worth of snow accumulation in just 12 hours—a key 12 hours. It meant that aircraft lost what's known as “holdover” time, the amount of time that flight safety guidelines say de-icing fluid remains effective and safe for takeoff. Aircraft that had been de-iced for takeoff were forced to turn back to the airport. Aircraft filled up the gates very quickly. It became difficult to move empty aircraft off gates to make way for arriving passengers.

The accelerated snowfall continued into the early morning hours of December 20. That created broad issues for customers, including unacceptable tarmac delays, while we worked with airlines to clear gates and the massive backlog of aircraft on our airfield.

In the days that followed, we took extraordinary action to help passengers who were stranded in our terminal waiting to re-book cancelled flights. We mobilized our staff, deployed our resources and brought in our community partners. We provided food, water, hygiene products and baby formula for passengers. The airport authority itself paid for more than 400 hotel rooms for up to four nights for 580 passengers so that they didn't have to sleep in the airport. We established a care and comfort area in the airport, a place to recharge with cots, blankets and access to showers.

As our operations stabilized, the severe weather out east resulted in aircraft arriving at YVR without passenger bags. In response, we took additional steps to assist our carrier partners. We started scanning passengers' delayed bags and set up secure storage areas to help connect passengers with their bags. This was vitally important. It helped us alleviate some of the demands on airline staff so that they could focus on helping passengers in other ways.

I am confident we made the right decisions to keep passengers safe during that week. However, I also believe passengers spent an absolutely unacceptable amount of time on YVR's tarmac, particularly overnight on December 20. As a result, we have implemented initial measures to help ensure that a similar situation does not occur within our airport ecosystem. These measures include greater communication and coordination with airlines around gating, towing, and, most vitally, as many have noted, communication with passengers. We are also launching a series of engagements next week to hear directly from our airport community and the travelling public. We want to hear their feedback and their ideas for what they want to see going forward.

Thank you very much for your time. I welcome your questions.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Vrooman, for your opening remarks.

We will begin our line of questioning with Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Strahl, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

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

We certainly appreciate all of you coming to share your perspective. We heard from the airlines this morning, and we'll be hearing from the minister later today.

I do want to talk a bit about the November 24 summit that the minister held. He indicated that at that summit he gave direction to the industry players that would prevent travel chaos from happening in the winter season as it happened in the summer season.

Perhaps I'll start with you, Ms. Vrooman. Were you a part of that discussion? Did the minister provide specific direction to YVR as to what changes you should make to your operations? Did he demand anything from you at that summit?

• (1230)

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Thanks very much, MP Strahl.

I certainly participated in person at that Ottawa summit. The purpose of the summit was to gather information on what had happened over the summer period. We saw over the summer period labour shortages among some of our key partners, such as CATSA

and Border Services. Those had largely been stabilized by the time we were into November here at YVR. There was also what could be done across the ecosystem to plan for better coordination, information sharing and the deployment of technology.

It was an input session. We certainly provided our advice on the changes we think would be necessary to help strengthen the airport system and the aviation system in the long term. That was the purpose and that was my participation at that event.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** After December 19, when did you first speak to the minister about the situation at YVR?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** We spoke to the minister's office on December 18, because of course we had advance warning that there would be a snow event. It happened to occur in a more intense fashion than what was forecast anywhere, but we did alert him—

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Obviously, sector players are in touch with the minister's office. That's expected. I would like to know, though, if the minister himself reached out to you. Did he reach out to you during that time, or has he since? Have you spoken with him directly since the events of December 18, 19 and 20?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** I have spoken to his deputy minister. I have not spoken to the minister.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Okay. Thank you.

You indicated that you were prepared in advance for this event. Obviously, you have an emergency operations centre that was stood up. However, clearly, there were more planes inbound. The airport was completely closed, I understand, on the 19th in the afternoon and evening. As a result of no gates being available, we saw planes on the tarmac, which you've referenced.

Is part of your review to determine...? Did you talk to Nav Canada?

Were there flights that were allowed to proceed to YVR that should have been held at their origin, so that you didn't have the issue of that many planes sitting on an apron that was unable to disembark passengers?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Thank you.

As you correctly note, we had significant congestion at YVR for the 24 hours, starting at about 7 p.m. on December 19 through to 7 p.m. on December 20. That was created, as I explained, because of the way the snow accumulated and the fact that we could not safely move the planes to takeoff position after they had been de-iced. It created a traffic jam, virtually.

We had something called a ground stop, which you referred to. That means that we were preventing inbound aircraft from landing. We are in constant communication with the navigation authority in the tower—Nav Canada—in those situations. When aircraft are already in flight and there is no ability to divert for other safety or weather reasons, we permit arrival.

We were operating under a demand management plan, which meant we had a restricted schedule in the first place to allow for that flexibility. However, unfortunately, it was such a busy day—the busiest week of travel in the past three years—that there was certainly a large number of aircraft—

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** I have limited time.

There is talk of running out of de-icing fluid and running out of aviation fuel. Did either of those things happen? If so, how did they happen, given that, as we said, this was a bad winter storm, but it was a couple of days?

I'm asking about your resiliency. Did you run out of fluid? If so, why? Did you run out of aviation fuel? If so, why?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** At no time did YVR run out of either de-icing fluid or fuel.

I think what happened was we were in constant communication with all airport partners, including carriers, and, because of the accumulation, we used more de-icing fluid than we normally would. However, at no point did we run out of de-icing fluid or fuel.

• (1235)

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Ms. Flint, I appreciate your testimony.

I have trouble understanding how terminal 3's baggage system went down in the Canadian winter. It sounds to me like you didn't put your winter tires on and you're surprised that you got stuck in the snow.

How would sprinkler pipes freeze? How would terminal 3's baggage facilities not be able to keep up with Canadian winter? Does that not indicate a lack of adequate planning for a winter event on Pearson's part?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** No. Certainly not. We absolutely did extensive preparation for winter with our facilities. This was a very unique and complicated situation that involved the puncture of an aircraft baggage cart and a fuel leak that caused the doors to have to be opened to vent the fumes away from our workers. That was done in response with our fire department.

That, coupled with the unusual cold and a unique direction of wind into that baggage area, which is not something we usually experience.... These were very unusual events that began the trail of system failures that resulted in something we've never seen before with the freezing of those units. We have had temperatures that are far colder than that, and our system operated quite well.

Again, our system was plagued for two days, but for only one hour out of those two days was the system fully down in terminal 3. Terminal 1 is a totally separate system and did not suffer these issues—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Flint.

Thank you very much, Mr. Strahl.

Next we have Mr. Sorbara.

The floor is yours. You have six minutes.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's wonderful to be here. I'm not a regular member of this committee. It's great to sub in and assist the team, but also to address concerns that have been expressed by Canadians from coast to coast.

First off, if I may, I want to say “thank you” to all of those hard-working Canadians who work for the airports and the airlines, from the baggage handlers to the people who we greet when we check in, and so forth. They always have a smile and they're always doing their best, and they should receive a shout-out. I think that's important, because they do their best, even when they greet travellers who are experiencing things that we don't want them to experience and who may not be in the best of moods. I thank you for that.

This morning, we heard from the airlines. In their testimony, it became apparent to me that they were talking about shared responsibility or what I would characterize as a shared burden in terms of being held responsible for delays that should not have occurred. At YVR, it was the individuals who were held on the tarmac. At GTAA, it was the the baggage carousel.

I'd like to hear very quickly from GTAA and from the Vancouver Airport Authority. What do you think of the idea of shared responsibility, or my term of shared burden?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** Thank you.

Of the airport and the airline system in it, only the airline has a contract of carriage with a passenger. The airline, in its risk management, has to put in planning around the risks that are inherent in the marketplace. They do so with the number of fleets and the number of crew. They consider the facilities and they consider all of the processes that are involved in air travel. That is uniquely and distinctly within the air carrier's realm.

There are different levels of remedies in the current APPR that include, in some cases, the provision of flight, which is something that only the air carriers can do. We know that the minister is looking into the APPR and the regulations. We welcome that conversation and providing our input into that.

We certainly support more service-level standards across the industry, so that all the parties can work better together to plan how to minimize these risks, whether they're day-to-day or, again, in these extreme events.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Thank you, Ms. Flint.

Can YVR answer, please?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Thanks very much.

Thanks for the shout-out, MP Sorbara, to frontline staff. They certainly did exemplary work throughout that very difficult week.

In addition to what my colleague Deborah has said, I would say that... For example, in our case, when we are talking about the tarmac delays, you might be surprised to know that the airports have no ability to tow or move aircraft. We don't have towing equipment and we don't have the legal authority or insured authority to do so, even if we wished to, so it's a complex ecosystem that works in order to serve passengers safely and efficiently each and every day.

At the airport authority, we would welcome the opportunity for discussion to increase the responsibility of airports for the coordination and movement of some of those kinds of functions. Of course, we would then be happy to share the accountability for providing that service to the level that Canadians expect.

• (1240)

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Thank you.

My next question concerns something that has already been alluded to: staffing at the airports. We went through the pandemic and there was obviously a decline in staffing levels. Staffing levels have now gone back up, but volumes have not returned to where they were pre-pandemic. It's concerning as we move forward that airports and airlines can handle increased passenger counts as we return to a fully normal travel season, and for expansion and growth.

Where are the airports in terms of staffing, and do there continue to be staffing shortages?

I'll first go to the Montreal airport, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Let me make a small correction: we have already recovered the traffic volume that existed before the pandemic. We even have weeks where we exceed that volume. We have had weeks where it was 107% of what it was in 2019.

It is clear that in Montreal—I think I can speak for my two colleagues as well—we have the staff required, including baggage handlers, to be able to serve the community. In addition, we are making sure with our partners that they have the required staff as well.

We are in constant communication with government agencies, including baggage services. We even post the positions they want to fill on our website. So we're there, we're ready, and the staff is there.

Are people fully trained? That's another question. Do they have the speed and level of execution that we require? There's still work to be done on that front.

[*English*]

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Thank you.

Ms. Flint, can you jump in on that question? I want to ask a final question, but I have only 30 seconds, so please be quick.

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** For the GTAA, 1,500 of the 50,000 employees at the airport are my direct staff. We are well staffed and have hired back over the course of the summer.

The issue is that staffing and labour today are different than what they were before the pandemic. Equivalent levels are not necessarily the best comparison. It really is about the high attrition we're seeing in the market. I'd like the industry, especially the Canadian aviation industry, to be seen as one that is one for the future and one where promising careers and great jobs can be offered. We want to see teams that come to the industry and of course remain. In the meantime, we must all work together to have more resilient plans that address newer staff in a very complex operating environment.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Flint and Mr. Sorbara.

Next we have Madame Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Vignola, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Flint and Ms. Vrooman, thank you for attending.

Good afternoon, Mr. Rainville and Mr. Massé, from Aéroports de Montréal, and thank you also for being with us.

In her remarks, Ms. Vrooman spoke about the services that the Vancouver airport had offered passengers to support them during the December 23-24 storm. Did the Montréal-Trudeau International Airport have to go through the same process and offer services: food, support in finding a hotel, transportation?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Absolutely. We had to deal with a situation like this last summer, which was more serious than the Christmas storm. This time we had to do perhaps less.

I myself was there, during the night, to set up beds. Indeed, in these cases, we set up cots in our conference rooms, we give food as well as baby food, diapers, among other things. Yes, we have all that. It's not part of our normal procedures, but in extreme cases we have it.

Of course, you need access to hotel rooms. Last summer, none were available, which was a problem. Also, they are often too expensive, even if there are some.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** In these situations where you work with the airlines, is it entirely at your expense or is there compensation? I'm trying to figure out how that works.

• (1245)

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** We are the ones who bear the costs in these extreme cases, because it is really exceptional. That this kind of situation happens twice in the same year is also rather exceptional.



**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

Earlier, I said that when a customer buys a ticket, they expect a certain level of safety. While we understand that some aspects are the carriers' responsibility, other aspects rather fall to you.

I would like you to say a few words about the safety aspects that are more of your concern, as the airport authorities.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Our primary responsibility is the proper maintenance of the apron, as well as clearance of the runways.

That is entirely our responsibility when there are winter conditions. I'm talking about Montreal here, because we have an average of 56 days of snow per year. So we're used to it.

This responsibility is so important to us that our crews usually arrive the day before a snowstorm and sleep in the hotel, so they can clear the runways the next day and bring the surface back to concrete.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** If the carriers ever cancel a flight for a safety reason related to ramp and runway clearance, do they pay the compensation or does the airport?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** The airline makes the decision to take off or not. In fact, it is the pilot who makes that decision.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** It's because the companies have a contract.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** This is because it is at the very heart of the pilot's job to determine the level of safety according to the facilities, and it is therefore up to them to decide whether to take off or not.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** The Bloc Québécois believes that the definition of what constitutes a safety reason, which the regulations allow air carriers to use to explain a disruption, could be misused by some carriers to justify their decision not to compensate their customers.

From your perspective as an airport administrator, should we be looking at a law that is more like the European Union law? It does not even include safety as a justification for a disruption that is the responsibility of the carrier. There, if a problem is the carrier's responsibility, they take full responsibility, including compensation.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Everyone, according to their field of competence, decides what is safe or not for the passenger. We will never question an airline's decision to deem a situation unsafe.

Each of us has our areas of expertise, and we respect each other, absolutely.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** So, de facto, it's always safety first.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Yes, that's correct.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** As safety is fundamental, it should not become a catch-all of reasons for not compensating passengers who suffer the consequences of decisions.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** That is your interpretation.

For our part, as soon as the word "safety" is uttered, whatever the reason, we do not question the decision.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I wasn't saying that you shouldn't take safety into account, because it is always the basis for decisions.

I meant that some carriers use safety as a reason to refuse to compensate passengers, even though the situation is entirely the responsibility of those carriers. Doesn't the notion of safety become an excuse, at that point?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** I'll let the airlines debate this question about their share of responsibility for safety. I will stick to what the airport itself does.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Safety comes first. All right.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** We cannot tamper with that, Ms. Vignola.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I agree.

Is baggage handling your responsibility, that of the carriers, or a shared responsibility?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** A shared responsibility.

Putting the luggage on the aircraft is the responsibility of the company, and getting the luggage to the exit door is ours.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Rainville. Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

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

My questions will be for Ms. Vrooman, from the Vancouver Airport Authority. I'd like to add to the discussion around these challenging events.

I believe it was in the evening of December 22 that we had one of the more alarming stories of the holiday season, with passengers on board an Air Canada flight stuck on the airplane for over 11 hours and unable to deplane. I've seen the communication from an individual who has worked in the airline industry, including in emergency response, and they say it's their opinion that YVR should have implemented an emergency action plan to get the Air Canada passengers off that aircraft.

Is an emergency action plan something that was discussed or considered at some point during those 11 hours?

● (1250)

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Starting on December 18 and throughout the week to the 23rd and beyond, to the 27th, we had full irregular operations and emergency operations plans stood up throughout.

On the specific issue of delays on the tarmac, of course our number one priority was to be able to work with the airlines, with ground crews, to get those passengers safely off as soon as possible. As I mentioned earlier, that effort requires coordination and the capability to tow aircraft. The airport authority does not have that authority, that capability or that responsibility; that is the responsibility of the airlines, so we rely on airlines, through their contracted ground handling crew, to move aircraft off gates. Normally, of course, that works very well. They come on to a gate and they move off. In this case, we came to a ground stop and we had no gating capability, as was noted.

You might wonder, though, why we didn't use air stairs. I've been asked several times why we didn't have buses and air stairs available. We certainly stood up buses and air stair capabilities immediately. However, it was the opinion of our airside safety officer that due to the congested conditions on the airfield and the snow, it was unsafe to have passengers depart. We evaluated that situation on an hourly basis until the conditions improved such that we could safely deplane people using air stairs, and then we proceeded to do that, thus clearing up the congestion.

I totally agree that delays for that amount of time are unacceptable, which is why we've put the changes in place that will require that aircraft be on the gate for only a limited time and that airlines demonstrate to us that they have the towing capacity to remove those aircraft.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Ms. Vrooman, you've pointed to towing capacity as one of the constraints that prevented you from getting those passengers off the aircraft and said that towing capacity is the responsibility of the airline. Were those tow vehicles able to access the gate, given the amount of snow and appreciating that snow removal is the responsibility of the airport?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Absolutely. We cleared the taxiways, the runways and the aprons for towing as a priority. That actually created some issues with respect to baggage handling, because we prioritized towing.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** If I hear you correctly, Ms. Vrooman, you made it so that the tow vehicles were able to access the gates and the aircraft, but the airlines chose not to tow the aircraft, which is what was required in order for people to deplane.

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** I wouldn't say they chose not to; I would say they had capacity constraints in respect to doing that.

Of course, as we heard from the carriers, it is in everyone's interest to get those passengers off the planes as soon as possible, but we had a weather event here, which meant it was difficult for some staff, ground handling staff, to get into the airport. That is an area that struggles with retention of labour, and we already had maximum overtime hours being recorded across our seven contracted ground handlers. That combination made a scarcity of both equipment and staff, meaning it was difficult to tow aircraft in the usual and timely way.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** With respect to preparedness, I know YVR has a climate plan. I'm curious as to whether that climate plan includes strategies around adaptation and extreme weather events, understanding that extreme weather is going to become a more frequent reality.

Prior to the incident we're discussing, did YVR have contingency plans for snowstorms, and if so, what weather parameters were those contingency plans based on?

• (1255)

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Yes, we have a climate plan, and it includes resiliency and adaptation. As I mentioned, that includes... For example, we are located on a flood plain, and while snow is difficult for an airport, water is equally so. During the atmospheric river we were the only transportation hub in the province that was fully functional for those 10 days, and that was because of the work we did to strengthen our drainage, diking and ditch system.

When it comes to snow, we plan for snow. We had a significant snow event that shut down our region on November 29. The airport remained operational throughout, save for a brief period on the north runway, when we had an EVA aircraft that was stopped for a short period of time.

We stress-test against forecasts. We discuss those forecasts with our airport community, which includes carriers, CATSA and CB-SA—all of those that come together to support, look at the forecast, and adjust—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Vrooman, and thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Doherty, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The majority of my questions will be for Ms. Vrooman.

Like many Canadians and Christmastime travellers, I was stuck in the Vancouver airport, waiting for a rescheduled flight. I sat with my wife on an aircraft. I was one of the fortunate ones. We were on the aircraft for only four and a half hours, waiting for de-icing fluid. The pilot came on and said that YVR wanted to hold on to the passengers a bit longer as they had run out of de-icing fluid.

Ms. Vrooman, you have a fancy video, which closes by stating: Let it snow. We're ready for winter at YVR.

Aéro Mag conducts your de-icing services at YVR. I'm very familiar with airport ecosystems. They have 15 de-icing trucks and 10 communal de-icing bays. How can they run out of de-icing fluid?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** I'm sorry to hear about your experience. It's obviously not the one that we would want, particularly at that time of year.

As I said, at no point did we or Aéro Mag run out of de-icing fluid. What does happen, though, as you're very familiar with.... You know that it's constant communication when de-icing is happening, and we did have a period where we had a combination of snow accumulation, ice and freezing rain—

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** I'm sorry to cut you off again. I have only five minutes.

It was a clear day, and they ran out of de-icing fluid. We were in the de-icing line, and Aéro Mag had to return.... The comment was, why do you always run out of de-icing fluid?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** I can't speak to that comment. We certainly did not run out of de-icing fluid. As you might imagine, you have to go and refill the trucks from time to time depending on—

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** How many trucks does Aéro Mag have? Do they still have 15 de-icing trucks?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** They have several. I can get that exact number for you.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Can you do that by the end of the day, please?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Of course.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Thank you.

Ms. Vrooman, there are 1,322 non-stop destinations weekly that YVR serves throughout the world. Is that correct?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Yes.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** In B.C. alone, there are 518 non-stop flights per week. Is that correct?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** That sounds about right, yes.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** That includes also medevac and air ambulance.

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Yes.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Were there medevac and air ambulance flights that were cancelled or delayed during this time and was there any loss of life or were medical services denied or delayed?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** I am aware of no loss of life, no denial of medical services and full operation of medevac flights.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Okay.

It has been said a number of times now that there is a shared responsibility going back and forth. One of the challenges that airports face is in ramping up, obviously, and the restricted area ramp passes throughout the whole ecosystem that is served. Is the aviation industry still facing some of these challenges?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** We did face those challenges significantly in the summer. We have cleared up that backlog, and we did bring on extra escort staff, because we knew that the timely movement of equipment and people would be critical during these operations, so we were able to provide escorts as needed to the airfield.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Okay. So that is no longer an issue...?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** No.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Okay.

Can I ask you, Ms. Flint, is that the same for YYZ as well?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** Yes. There's a stark difference between the summer operations and winter. We were well prepared. The staffing issues that had plagued the industry [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] working with the federal government, restaffing, retooling, eliminating processes that also had made staff inefficient have all been remedied.

• (1300)

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Have you spoken directly with the minister in the last couple of weeks regarding the challenges that YYZ has faced?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** We had a series.... I began a weekly letter back to the government with situational awareness—

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Directly with the minister...?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** No, but I spoke with Deputy Minister Keenan on December 29.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Ms. Vrooman, again to you, just to reconfirm, you have not spoken with the minister yet.

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** That is correct. I've spoken with the deputy.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Okay.

For our Montreal colleagues, Mr. Rainville, have you spoken directly with the minister as of yet with respect to any challenges?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** No. We spoke with the office of the Minister of Transport.

[*English*]

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Okay, so the minister hasn't reached out as of yet: That's correct.

I guess the challenge I have, as I've said many times on either side of this, is that YVR continues to say and the airports continue to say that they are ready.

Ms. Vrooman, you've said that you were ready for this winter storm on November 29—

**The Chair:** My apologies, Mr. Doherty, but there is no time left. We're going to have to move on to the next line of questioning, which will be with Ms. Damoff.

The floor is yours, Ms. Damoff. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being with us today.

I represent Oakville North—Burlington and most of my constituents travel through Pearson airport, so I'm going to start with the GTAA. I want to talk about the issue with luggage.

You mentioned that the winds were from a different direction and freezing and you made it sound like that was the only issue, yet I know that passengers both before and since then have had problems with luggage that has not arrived, or there have been extended delays in receiving it, particularly during the Christmas period when people didn't receive their luggage.

I'm wondering if you could just comment on the processes for what happens with luggage and how it gets to passengers when it is delayed.

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** Yes, I'd be happy to answer that. Thank you.

The baggage responsibility is shared, as has been said. We are responsible for the infrastructure: 13 kilometres of baggage conveyance belts and numerous carousels. The airlines are responsible, through their ground handlers or their own staff, for taking the bags at check-in, putting them into the conveyance and then, as they go through the process, for taking them off the conveyance, loading them into carts and getting them to the aircraft, and similarly, on the inbound, getting them into the conveyors so that passengers can pick them up.

When there are irregular operations, many of those times it is due to delays in flights and the transfer of baggage, and the airlines need to coordinate bags from people who have missed their flights or missed their transfers. The accumulation of the majority of the bags at Pearson International Airport and the pictures you saw were due to that, not just for the bags that were destined for Pearson, but for those that were in transit to and from other places.

As Canada's largest international hub airport, we also sometimes serve as a collecting point and a hub distribution point for bags that the airlines are trying to get back to their passengers, so you see stark images of that. I did acknowledge, of course, that we had mechanical failures in terminal 3 during that two-day window, but again, we have a plan, as I've shared. This is about modernizing our airport system. Finally in a position to invest capital, we will make our baggage systems and other parts more resilient, but 10% of the baggage—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm sorry. I'm going to stop you there just because I have limited time—

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** Understood.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** —but thank you for the response.

I want to turn now to the efforts that have taken place over the last year between the minister of Transport Canada and the various sectors of the air industry: airlines, airports, CATSA, CBSA, Nav Canada and others. I just wondered if I could get a comment on the efforts that have taken place.

Maybe I'll start with Montreal, since you're here in the room. If I have time, I'll go to Toronto and then Vancouver.

I'll turn it over to you, gentlemen.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Obviously, after last summer, considerable adjustments were made. The lack of human resources has been addressed.

Government agencies such as the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority and the Canada Border Services Agency made considerable efforts, as did Nav Canada, where the situation was critical. We now have the level of assurance we needed for the holiday season, as well as the resources to provide quality service to passengers.

So, there have been considerable efforts made on that front. This can only be commended.

• (1305)

[*English*]

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Are those conversations between the various parties continuing today?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Yes, absolutely, as has always been the case. We use the word “ecosystem” because we all work together and we all serve the passengers. Obviously, there have been more of these conversations since last summer.

We are, even as we speak, preparing for next summer. As I said in my opening remarks, the human resources will be there. They must be there in quantity, but above all in quality. We are actively preparing. The school break in March will be a test, but we are trying to prepare for the summer.

[*English*]

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Okay. Thank you.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Damoff.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Vignola, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

Mr. Rainville, in your statement, you mentioned the preparation needed to avoid crises such as the one we experienced in December. I would like to know who is around the table when this planning and these discussions take place.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** We have a lot of direct discussions, one on one, with the airlines and with the Government of Canada. During the forum on November 24, we were able to meet. Those discussions are still ongoing.

With the airlines, we have very structured committees. We have made progress. We are constantly consulting with the airlines. As I said, we're having these conversations a little more often than we used to with the Government of Canada.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

According to what we heard from the carrier representatives this morning, one of the shortcomings of the Air Passenger Protection Regulations is that it only targets air carriers, whereas air travel is a large process involving many players, an ecosystem as you mentioned. I would like to hear you on that.

Do you see this as a flaw, or is it something normal, given that the contract is between the passenger and the carrier?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** I would say to you that it may be like that in the contract, but that is not how things work in reality. The reality is that we are all in this together. We have a common goal, which is to serve the passengers and avoid all this. Maybe we can demand a change in the regulations, but frankly, we are all in this to serve the passengers.

I'm only going to speak for Montreal. In our committees, we coordinate to provide a common service. I think we are all responsible for providing that service.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I have one last very quick question that may seem comical, but isn't that comical.

We'll see what happens for this winter, but since last summer, is there still any lost luggage that hasn't found its owner?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** To my knowledge, no. In fact, I found mine.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have two and a half minutes.

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

It's funny—I just got a text from a certain airline telling me that my flight home has been cancelled. I'll try not to read too much into that. I hope it wasn't connected with my earlier comments.

I'd like to pick up where I left off with Ms. Vrooman from YVR and the evening on which so many passengers were stuck and unable to deplane. Were there instances that evening of passengers having to be deplaned for medical reasons and, if so, how was this done?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** I am unaware of any emergency evacuations from aircraft that were held on the tarmac. Certainly we were briefed about some passengers who had some distress over anxiety, etc., which is understandable, coming from the aircraft and we moved, as I said, as quickly as possible with the constraints that we had to get those aircraft to the gates.

• (1310)

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Along similar lines, were there requests from the airlines to get food and beverages to those who were stuck on board?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** We received no such requests.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** If those requests had been received, is there a process in that situation for getting food to the passengers who were stuck on board?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Absolutely. Depending on the conditions, we have our emergency operations and, in fact, our fire and emergency crews able to taxi out and transport to aircraft as needed.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** If there were people on board these aircraft who were in medical distress, what would the protocol be for getting them off the airplane?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** That would depend very, very much on the specific situation, so it's difficult to comment in a general way, but, of course, there would be assessments made, and there would be trained personnel who could operate on the airfield in ways that the public and passengers cannot in order to get to that aircraft and safely remove and evacuate those types of passengers.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** My final question, Ms. Vrooman, comes back to this issue of the extraordinary snow accumulation and snowfall. Where I live, 30 centimetres of snow is just known as a Thursday, but obviously this was outside of the parameters in which YVR was able to operate.

Will YVR be upgrading its resilience plans to ensure that it can continue operations and deplane people under circumstances such as that kind of accumulation of snow?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** It wasn't the accumulation of snow, because certainly even here in Vancouver we've had more than 30 centimetres of snow accumulate over time. It was the rate of accumulation that caused the time outs and the safety standards that I referred to. Of course, I have already actioned an after-action review, as we do after every incident, large or small, to take these learnings to improve our service.

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

Next we have Dr. Lewis.

Dr. Lewis, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is going to be for Ms. Flint.

I'm grateful for your testimony here today and for your forthrightness in identifying some of the causes of the delay. This was a very important travel season for many Canadians, especially those who were forbidden to travel during COVID.

You testified about the unique situation that related to the luggage conveyor belt. How long did that situation last? When did it break and when was it fixed?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** It was a period of 48 hours in which there were intermittent failures in the mechanical aspects of the system. Again, it's a very complicated system. It wasn't one whole system that broke down but component pieces that had their challenges.

This is a system that is a bit too sensitive, if you will, to the labour and to how the labour uses the system. We have a concept, known as bag hygiene, that requires airline staff to load the bags properly into the system. That did contribute to some of the challenges in getting the system back up and running once we got the motors and other parts that had frozen corrected. Over the course of two days, those 48 hours, we were able to restore the system.

One of our—

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** We were bombarded with pictures of luggage sitting all around the airport. Was this associated with the malfunction?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** It was both. Absolutely, some component parts were.... As a result of the malfunction, 10% of the bags were affected and were not able to be inducted into the system that the airlines had ticketed. Those were accumulated, particularly as airlines didn't cancel flights and people were coming to the airport and putting bags into the system. Those flights were ultimately cancelled.

It creates this—

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** With this grave publication of these pictures all over the Internet, did you receive a call from the minister?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** I did speak to the deputy minister on the 29th. Prior to the holidays, I had a series of written briefings that I provided to the government about the situational awareness of the airport and its partners going into the holidays and the importance of this time period.

Again, there was the storm—

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** You stated it was 48 hours. When did it start?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** It started the evening of the 24th.

• (1315)

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** And your first call was on the 29th.

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** I did speak to the deputy minister on the 29th.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Okay.

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** We stood up our emergency operations centres, which includes all of the various leaders of the agencies and our partners, so there was real-time operational communication, of course.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Would you consider any of the equipment that was involved to be obsolete? We heard from other airports about their obsolete equipment and infrastructure.

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** I've talked about the airline and the sensitivity with regard to people loading baggage correctly. In 2023 I want to have an airport that has the most modern infrastructure and that does not require people to do perfect loading in order for the system to be resilient. This is my call, if you will, for modernization and investment in the infrastructure of the airports. We have some very modern—

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Do machines load better than people?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** It always involves both. There are the mechanics of a moving conveyance, the machine, but you need the people to manage the system. That includes technologists as well as

people who are handling the bags themselves. I believe we can develop one of the most modern systems—reliable, resilient to weather, resilient to many conditions—here in Canada. We are intent on doing that here at Pearson.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Is this something that you've already spoken about with Mr. Alghabra or his team?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** Both at the air sector summit and in additional conversations, we have spoken about our plan for infrastructure. We are having concerted briefings over the next several weeks on our new strategic plan, which is one about building infrastructure and new resiliency and the airport of the future here at Pearson.

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis:** Do you have the budget for it right now?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** Well, our call for investing rent, where we have paid over \$3 billion in rent over the course of the lifespan of GTAA.... Out of the \$6 billion that Canadian airports have paid in rent to the government, being able to take some of that rent, if not all, and reinvest it into important, resilient or sustainable infrastructure at airports, would help the system. Certainly, we are going to invest, regardless, in the future of Pearson, but the entire ecosystem gets better when the policies and the actions support the infrastructure of a very sensitive and complicated air sector.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Lewis and Ms. Flint.

Ms. Diab, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Lena Metlege Diab:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I come from the Halifax West riding in Nova Scotia. We have a great airport with a great team on the ground there doing fabulous things. I just want to thank you on behalf of Canadians. I want to thank you personally for being here as witnesses but also thank all your staff who work at all of our airports across the country and also the staff with the airlines. As you mentioned, it takes a village, really, to get this going.

The more and more I talk to people.... In fact, I was telling somebody last night that I was flying up to Ottawa for a transportation committee trying to understand what's happened over the last couple of months here in Canada and so on. They said to me, "Yes. You're an MP. That must affect you more, because you fly a lot."

As my colleague across the way just said, I think many of us now who are flying, whether for work or pleasure, are scared, quite frankly, and nervous about flying because of weather or mechanical issues or other things. But I will say this: We've been very lucky. Thank you for all your service. We've had no deaths that I'm aware of, and really no physical injuries. Of course, there are people who have been traumatized, but I just want to say thank you to everybody in the ecosystem who is really there to ensure that Canadians are kept safe, because that is the most important thing.

I do have a question.

[Translation]

I'll start with the Aéroports de Montréal representatives.

[English]

Even though we have an international airport in Halifax, a lot of our connections come from either Montreal or Toronto.

You've talked about lessons from the experiences that we've been living the last few months.

[Translation]

Could you tell us what you have done to improve the passenger experience?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Investments have been made to improve fluidity. We have a new version of ArriveCAN that allows people to make their declaration before they leave or to fill it in the plane. Also, on the American side, it is possible to do the declaration in advance. So there have been some technology-assisted improvements.

One of the things we learned was how to improve the way we issue permits to people who need to go airside. We had to speed up the issuance of permits, which is done in conjunction with Transport Canada.

On our end, we had to devote more resources to helping people get their permits and deal with Transport Canada. The processing has also been accelerated. When you absolutely have to get people into the system quickly, it's not easy because of the permits you have to have to go to the air side. This has been greatly improved.

• (1320)

**Ms. Lena Metlege Diab:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Rainville.

Are your relationships with Transport Canada and the airlines good, or not? Can you tell us about that?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** The situation was difficult last summer, there's no denying it. Rather than pointing fingers or looking for blame, we immediately started working together. Everyone must understand that, in the end, it is the passenger who pays the price. We had to start working together immediately.

No quarter is given or taken. We are tough on each other, because everyone has to take responsibility. This has allowed us to build a closer bond since the events of last summer.

**Ms. Lena Metlege Diab:** Thank you, Mr. Rainville.

[English]

For Toronto we've heard about staffing today being different, and the resiliency in the complements. What is it like at your airport in terms of staffing? How would you classify that since the pandemic?

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** Is that for Pearson?

**Ms. Lena Metlege Diab:** Yes.

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** Okay. Thank you.

At GTAA, which manages the airport, we are 1,500 employees out of the typical 50,000 employees across the airport ecosystem. We have the majority of our staff back. We did an accelerated staffing hire over the summer once we were in a condition where

we were not losing money and borrowing money, as we had over the last several years during COVID. Similarly, we restarted our reinvestments in maintenance and asset infrastructure.

Staffing is different today across the ecosystem. There is more attrition and there are more new employees. That is affecting the system. I do believe we need to plan to be more resilient as a result of that. One of our strategic pillars is to create—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Flint. Unfortunately, I have to cut you off there. We're out of time.

[Translation]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My first question will be fairly brief and it will be the same for each of the airport representatives. Since December 23, have you had the opportunity to speak directly to the Minister of Transport? You can simply answer yes or no.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** No.

[English]

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** No.

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** No.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Rainville, at the outset you surprised me somewhat, because you were quite harsh on the airlines in talking about the lack of communication between them and the passengers. The airports have paid the price and Montréal-Trudeau International Airport has been called a third world airport.

What do you think is the solution? Can you answer in 30 seconds?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** I would say it's better communication between the airlines and the passengers. We've said it, and we've also said it in our committees internally: we need to improve communications by providing more detail.

Technology is helpful. Some airlines produce reports and will communicate flight delays by text message and so on, which works very well. We need to continue with that.

• (1325)

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** As the head of an airport, Mr. Rainville, who are the worst students currently when it comes to communicating with passengers?

This lack of communication means that we end up with far too many passengers staying in airports for far too long, as we saw during the crisis at Christmas.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** We have said it before: we were disappointed with the services of one of our carriers who, unfortunately, did not communicate with the passengers and, more importantly, took a long time to recover.

We are used to snowstorms in Montreal. We also understand how the networks work. Even if we can't intervene, we generally understand how the networks work. It takes about 48 hours for the system to recover.

Now, when a carrier takes longer than expected to land a plane, and no aircraft is sent to take over, either in Montreal or at the passenger's destination, it creates a lot of unhappiness in our airports. Why is that? I explained it: many people are stuck in the terminal. We are trying as best we can to give them good service. It is a situation that is difficult for the airline employees and for my employees, and above all, very difficult for the passengers.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Another situation we saw was that on the spot at airports, people seem to have a lot of trouble getting answers from someone. People want to talk to someone. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be a lot of staff available at the airports.

Does that not seem like a shortcoming, both on the airline side and the airport side?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** For our part, in Montreal, we have people on the spot, people wearing red jackets who are called ambassadors. These people are omnipresent in the airport.

However, it's nice to have people on site, but passengers still need to get answers. You have to be able to inform people. That is what I explained in my statement. I want us to improve communications so that we have more information and data to pass on to our passengers, particularly by giving them more precise times.

Ideally, we could tell people not to show up at the airport when there is a three-hour delay, for example. But if we have a six-hour delay, let's tell people so they can stay at home. This situation must be improved.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** That's a clear message you're sending to the airlines, Mr. Rainville.

I have another question about time spent waiting in airports, because we know that more snowstorms are coming. Do you think it would be appropriate to set up a team to deal with such situations?

Such a group could include you, politicians, civil servants, airport and government officials; you could get together to try to find solutions more quickly to avoid a situation like the one that occurred in the last few weeks.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** I'm going to talk about Montreal where, as I said, we are used to snowstorms. We have hardly ever lost access to the runways. In my 15 years of experience at Aéroports de Montréal, we have only lost the runways twice. From an airport perspective, when the snow falls at more than five centimetres per hour, it is technically impossible to do better.

The system's recovery time is something that has been proven. I'm still talking about Montreal. The time it takes us to get the system back—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** If there are problems at other airports, it affects the Montreal airport, doesn't it?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Yes, absolutely. We have internal committees at each of the airports. The mechanisms are already in place. I think everyone will learn from the situation that occurred over the holiday season.

In Montreal, apart from the exceptional cases I mentioned, we have everything we need to be able to deal with this kind of situation.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Rainville and Mr. Berthold.

Ms. Koutrakis, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to all the witnesses who are with us, this morning and this afternoon.

Gentlemen who represent Aéroports de Montréal, can you comment on the performance of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority and the Canada Border Services Agency over the holiday season? Did you see any differences compared to the summer period?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** I give them 10 out of 10. The staff of both agencies were on site and the new technologies were operational. I'll be factual: it was perfect. Everything worked superlatively. The customs officers were there. It worked.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** What effect does freezing rain or snow have on passenger schedules? How many aircraft can take off and land safely in one hour in normal conditions on the one hand, and in icy or snowy conditions on the other?

• (1330)

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Let's start with the state of the runway. It is not the airline's prerogative to decide whether the plane takes off or not, but the pilot's. Since he has control over his aircraft, it is up to him to make the decision. As for what influence this will have on our activities, that is generally up to the individual pilots. It's up to them to make the decision.

Then there is de-icing. This takes as long as it takes and depends on the thickness of the ice cover on the wings. I believe other airports have experienced the same situation. Often, when the aircraft returns to the runway and is about to take off, the ice has continued accruing and the operation has to be repeated. You end up going in circles and it is then better to stop operations than to de-ice for the sake of de-icing.

I can't give you precise figures, but it is clear that these conditions slow down operations significantly.

[English]

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** I'm wondering if the GTAA and Vancouver would chime in on the same two questions.

Did you see a difference in the performance of CATSA and CBSA during the holidays, and how did they compare to that in the summer period?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Maybe I'll take that first.



We did see an improvement in both CATSA and CBSA. We didn't have the CBSA issues in the summer that other airports in Canada had, so they saw consistent staffing levels and service, and CATSA improved significantly from the labour issues that we saw in the summer.

I also would like to take this opportunity to answer MP Doherty's question.

There are 24 Aéro Mag trucks, MP Doherty.

Thank you.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Thank you.

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** If you're asking for Pearson, the government agency staffing was sufficient and performed very well.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** What would you say is the effect on the passenger air schedule if there is freezing rain or snow? In other words, how many aircraft can safely take off and land in one hour at your airport in normal conditions versus in freezing rain or snow? That's for Ms. Flint or—

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Again, for us at YVR, as my colleague Philippe said, it depends on the conditions, but certainly the conditions that we saw, with the accumulation of snow in such a short period of time and the density of it, meant that the time out period maximums were exceeded, so by the time you've de-iced the aircraft efficiently, got it to the airfield, it has exceeded the maximum time that regulations allow for the aircraft to safely depart and it has to go back to de-icing and start that process all over again, so it depends on the weather conditions and the maximum time out thresholds.

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** It's a similar answer for Pearson. A decision is made with Nav Canada and others on a real-weather condition basis.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Would all of you say that your experience communicating with either the minister or his team has been positive, or do you think something more could have been done that perhaps was not done?

Does anyone want to answer?

[Translation]

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** We are autonomous. Our operations run continuously, all day, all week and all year long.

Of course, this is mostly between federal agencies. The role of government is to set policy. We are accountable with regard to our lease and so forth, but in terms of the day-to-day operation, clearly that takes place between us and the airlines.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, there seems to be no interpretation. We'll check it out.

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** Yes.

[English]

I was just saying that it's not between us and Transport Canada when we have an operational issue; it's between us, the airlines and the federal agencies. I wouldn't call the minister if I had an operational issue. That's not why the minister is there; he is there to give us regulations and look over our shoulder on our lease agreement.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Koutrakis.

[Translation]

There are two rounds of questions and answers left, each lasting two and a half minutes, and may I add that the interpretation is working again.

Ms. Vignola, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

• (1335)

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

I will address the same question, first to the representatives of Aéroports de Montréal, and then to the representatives of the Vancouver Airport Authority and the Greater Toronto Airport Authority.

Whether in the context of your statements or responses that have been provided, you have all talked about investments to be made and improvements to be made. What improvements do you see that still need to be made, whether it's at Montréal-Trudeau Airport, Vancouver Airport or Toronto Airport?

Will some form of support be required and, if so, what?

**Mr. Philippe Rainville:** As mentioned earlier, we may have less need for the Government of Canada and Transport Canada on a day-to-day basis. On the investment side, however, it is clear that we will need support. Every one of us has pointed that out.

Every airport has its challenges. On the Montreal side, they are multiple, whether it's the city side or the air side. The network and the parking lots need to be redone. We need capacity on the air side. And, as with all airports, it's not immediate. We can't specify our funding needs for today or tomorrow. We need to prepare plans for the years ahead.

In the case of Montreal, the problem is not a lack of capacity on the runway side. It's just that, in order to be able to take full advantage of the runways we have in Montreal, we will need support for the rest of the infrastructure.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Do you want to answer the question, Ms. Vrooman?

[English]

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Certainly, we have submitted a proposal to Transport Canada that asks for the rent that we pay annually to the government...in our case, it's about \$60 million a year...to be freed up for reinvestment in infrastructure. In our case, that would be infrastructure related to ongoing climate mitigation and climate goals. It would also be expanding our cargo operations and supporting digitized processes that will allow us to communicate more effectively with carriers and passengers.

**Ms. Deborah Flint:** Similarly, I would make the point that passengers want a modernized experience that's digital and biometrically enabled for their choice, similar to what's available in the United States and in Europe, as well as continued investment in major infrastructure, as I pointed out earlier.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Vignola.

[*English*]

Finally, we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have two and a half minutes.

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

Ms. Vrooman, earlier you said that food and beverages could have been transferred to the aircraft if a request had been received from the airlines but that no request was received. I'm wondering two things.

First of all, logistically, how would YVR get food and beverage to the aircraft for the passengers who were stranded on the tarmac?

Second, given that YVR was acutely aware that there were planes with passengers stranded on board for 11 hours, was an offer ever made by YVR to the airlines to resupply food and beverage on board?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Thank you.

We certainly were in constant communication with all of the airlines throughout that period, as I said, starting on the 18th and all the way through the week. We would have assessed, had we been asked, the situation, as we would have any medical evacuation, which someone asked about earlier. Depending on the location of

the aircraft and the conditions around it, we'd have trained emergency personnel who could provide.

We certainly were constantly asking what support they needed, and the airlines were saying unconditionally they needed access to the gates, so that was our priority.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Ms. Vrooman, it seems as though we have a situation here in which the resilience plans of the airport really fell down under the pressure of this extreme weather event.

I'm curious about the role of the federal government. Are there federal regulations to ensure operational resilience during extreme weather events and should those regulations be revisited in light of what happened at YVR?

**Ms. Tamara Vrooman :** Certainly we have regulations that govern safety for irregular operations. I think what we're seeing here and the changes that we've made already in advance of our full review speak to the fact that in irregular operations there need to be clear authority and communication around demand management, around reduced flight schedules, and around capacity in order to ensure that this capacity is made available as predicted in the plan.

We certainly see opportunities for clarity on policy and regulation that focus on those areas.

• (1340)

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you.

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

Once again, I want to thank all of our witnesses for appearing either in person or by video conference and for adding their testimony to our ongoing study.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.







Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>