



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on Public Accounts

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 057**

Monday, April 17, 2023

---

Chair: Mr. John Williamson





## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Monday, April 17, 2023

• (1100)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 57th meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), the committee is meeting today to study report 1 of the Auditor General of Canada, Accessible Transportation for Persons With Disabilities, which is part of the 2023 reports 1 to 4 of the Auditor General of Canada.

[English]

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses.

From the Office of the Auditor General, we have with us Karen Hogan, Auditor General, with Milan Duvnjak, principal, and Susie Fortier, director.

Also, from the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, we have Nada Semaan, president and chief executive officer.

I spotted a small error on your name card, Ms. Semaan. I'm terribly sorry about that. I apologize for that error.

Also from the authority, we have Louise Alberelli, general manager, operational programs, and Rhoda Boyd, general manager, communications.

From the Canadian Transportation Agency, we have France Pégeot, chair and chief executive officer, and Tom Oommen, director general, analysis and outreach branch. From Via Rail Canada, joining us by video conference, we have Marie-Claude Cardin, chief financial officer, and Catherine Langlois, senior adviser, universal accessibility.

Before I turn to our witnesses, I understand, Mr. Genuis, that you have a motion before us.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Yes.

**The Chair:** Do you want the clerk to read it for you, or do you want to speak to it? How would you like to proceed on this?

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I'll read it into the record. That's fine. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is important that as a committee we're able to take up urgent issues of the day, therefore I'm moving a motion that I provided notice of, which is aimed at getting to the bottom of dishonest conduct and attempted foreign interference in the Trudeau Foundation.

The motion is as follows:

That, given that (i) the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation received a \$125-million taxpayer-funded payment in 2002, when the Foundation was created, by a former Liberal government, (ii) the President and CEO and a majority of the board of directors of the Foundation resigned recently, (iii) the Foundation was reported to be incapable of repaying a large donation received from a wealthy individual connected to the CCP regime in Beijing because the donor's true identity is not known, (iv) the Canadian Security Intelligence Service had uncovered a plot by the CCP regime in Beijing to donate to the Foundation, and (v) it has been reported by media that some Foundation directors had considered calling in the Auditor General, the committee undertake a study concerning the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and its governance and funding, as well as the management of its taxpayer-funded endowment, provided that the committee hear testimony from (a) Morris Rosenberg, former president and CEO of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, (b) Pascale Fournier, former president and CEO of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, (c) the Auditor General of Canada, (d) the Minister of National Revenue, (e) the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, (f) Bob Hamilton, the commissioner and chief executive officer of the Canada Revenue Agency, (g) Sharmila Khare, director general of the Canada Revenue Agency's charities directorate, and (h) other witnesses as deemed necessary by the committee.

Mr. Chair, as you know, Conservatives have been working hard to get to the bottom of the serious problem of CCP interference in Canadian democracy. It is becoming clear that there was from the beginning a concerted effort by the Xi Jinping regime to co-opt and shape the direction of this Liberal government, and that those efforts targeted Justin Trudeau even before he took office. It could be, in certain cases, that efforts at influence were rebuffed by the intended target, but in this case it is becoming clear that the Prime Minister and those around him were aware of this attempted interference and accepted it because they benefited from it. They benefited from it in the form of dollars for a family foundation and in the form of electoral support.

This is an urgent issue because Canadians and their representatives on this side of the House are deeply concerned about threats to Canadian sovereignty and about the reality that hostile foreign actors with interests contrary to Canada's are trying to capture our leaders and subvert our institutions.

In response to these pressing concerns about foreign state-backed interference and threats to our national security and our sovereignty, Liberals have been desperate to bury the story. They and their proxies have attacked journalists, attacked CSIS, attacked the opposition, stonewalled studies through extended filibusters at various committees, and refused to answer basic questions during committee appearances.

Conservatives continue to push, as we have from the beginning, for a full public inquiry into foreign interference, an inquiry led by someone who is truly independent of the government and of the organizations implicated in this scandal, so my motion today is about the role of the Trudeau Foundation in attempts by the CCP to interfere in Canadian democracy.

The role of the Trudeau Foundation in this scandal is particularly important. As soon as a prime minister also named Trudeau took office, foreign donations to the foundation skyrocketed. It does not take a Trudeau Foundation scholar to figure out that there was some relationship, at least in the minds of these foreign donors, between the foundation and the Prime Minister, such that they had a reason to donate to the foundation after 2015 that they did not have before 2015.

Again, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure that out.

In fact, *Le Devoir* recently reported that the Trudeau Foundation began actively soliciting these foreign donations. Again, they can't have been ignorant of the implications of having a Trudeau prime minister and soliciting money from foreign donors to this family foundation who also wanted to have an influence over the direction of the Canadian government.

This was quite obvious and was, in fact, the subject of repeated questions by our party in question period in the early days after 2015. These questions were blown off by Liberals at the time, who continued to praise and defend the Trudeau Foundation.

Since that time, though, the leadership of the Trudeau Foundation has faced further scrutiny, promised to return a donation to a CCP insider, claimed that it had returned the donation, failed to return the donation and then resigned en masse. Through these events, there has been a great deal of bluster from senior Liberals, Liberals who want to blame the media and Conservatives for the problems of the Trudeau Foundation and the Trudeau government.

In response to some of this misinformation, it's important to put the facts about the Trudeau Foundation on the record. The Trudeau Foundation is not a normal charity. It is defined in law as a government institution. The Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act define the Trudeau Foundation as a government institution. In fact, the Trudeau Foundation's privacy policy says as much on its website. The Federal Accountability Act also specifically names the Trudeau Foundation and empowers the Auditor General to follow the money that it spends.

● (1105)

Importantly, though, the Trudeau Foundation was not directly set up by government. It was created as a family foundation, with a preferred position in governance given to members of the Trudeau family, including the current Prime Minister. It was a family foundation that was subsequently turned into a government institution through the injection of \$125 million of taxpayers' money.

Regardless of the merits of its work, this is an extremely odd governance structure for any organization. You have a family foundation that is a registered charity but that also has many of the characteristics of a Crown corporation, insofar as it has been heavily subsidized and insofar as it is defined as a government institution in

various statutes. In effect, it has the freedom of a private charitable organization while benefiting from the Prime Minister's name and taxpayers' money, even while members of his family continue to shape its future.

Liberals have claimed that this Frankenstein had bipartisan support, but that does not appear to be the case, based on my review of Hansard. John Williams, a former chair of this committee, said in the House on March 19, 2002, when the appropriations for the Trudeau Foundation were being discussed, "Mr. Speaker, could the President of the Treasury Board confirm that the bill is in its usual form for an appropriation bill and that the \$125 million donation to the Pierre Trudeau foundation and opposed by the opposition is actually in order?"

On the governance structure specifically, the governance of the Trudeau Foundation is invested in the foundation's membership, which in turn selects the board of directors. These are clear facts, and you can find them on page 53 of the foundation's latest annual report. There are 30 members of the foundation. Six seats out of 30 seats are set aside for members appointed by the Minister of Industry, and three are reserved for "liquidators of the succession of the late Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau", effectively members of the Trudeau family or family appointees. Nine of 30 spots of those who control this organization are selected by either the Trudeau government or the Trudeau family.

Both Sacha Trudeau and Justin Trudeau are members of the foundation. The Prime Minister identifies as an "Inactive Member", although he continues to be a member of the foundation with, apparently, the associated powers and privileges. This is an even more curious relationship, that a sitting prime minister retains membership in a foundation, along with his brother and up to six members that his government directly appoints, and along with David Johnston, who is apparently responsible for investigating this whole mess. Claiming non-involvement is a bit odd, given that he maintains membership in the foundation.

The members of the Trudeau Foundation select the Trudeau Foundation's board of directors—up to 18 directors—with two seats reserved for representatives appointed by the Minister of Industry and two seats set aside for members or reps of the Trudeau family. At the time of the last annual report being published, Sarah Coyne, the Prime Minister's half-sister, was one of the family representatives on the board, so the Trudeau Foundation had the Prime Minister as one of 30 members, though he identifies as inactive, another sibling as an ostensibly active member, and another sibling as a member of the board of directors. About one-third of the membership spots and one-third of the director spots are reserved for appointees of the Trudeau government or the Trudeau family.

Whatever the Prime Minister's ongoing involvement in the Trudeau Foundation is or isn't, the CCP were not incorrect in their calculation that this family foundation is close to his heart. Allan Rock said as much when he announced the Liberal government's massive injection of funds into the Trudeau Foundation in 2002. He said, "Two people deserve particular credit. Without Sacha and Justin Trudeau's determination, idealism and, yes, their father's famous stubbornness, today's announcement would simply not have been possible."

Liberals like Allan Rock know that the Trudeau Foundation is close to the Prime Minister's heart and subject to his potential influence. That reality is evident from even a cursory review of the Trudeau Foundation's governing documents. When, today, Liberals like Allan Rock whine about how we shouldn't criticize a charity, they are being highly misleading, and they know it.

Government institutions such as the Trudeau Foundation should be held accountable by parliamentary committees. The Trudeau Foundation was supported by Allan Rock and others to be able to use taxpayers' money and created to be subject to the ongoing influence simultaneously of the Liberal establishment and the Trudeau family.

When the good book says to build one's foundation upon a rock, it wasn't referring to Allan Rock. Unfortunately, the governance of this foundation is not on anything solid, but is on the shifting sands of politics and the preferences of the Trudeau family.

The Trudeau family has rightly been subject to significant criticism over the fact that they cashed cheques from foreign entities that were clearly trying to use those donations to curry favour with the Government of Canada. It appears now that they solicited these donations from foreign sources. Further, it is now very clear that the Trudeau Foundation lied to Canadians about its decision to return a donation.

• (1110)

On March 1, the Trudeau Foundation issued a statement, which included the following:

The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation has learned in recent days through the media that there was a potential connection between the Chinese government and a 2016 pledge of \$200,000 to be received by the Foundation.

It went on:

In light of these recent allegations, the Foundation has refunded to the donor all amounts received with respect to the donation pledge.

On March 1, the claim was made—past tense—that “the Foundation has refunded to the donor all amounts received with respect to the donation pledge”. It did not say that they were thinking about or planning to or intending to. It said, “The Foundation has refunded to the donor...” That was a lie. The statement did not say that they were intending to. It said that they had, but they hadn't. This failure contributed to the governance crisis that we have since seen at the Trudeau Foundation. This government and this Trudeau family institution were subject to a sustained campaign of foreign interference. They accepted the money and then lied about when they were returning it.

The Trudeau Foundation has now asked the Auditor General to investigate, and we need a thorough investigation by the House of

Commons audit committee of where the money went and what governance problems at this government institution led us to that point.

That's why we have put forward this motion. It is squarely within this committee's mandate as the committee responsible for the audit function of Parliament to study this issue, to understand what auditing processes were involved and could be involved, and to look at the appropriateness of a CRA audit and a review by the Auditor General—things that of course we support—along with a fully independent public inquiry into the whole mess.

This government has commissioned two different people to investigate the foreign interference issue: Morris Rosenberg and David Johnston, both from the Trudeau Foundation. Liberals should not investigate Liberals, and Trudeau Foundation members and directors should not be investigating the Trudeau Foundation.

Honestly, Mr. Chair, sometimes this government behaves as if this country has only a dozen families in it. They keep recycling the same people who are part of the same well-connected Laurentian insider circles, from the same families related to themselves, who have served them in the past—Trudeau Foundation members investigating foreign interference, Dominic LeBlanc's sister as Ethics Commissioner... I could go on.

In this massive country of almost 40 million people, with immigrants from all corners of the world, they nonetheless keep recycling the same insiders from the same insider families. This Liberal government is a government for their friends, for the connected corporate insiders who work for McKinsey and volunteer at the Trudeau Foundation. If you were born into or if you married into one of the 30 or 40 families that hold the cards, then no problem: You get the government contracts, the foreign donations, the ethical cover—whatever it is you're looking for. But I say that this is a big country. Let's act like it. Let's have proper parliamentary oversight. Let's call in the truly independent actors to get to the bottom of this ethical mess and get to the bottom of this corruption that is undermining trust in our institutions.

Conservatives would never dream of even trying a thing like this. Can you imagine if Conservatives started a Stephen Harper foundation, put all of Stephen Harper's heirs into leadership positions in the organization and then pumped \$125 million from taxpayers into that foundation? Can you imagine the extent to which Liberals would lose their minds over such an arrangement? Conservatives would never do such a thing, because we will stand with the common people.

Liberals like Allan Rock, Gerry Butts and Justin Trudeau do not want to see powerful people and institutions held accountable. It's clear from their comments, but Conservatives will continue to speak truth to power on behalf of the common people, and we hope that other opposition parties will support us in passing this motion and helping us get to the bottom of this mess.

Thank you.

• (1115)

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

Are there any other comments on Mr. Genuis's motion before this committee?

We have Mr. McCauley, but let me just say to our witnesses that it is not my intention to keep you here any longer than absolutely necessary if this goes on. I'm just not sure how this is going to unfold. I appreciate your patience, and I thank you in advance. I'm going to have to ask you to sit through this for a bit, but if it goes one way or the other, I'll let you know.

Mr. McCauley, you have the floor.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC):** Thanks. I just want to offer up a couple of small items for amendments to the original motion. I'll provide my written notes to make it easier.

On item (v) and replacing the first part of the sentence, instead of "it has been reported by media", replace that with "the Foundation wrote to the Auditor General to investigate donations from a wealthy individual connected to the CCP Regime", and then just change (h) to read—instead of "other witnesses as deemed necessary"—"Edward Johnson, Bruce McNiven and Peter Sahlas, from the board of directors for the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation", and then have "(i) other witnesses as deemed necessary by the committee".

**The Chair:** Thank you. If you send those to the clerk, we'll consider them in a few minutes.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleague for presenting this motion. I think it's an important motion and I think it's in line and in spirit with what many Canadians would expect from this committee, so I think it's an important motion that members of this committee should take seriously.

The parts I don't necessarily agree with within the motion are related to some of the intent of the motion. It's my understanding that the Auditor General's office has received a request from the Trudeau Foundation to audit it, so it agrees with the member in this case that it should be audited. I agree with that point from both perspectives. It's my goal—and, I think, our goal at this committee—to find a way to best account for what's happened here, and I think the person who's best able to do that is the Auditor General. The member remarked that the most important piece to this would be an independent investigation and that an independent investigation should be conducted by independent offices, and I agree. The Auditor General is an independent office and an independent officer of this place and could and should investigate this as a matter of perception for Canadians, because, of course, the conflict is there.

I don't think, however, that members of this committee should undertake a study that would involve many of these members when the Auditor General has the tools and capacity to do that work. We have many things to do in this committee, and I think this motion would be best served by this committee if all parliamentarians here could find a way to come to a consensus to have the Auditor Gener-

al do this investigation. That would be my hope. I feel that many of the aspects contained within the motion, however, are not necessary if we're trying to find a way to make the independent piece of this accountable.

I would suggest that we find a way to create either an amendment or a process that would clarify the willingness of this committee to, one, see the Auditor General conduct an investigation; two, do so in a way that's transparent and independent; and three, come back to that report, because we always study the reports of the Auditor General. I would await the report of the Auditor General so we could actually conduct that investigation properly and according to the goals of this committee.

I would seek advice from my committee colleagues as to what they think about that process and if they're amenable to seeing this amendment be more consistent with the goals of this committee, which is to ensure that the work of the Auditor General—in this case, the work of auditing the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation—be conducted. However, I don't think it requires members of this committee to summon witnesses before that audit is complete.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** I appreciate that. I'm going to suspend for a few seconds to consult with the clerk on a few things.

Wait one second. I see several hands. Is there agreement on this side?

**An hon. member:** Do you mean to suspend? Sure.

**The Chair:** Well, yes, but in terms of speaking order, I don't....

Wait one second, please.

• (1120)

(Pause)

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Committee members, it appears we are now seized with the motion before us. There is an amendment to the motion as well, and, it appears, some discussion coming from Mr. Desjarlais.

I'm going to turn to Mr. Fragiskatos, and then I'll come back to the witnesses very quickly.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have the floor. Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to members.

We support what Mr. Desjarlais has said. We want this committee to stay focused on its important work. The matters that have been raised are certainly important, but the course of action that he suggests, I think, provides an avenue that definitely is in keeping with our obligations as parliamentarians.

If I understand procedure correctly, Mr. Chair, I think we need a new motion to bring to life what Mr. Desjarlais has said, and to get there, I suggest we adjourn debate on Mr. Genuis's motion and vote to that effect.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** I'm open to that, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Could I hear some comments from Mr. Genuis on that?

Wait one second.

Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos, and then I'll clarify the thinking—

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I move to adjourn debate on Mr. Genuis's motion.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I'm sorry, but he didn't have the floor when he moved that.

**The Chair:** That's right, yes. We're on Mr. McCauley's amendment to Mr. Genuis's motion, and my understanding is that if we want to short-circuit it the way you're suggesting, that will require unanimous consent, which is why I want to see if there's agreement on this side.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I think we can go straight to a vote. That's my understanding.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** On a point of order, Chair, a member who has the floor can move a motion to adjourn debate. However, Mr. Fragiskatos finished. You said you were going to go to me and then you consulted with the clerk, so—

**An hon. member:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** All right. I'm going to hear from Mr. Genuis first.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** When Mr. Fragiskatos has the floor, he's right, he's welcome to move an adjournment of debate motion at that point.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I have a point of order.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Let me make my comments, and then you'll have the floor.

**The Chair:** Let him make his comments, and I'll come right back to you.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I just want to say that I think we're talking about two different things. We're talking about the Auditor General being asked to look at the issue when we're talking about this—

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.):** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, when a member moves a dilatory motion, there should not be any time for debate.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** We're not debating a dilatory motion. He didn't have the floor, Mr. Sidhu. Thanks for paying attention.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** On a point of order—

**The Chair:** Mr. Fragiskatos, I did come back to you out of courtesy. I'd like to hear from Mr. Genuis, and then I'm going to come right back to you and you can move it very quickly, all right?

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** We're talking about two different things. We're talking about this committee doing a study, and we're talking about asking the Auditor General to do an audit of the Trudeau Foundation.

Now, we are in favour of both of those things happening. We think that the role of the Auditor General in pursuing it is very im-

portant. Unfortunately, the Auditor General's office, in our view, hasn't been sufficiently resourced. There are many issues that the Auditor General has been asked to study, and there's an urgency to confront this issue now. We would support passing this motion, as well as passing a separate motion.

In terms of the idea of a motion that asks the Auditor General to do that investigation, I think that would be a separate motion. We would vote in favour of that motion.

However, what we're asking today is for this committee to conduct a study on an urgent basis, in a timeline that will allow the public to have some degree of satisfaction in terms of what's going on. That's why we think it's important to adopt this motion as well as to consider a separate motion.

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

Mr. Fragiskatos.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I move that we adjourn debate on Mr. Genuis's motion.

**The Chair:** Clerk, could you call that, please?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

**The Chair:** Thank you. That is put aside for now. I'm sure members will come back....

Mr. Genuis, I'm going to move on to another issue. This is done for now. You're welcome to bring it forward to another committee.

Again, I apologize to the witnesses, but I want to bring committee members up to speed on the COVID-19 contracts. This is a matter of business that is before us.

The committee received, from Public Services and Procurement Canada, two of the seven contracts on Thursday, April 13, 2023. They were from Johnson & Johnson and Medicago.

We have correspondence, which you've all received, from the assistant deputy minister of policy, planning and communications on behalf of Public Services and Procurement Canada on Thursday, April 13. This correspondence was distributed to members on Friday, April 14.

I won't summarize.... Actually, I will. The summary is as follows:

on behalf of Public Services and Procurement Canada...regarding the Committee's March 23...motion to request access to contracts entered into between the Government of Canada and manufacturers for COVID-19 vaccines.

Based on the measures taken by the Committee, through its motion, to limit public disclosure and safeguard the confidentiality of information, PSPC, following consultations completed with two companies, is providing [the] first tranche...

I'm just summarizing the letter.

The letter referenced the fact that we had taken steps to keep these documents confidential and the department would hopefully—there are no assurances—endeavour to deliver the remainder of the contracts this week: “a second and final tranche of documents in response to the motion.”

I, as chair, sent correspondence back to PSPC, requesting the documents without further delay. That was done on Friday, April 14.

I want to just raise this. We will not deal with any vote on this, because that will require a motion, but I want to get a sense of the room on this issue.

I'm going to turn first to Madame Sinclair-Desgagné, as the motion's sponsor, to address this question. I'll then turn to others if they have comments, and we can pick this up, as I'm sure a motion will be coming for Thursday.

Madame Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor, please.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is an extremely important issue. Frankly, I am outraged at Public Services and Procurement Canada's lack of cooperation on a motion passed unanimously by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. It's outrageous that after the 15-day deadline, the department, whose offices are next door, has only sent us two of the seven contracts.

This is not normal. We are supposed to be a democracy. It's up to the government to show that. I therefore ask the members opposite to remind the department of the motion, which they voted for, and to make sure that the committee is respected so that we can do our work. If we're going to make this the fight of a generation, then so be it. Transparency and accountability are important, and we're going to fight to the end to get these contracts and just do our job.

I call on all my colleagues to push for copies of these contracts. The department is already lagging behind on this. Normally, points are docked when you're late, every teacher knows that. It's going to be a little harder to have a calm debate if cooperation is already an issue. Therefore, let's get those contracts sent to us so we can look at them next week as scheduled. It's going to be very important.

I remind Public Services and Procurement Canada that it still has a few days to provide the contracts, as per the motion passed unanimously by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Thank you.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I completely agree with my Bloc colleague. This committee has been seeking the vaccine contracts in unredacted form so that we can understand what was in those contracts and what kinds of deals were made between the government and vaccine manufacturers. The government didn't want those contracts brought forward.

We agreed to hear from vaccine manufacturers. We tried to get an explanation from them about what exactly they wanted to hide from members of Parliament in these contracts. They did not provide any credible explanation for what they wanted to hide. In the wake of that testimony, the committee agreed unanimously to a motion ordering the production of those unredacted documents within a certain timeline.

We provided a reasonable timeline to provide those documents, but clearly the government knew this was coming. They had a lot of time to prep and to hand over these documents. These are documents that they have. They provided them in redacted form, but we need them in unredacted form. We're still waiting.

Again, it begs the question: What is in these vaccine contracts that the government is so desperate to hide from 10 members of Parliament who will look at these contracts in camera? The committee unanimously ordered the production of these documents. It's outrageous that the government is continuing to try to bury them. We need these contracts forthwith, and I think the committee should prepare the necessary steps so that we can move forward on Thursday with this. I hope there's a consensus to do that.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We don't need a consensus today.

Ms. Yip, you have the floor.

**Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** The department is working as hard as it can to get these letters. The letter also says that the documents will be coming this week.

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

Mr. McCauley, you have a comment. I would ask you to keep it brief. Go ahead.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I will be very brief.

We're going through this exact same issue in the operations committee with a very direct committee motion that the government has repeatedly ignored despite escalating requests. This is a pattern now with this government. I think we need to figuratively put our foot down and assert the supremacy of Parliament, not the supremacy of bureaucrats over this committee and Parliament.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** We can hear from members, or I can end it now if you'd like.

Ms. Yip, you would like to make a comment.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** I'd also like to point out that two of those days were statutory holidays.

**The Chair:** Mr. Desjarlais is next.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.



I believe that the timeliness of the production of these documents is a really important piece of how this committee functions. This isn't to cast any kind of shame against the government or the bureaucrats who are in charge of this, but it is a concern that I think should be followed up on.

At the very least, I think this committee should note its displeasure by a letter at least, Mr. Chair, if you would be so willing as to find a way to express our displeasure with this fact, because it is delaying our work. If it's a matter of timing, if it's a matter of an innocent mistake or if it's a matter of just not having enough time, that's okay too, but we expect a response. I think it's only appropriate that this committee have a response in writing from those responsible, to help us understand why this delay exists and so that we don't just cast judgment as to why we think it is not present with us today.

I think a response from the department is in order for this, because, as Mr. McCauley mentioned, it is becoming a pattern in other committees as well, and it's of concern to the duties and operations of Parliament.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** To respond to Ms. Yip, there may have been two days off, but the documents were supposed to be sent to us on April 7. However, it's now April 17. It only takes a quick calculation to realize that they are very late.

You can also ask your assistants how long it takes to send documents. However, two weeks is quite a long time.

At the moment, the documents we're expecting are very late. Those who are supposed to send them know very well what they're doing. Is this another attempt to prevent us from doing our job? We will see if it is.

If the documents arrive in an appropriate fashion this week, that will be fine and we won't bring it up again. However, if the situation unfortunately goes on and we're unable to review the documents as scheduled next week, I believe we will have some serious issues to address.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll end it, if you want to let me, or I'll turn it over to you.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** I'm very short, as you know.

Your comments, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, are noted, and, as the letter mentioned, the documents are coming this week. I believe you said until the end of this week. We will see, and then we can progress from there, but I think that sending a letter or more inquiries is not warranted at this point, because the letter said the documents will be coming this week.

**The Chair:** I agree with much of what Ms. Yip said.

In fact, Mr. Desjarlais, I did send a letter on Friday, reminding the department that the committee takes the motion very seriously and urging it to get the documents in this week.

I'm just going to remind you all—

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** On that point, Chair—

**The Chair:** As a courtesy, I'll let you go ahead, but be brief, please.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you, Chair, for your mercy here.

**The Chair:** It's a courtesy. We're not at that level yet.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** I just want to thank you for that letter. I think, however, if we don't see the production of those documents by the end of this week, that we should make very certain that we inform them that we will have this heard in the House.

**The Chair:** Okay—you're all kind of jumping to where I was going to go, to what I was going to say. I'm going to leave it on this note.

This committee is welcome to take this up this Thursday or a week from Monday.

Members, I will let you decide that among yourselves. I am your servant. There will be three options for this committee to consider either this Thursday or on Monday. Those are, one, to accept the department's—the government's—reasoning; two, to try to seek an acceptable compromise—and I won't speak to what I think that compromise for members would be—and three, to reject the reasons the department gives if it does not produce the document and then consider turning it over to the House of Commons.

Those are the avenues we will have. I think we should take them up at a different time.

Mr. Genuis, I would really like to hear from the witnesses, so, as a courtesy, be very quick. I'm not going to allow a speech on this because—

• (1140)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** All right. I'll be quick.

I just want to clarify something, maybe with the clerk. My understanding is that there's a time required for the preparation of that report to the House, so I think we should have that report ready to go, so that if we decide—

**The Chair:** I will work on that behind the scenes, but I'm going to be looking to all of you for the timing. I'm hearing Thursday and I'm hearing Monday, so I'm going to be coming back to you and I'd like to know what that is, because I don't want to disrupt witnesses coming on Thursday. If I can give them notice, I will, but if we can proceed with committee business, we will.

I'm going to endeavour to juggle all these balls by working with you. If necessary, we'll be ready to move, but committee members might decide to wait until Monday.

I'm getting conflicting signals here.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you. Chair, I also want to provide a notice of motion on the other matter:

That the committee report to the House that it calls on the Auditor General to conduct a fulsome audit of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, with a focus on foreign interference.

I am providing that as a notice of motion. I think that reflects our conversation, but, of course, we can wordsmith that later on.

That's it. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Hogan, welcome back. You have the floor for five minutes.

I want to express my gratitude to all the witnesses. Welcome to the workings of Parliament.

Over to you, Ms. Hogan. It's nice to see you again, Auditor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Karen Hogan (Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General):** Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to discuss our report on accessible transportation for persons with disabilities, which was tabled in the House of Commons on March 27.

I would like to acknowledge that this hearing is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

Joining me today are Milan Duvnjak, the principal who was responsible for the audit, and Susie Fortier, the director who led the audit team.

This audit looked at whether Via Rail, the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority and the Canadian Transportation Agency worked to identify, remove and prevent barriers for travellers with disabilities.

In 2019 and 2020, more than one million persons with disabilities who travelled on a federally regulated mode of transportation faced a barrier. We found that all three organizations had identified some barriers in taking steps to improve accessibility. Via Rail held consultations with persons with disabilities while designing its new fleet. It also consulted on its accessibility plan and training programs, as did the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority.

However, improvements were still needed in many important areas. For example, online information was not fully accessible. According to Statistics Canada, this is one of the barriers most frequently experienced by travellers with disabilities. Poor accessibility means that information is difficult to find or is incorrect for someone using a screen reader. This makes it difficult for persons with disabilities to plan or book a trip by themselves.

[*English*]

We also found that staff and management did not always complete accessibility training. This can affect the service provided to travellers with disabilities and their companions.

As the organization responsible for enforcing accessibility regulations in the transportation industry, the Canadian Transportation Agency identified accessibility barriers through its inspections, and it worked with transportation service providers to remove some. However, we found that the agency conducted few inspections, and it could request complaint data from service providers only in certain circumstances. Consistent access to this data would help the

agency improve its oversight. Meanwhile, the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority and Via Rail focused on resolving individual complaints, and they missed opportunities to use complaint data to better understand travellers' lived experiences.

Every person has a right to participate fully and equally in society. If access to these rights is delayed or denied, the impact is that some members of society are excluded or left behind. To further improve the accessibility of trains, planes and other federally regulated modes of transportation, responsible organizations need to broaden their consultation with persons with disabilities, make their online content fully accessible, and use complaint data to identify, learn about and prevent barriers. This work is necessary to achieve the federal government's goal of a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening statement. We'd be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.

• (1145)

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

We'll go now to the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority.

Ms. Semaan, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Nada Semaan (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Air Transport Security Authority):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, and thank you for inviting me to speak with you today.

My name is Nada Semaan, as the chair mentioned, and I am honoured to be appearing before this committee for the first time as the new president and CEO of CATSA. I'm joined today by my two colleagues, Rhoda Boyd, who is the general manager of communications, and Louise Alberelli, general manager of operations programs.

As you are aware, the Canadian Air Transportation Security Authority is responsible for securing specific elements of the air transportation system. We have four mandated activities: pre-board screening, hold baggage screening, non-passenger screening, and restricted area identity cards. We deliver the mandate of security screening at 89 designated airports across the country through a third party screening contractor model.

Our goal is to provide professional, effective and consistent security screening across the country, combined with a focus on service excellence, and I can assure you that accessibility is a key priority in achieving that goal.

We are pleased that the OAG audit acknowledged the efforts we have already made to identify, remove and prevent transportation barriers for persons with disabilities.

[Translation]

CATSA is proud of the work it's done in this area. We strive to provide a barrier-free security screening experience for those who work at or transit through Canada's designated airports.

Ongoing improvement is always at the forefront of CATSA's efforts. With this in mind, we saw the Office of the Auditor General's audit as an opportunity to look at what additional steps we could take to better meet the needs of those we serve.

[English]

We agreed with the recommendations made as a result of the audit, which provided additional measures we can undertake to remove barriers for persons with disabilities.

Specifically, the report highlighted three areas for improvement for CATSA. One is to meet web accessibility standards. The second is the timeliness of accessibility training and further consultations with persons with disabilities related to that training. The final one is to develop and implement a strategy to better analyze complaint data.

In response to the first recommendation, we have taken critical steps towards ensuring our online content meets web accessibility standards. I'm pleased to announce that on March 29, 2023, CATSA updates the online content management system for its website to a new, fully accessible version. We have now turned our attention to the manual work required to update forms, visuals and other aspects of our website, with each step contributing to an incremental improvement level of accessibility as we move forward.

The second recommendation made to CATSA was with regard to the timeliness of accessibility training, and I am pleased to confirm that all screening officers and additional management and decision-makers identified to receive disability awareness training have now done so. Going forward, we have implemented a process to monitor and ensure that all screening officers receive accessibility training prior to starting work with the public, that CATSA management and decision-makers are immediately offered accessibility training upon joining the organization, and that they complete it in a set time.

This second recommendation, on training, also highlighted the importance of consulting persons with disabilities with regard to our teaching methods. CATSA has been consulting persons with disabilities since 2014, with the goal of improving screening processes, operational procedures and training material for screening contractor personnel. However, consulting on teaching methods has posed a challenge with regard to the disclosure of security-sensitive information. That said, while the challenge still exists, we are committed to finding an approach that meets the recommendations giv-

en to us while ensuring we also respect the regulatory constraints surrounding the disclosure of this information.

In response to the final recommendation, on improving analysis of CATSA's complaint data, work is under way to develop and implement a strategy in consultation with various teams within CATSA, as well as with persons with disabilities. We will also ensure that the strategy aligns with the federal data measurement strategy for accessibility of 2022-27.

• (1150)

[Translation]

As noted by the Office of the Auditor General, we currently evaluate and process complaints individually. This allows us to review complaints in real time, share information and feedback with our frontline operations team and provide training to determine immediate action.

We agree that we could improve the ways we analyze complaint data. We've already begun work in this area. We're currently exploring how we categorize complaint data as well as which processes we can adopt to support trend analysis and reporting so we can enhance our current real-time approach.

[English]

CATSA remains committed to aligning with government priorities and listening to and engaging with passengers, airport workers, screening officers, the CATSA workforce and, in all honesty, all who wish to work with us, to identify, prevent and eliminate accessibility barriers, both current and future.

The actions we are taking today are working toward a more accessible and barrier-free tomorrow.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here and to present to you today. We will be happy to take questions after.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, and welcome.

We're turning now to the Canadian Transportation Agency and France Pégeot.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Pégeot (Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Transportation Agency):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the committee for the invitation to appear today.

With me is Tom Oommen, director general of the analysis and outreach branch at the Canadian Transportation Agency.

The agency's mandate is based on the Canada Transportation Act and contributes to the national transportation policy, which strives for an accessible, competitive, economic and efficient national transportation system that serves the needs of participants and communities, and in which people trust.

We have three main roles. We help ensure that the national transportation system runs efficiently and smoothly in the interests of all Canadians, particularly in the areas of rail and marine. We provide consumer protection for air passengers. Finally, we protect the human right of persons with disabilities to accessible transportation.

The agency has a dual role. First, we are the economic regulator of the transportation industry. We make and implement regulations. We issue determinations, for example on Canadian ownership of airlines; and we monitor and enforce legislation and regulations.

Second, we are an administrative tribunal. As such, we provide access to justice by resolving various disputes, informally and formally through adjudication, between regulated industry and its users.

Accessibility has always been and continues to be a priority. I would like to start by acknowledging that barriers do still exist for persons with disabilities in the transportation sector and that there is still work to be done. With that being said, I believe that progress has been made.

Following two years of consultation, the accessible transportation for persons with disabilities regulations came into force between 2020 and 2022. These regulations integrated two previously existing regulations and six voluntary codes of practice and cover large transportation service providers. The agency is currently working on proposed regulations that would apply to small ones.

• (1155)

[*English*]

The agency also developed the accessible transportation planning and reporting regulations, which came into force at the end of 2021. These are designed to ensure that the various members of the transportation industry plan how they intend to improve accessibility, in consultation with persons with disabilities, and demonstrate how this translates into concrete results.

To ensure continuous communications with persons with disabilities, we have established an accessibility advisory committee. This group, which meets at least twice a year, brings together members of disability rights groups and also industry. This forum lets us get input on projects, priorities and regulations, and provides us with an opportunity to share information on our activities.

The agency encourages everyone to bring forward complaints if they believe that a service provider hasn't respected its accessibility-related obligations. In most cases—97% of the time—the agency is able to help resolve those complaints through informal processes such as mediation. All accessibility complaints are prioritized, and I am pleased to inform you that we currently have no backlog with respect to accessibility complaints. We monitor compliance with the regulations and investigate all incidents involving people with

disabilities that are brought to our attention, whether it be via media, for example, or other sources.

Beyond the specifics of our regulations, I believe it's also crucial for transportation service providers to instill a culture of accessibility at all levels of their organizations. There is an opportunity currently to ensure that new and existing staff are provided quality training on accessibility, and that each and every individual is imbued with a culture of respect. I emphasize this at all my meetings with industry executives.

We are proud of the work we're doing at the agency, and we recognize that action must be taken beyond our authority to eliminate barriers in transportation. Therefore, we have taken a leadership role on the international stage. For example, to improve the handling of mobility aids, we have led three research projects in collaboration with the National Research Council and Transport Canada. Our work has been an important contribution to recent International Air Transportation Association guidelines on mobility aids.

Additionally, the agency, representing Canada, is chairing an ICAO—International Civil Aviation Organization—initiative to develop a compendium of the accessibility statutes, regulations and best practices of various countries. The compendium can be used as a reference for countries looking to develop or improve their regulations, and it will inform ICAO's direction on improving accessibility.

Throughout the audit, we have collaborated fully with the Auditor General's representatives, and we welcome their findings and recommendations. We're committed to implementing the plan of action identified in the report.

Thank you very much. I will be pleased to answer questions.

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

We're turning now to Via Rail Canada. Marie-Claude Cardin, you have the floor for five minutes. Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin (Chief Financial Officer, VIA Rail Canada Inc.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to committee members, for allowing us to present to you all the work that Via Rail is doing to provide a barrier-free travel experience for our passengers, from booking to destination.

We are proud of our efforts to date, as recognized by the Auditor General, and our teams will continue to carry out our many initiatives in this area with dedication and professionalism.

With me today is Catherine Langlois, senior advisor on universal accessibility.

[English]

Via Rail is committed to being the most accessible national and intercity carrier in Canada. That is why we have undertaken several major initiatives over the past few years to create an environment in which every person with a disability can travel independently and with confidence. This means we are working every day to improve our services so that all of our passengers can enjoy the same quality experience for which Via Rail is so often recognized.

Today, I want to share with you the plans we have in place to remove any remaining barriers and to make Via Rail a fully accessible mobility option for Canadians. Please allow me to explain some of our initiatives.

- (1200)

[Translation]

First of all, Via Rail benefits from a unique expertise since the establishment of a universal accessibility advisory committee in 2021. This committee is made up of organizations representing a wide range of people with disabilities. Their advice is invaluable and helps to better determine the needs of passengers and identify the criteria for success so that Via Rail can continue to be the most accessible carrier in Canada. When Via Rail launches a new project, the members of this committee are informed and, depending on the nature of the project, are invited to become involved to varying degrees.

Via Rail recently began marketing the first trainsets of our brand-new fully accessible fleet of trains to serve the Quebec-Windsor corridor. I am personally proud of the inclusive approach we have taken to provide an experience that best meets the needs of people with disabilities and their companions. Some of our advisory committee members have already been invited to experience it.

[English]

In addition, Via Rail has developed and launched a comprehensive accessibility training program. This training is offered to both senior management and frontline staff. To date, all members of our senior management team have completed this training, with the exception of two new executives who began their roles in April 2023. This training will be updated on a regular basis to ensure that our entire workforce has a good understanding of how our organization operates to provide a fully accessible experience for our passengers. Training material will also be reviewed in collaboration with representatives from partner organizations to address any gaps in the teaching methods used.

As for the management of complaints lodged by our passengers, since last February we have been the subject of an extended review by all of the business units concerned, which are in the best position to make the required changes. We are also committed to developing and implementing a strategy to improve the analysis of complaint data on an annual basis. Detailed quarterly reports on accessibility complaints will be produced and forwarded to our experts, who will work to remedy the situation. Progress reports will then be presented to our advisory committee members.

With the ultimate goal of providing a fully accessible experience at every stage of the customer journey, the accessibility of Via

Rail's digital assets—such as our online presence and reservation system—has also been upgraded to provide significant improvements to our passengers.

[Translation]

Via Rail is excited to launch a new reservation system in the near future. This new system will be a critical step in the fully accessible experience we are committed to providing to our passengers. At the same time, we are modernizing other important information systems, including the content of our web pages. We are committed to ensuring that our content meets accessibility standards in this area, and to that end, we will have our digital assets evaluated by an accessibility specialist and will implement all recommendations from that annual review.

I am confident that the measures presented today will address the issues raised by the Auditor General so that Via Rail can better understand and meet the needs of its passengers.

In closing, I would like to reiterate Via Rail's commitment to being the most accessible carrier in Canada. We are proud of the work we have done and are committed to continuing all efforts, as we work with the government and all our partners to create a barrier-free society for Canadians.

We will be pleased to answer your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now start the first round. The first four members will have six minutes each.

[English]

Mr. McCauley, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thanks, Chair.

Witnesses, thanks very much.

AG Hogan, thank you for your patience as we went through other business.

I want to start with you, AG Hogan, for a couple of questions. When you talk about the online not being “fully accessible”, could you walk me through what exactly you mean by that? Is it mostly around the visually impaired, or...? Is there an online standard that perhaps other companies are doing and we should follow to make it so that we can fix this right away?

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** There are accessibility requirements in regulations that came out as issued by Canada. It was to those that we held the two organizations. We looked at Via's website, as well as the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority's website. We found that there was a gap in not meeting the accessibility requirements in both: about 17% of them were not met on the Via site, and for CATSA it was about 15%. They would range from minor things to more important issues.

I have a couple of examples that I could give you.

When we looked at trying to look at schedules with an e-reader, an individual would get the wrong departure time. That's just inaccurate information, which doesn't allow an individual with a disability to plan a trip on their own or book it by themselves.

A second example would be that information was just very difficult to find. If you were travelling with a service dog and you wanted to know what to expect as you try to clear airport security or where the relief areas are in train stations, it was very difficult to locate, again making it very discouraging or very complicated for individuals with disabilities to travel.

• (1205)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** When you talk about the training that is required or the training that is needed, is there an industry standard that perhaps these departments should be following, or are the departments kind of creating it as they go?

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** Again, there are regulations about the content and what should be in the training, but some of the decisions around the content should also be determined in consultation with individuals with disabilities. When we reviewed the content against the list of mandatory elements, we found a few gaps, but more importantly, we noted that there was a gap in the consultation about some of the teaching methods that should be there.

The important thing to note is that the individuals who actually are the on-the-ground service had really good compliance around training at both organizations. It was more at the management level that they were late or hadn't taken it at all. Having management complete that training is just as important, because they set how policies and regulations are implemented and whether they should be adjusted. They also do the supervision of employees. It's critical that everyone complete it, and I believe that both organizations made that commitment: We heard in opening remarks that some of that training has happened already.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I have just two last questions.

Are you satisfied with the training that is available? You audited the training. Are you satisfied with it, or do they have to go back to square one and relaunch their training? Is it just a matter of not having rolled it out for enough people...?

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** We didn't look at all the teaching methods. We looked at whether it met the minimum requirements of what areas to cover. Other than the small gaps we found, we are satisfied that it met the requirements, but then it's up to individuals taking the training and then applying it, and that's where supervisors come into play. We also think that the Canadian Transportation Agency could inspect the actual delivery of services, which would show whether or not the training was fruitful.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** The last question is this: Overall, in the study, are there infrastructure issues, or is it more about following up on the training? What issues should we focus on? Is it a smattering of both, in providing proper access to all Canadians?

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** I would say it's many things.

The old fleets don't necessarily have to meet current or new accessibility requirements, but the new fleets do, so it's a continuous

process. Many of the services are on demand. If an individual arrives in a wheelchair, the people working that day need to know how to support that individual in gaining access to a train, and so on. There are a lot of training requirements about the facilities, individuals and websites.

I think it's across the gamut, if we want transportation to be barrier-free in the country.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thank you.

Ms. Cardin, you mentioned that all senior management, except for a couple, have now gone through the training.

What is your plan to stop backsliding? It would appear to me, cynically, that the training is caught up only because of the AG report. What is Via doing to ensure this is actually done as part of a regular process and not only when the Auditor General catches you?

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** Thank you for your question.

Since the Auditor General's report came out, we've implemented a stringent follow-up process to make sure managers and staff complete the training, and that process wasn't necessarily in place before.

• (1210)

[English]

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Okay.

**The Chair:** That's your time, Mr. McCauley.

We're now turning to Mr. Sidhu.

You have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for taking the time to join us here on this rainy Monday morning in Ottawa.

I have a quick question for the Canadian Transportation Agency.

Reading the news, we often see reports about wheelchairs or other mobility devices being damaged by airlines when they're in transit. I want to know what the obligations of airlines are when it comes to preventing this type of damage or providing compensation when it does occur.

How is this enforced?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** Good morning.

Essentially, the obligation is for the providers of transportation services to ensure the mobility aids do not get damaged. If they do, it's up to them to compensate and make sure that whatever costs are incurred are being reimbursed to the person who is the user of the mobility aid. This is essentially what the regulation says.

What we do, first of all, is to encourage people to make complaints to us. Also, when we hear about issues—whether it be through the media or when somebody brings a situation to our attention—we immediately send one of our staff to investigate the incident and make sure the regulation has been followed. Some of the obligations are with respect to the training that people handling the mobility aids must follow.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you for that.

The Minister of Transport recently announced additional funding for the Canadian Transportation Agency, to increase its complaint processing and regulatory enforcement capacity.

The question is, are some of these funds going to be allocated towards improving monitoring and enforcement activities related to accessible transportation?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** Yes. The vast majority of the funding is for air passenger protection complaints, because this is where we have a very important backlog, as I'm sure all members of the committee know. With respect to enforcement, some of the resources will be dedicated to increasing our enforcement capacity for accessibility.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you. I'm now going to turn to Via Rail Canada.

I want to know more about fleet transition to enable better access...to the needs of Canadians with disabilities. Is the fleet evolving? Could you shed a little more light on that?

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** Absolutely.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we are in the process of deploying our new trains, which will serve the Quebec-Windsor corridor. They are fully accessible, with larger washrooms, slightly wider halls and braille signage on the seats. All those improvements are the product of our consultations with members of the disability community.

Of course, people with mobility issues can still travel on our current fleet in the rest of the country. Our on-board personnel has been trained to ensure that people are able to board the train and move about while on board with reasonable ease.

[English]

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you for that.

In terms of fleets and consultations—you mentioned that there's some consultation going on—are we looking at other countries to see what they're doing? Are we looking at other companies around the world that are seen as leaders in terms of fleet management and making sure that those with disabilities can access their services?

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** That's a very good question. I'm going to ask Ms. Langlois to answer that.

[English]

**Ms. Catherine Langlois (Senior Advisor, Universal Accessibility, VIA Rail Canada Inc.):** If it's okay, I'm going to answer in French.

[Translation]

Via Rail is a member of the International Union of Railways, which has a special committee on accessibility. We are on the committee, along with all of our European industry partners, as well as Amtrak, in the U.S. We share best practices in accessibility, including how to consult with persons with disabilities, with a view to improving our services.

• (1215)

[English]

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you for that answer. It's very inspiring to know that we are looking at other companies and learning from countries around the world in terms of giving better access to those with disabilities.

Mr. Chair, I don't have any further questions. Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** You're very welcome.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné. You have six minutes.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Langlois, I just want to make a quick point. You never have to ask permission to answer a question in French. People don't ask us, as francophones, for permission to answer in English. Thank you very much for answering in French.

**The Chair:** That is exactly right.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being with us. We are glad to be studying such an important issue.

We are examining the situation in relation to persons with disabilities, but I think that, in this case, it's important to consider inclusiveness on a broader level. Consider, for instance, the ability to be served in your own language or the various accessibility challenges families face. I'm in the second category. Travelling with a stroller is anything but easy, especially when Air Canada damages it one out of two trips. It's happened to me, and Air Canada doesn't reimburse you. There's an issue worthy of an in-depth study.

Ms. Pégeot, I'd like to ask you a very simple question about something you said in your opening remarks that caught my attention. You talked about competition in the transportation sector. Do you think there's real competition in air transportation right now?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** That's not a question for me to answer. I was basically referring to the national transportation policy, from which our activities and mandate flow.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Shouldn't you be able to answer a question on something that's in your policy?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** We are actually an economic regulator. The rail sector has two main transportation service providers, and the air sector has a few carriers. To protect consumers in the rail industry, we ensure that a mechanism is in place to settle disputes between railway users and the two companies themselves.

An organization like ours helps to bring balance to the market, which is made up of service providers, railway users and other consumers, as well as governments. Our job is to ensure that the market operates as smoothly as possible.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Do you think the market is operating smoothly right now?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** Forgive me, but I don't think that's for me to say. What we try to do is make sure that the market operates as smoothly as possible under the legislation we are responsible for enforcing.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** All right. Air Canada has received nearly \$6 billion in public money in recent years. Who has the authority to ensure that Air Canada passengers are protected?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** The agency administers the Air Passenger Protection Regulations, which are in place for that purpose. It's a complaints-based regime to protect passengers. I realize that we have a considerable backlog of complaints, as everyone knows. We recently received funding to address that backlog. We are also looking at our process for handling those complaints to make it more efficient, and we are already starting to see results. The regulations are definitely an important part of our consumer protection regime in air travel.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Do you feel you have adequate funding and authority to impose sanctions or make sure that airlines comply with the regulations?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** As I told the members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the current legislation governing the air passenger protection regime is fairly complex. It's built around three flight categories, but the airlines are the ones with the information to determine which category a flight falls under. For that reason, it's very difficult for passengers, and even the agency, to determine which conditions apply. If the legislation were clearer and less complex, it would certainly make things easier for us. I know the minister commented on that recently.

• (1220)

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** The government has set out a clear mandate requiring that airline personnel be able to serve customers in both official languages, so who do you think should have the authority to oversee that and impose sanctions on non-compliant airlines?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** Our mandate does not cover—

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** If not your mandate, then whose?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** I'm not sure whether it's the Commissioner of Official Languages, but I know the commissioner has looked into that.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** That has to do with the use of French, but for matters relating to accessibility for persons with disabilities or inclusion overall, who can make sure that airlines actually provide those services?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** Accessibility is part of our mandate, and we do the best we can.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** You said it was shared by different organizations. The Commissioner of Official Languages is responsible for issues that involve the use of French, and you are responsible for accessibility issues.

**Ms. France Pégeot:** As a regulator and administrative tribunal, we have some technical expertise in the transportation sector. That's why our mandate includes accessibility in the transportation sector.

Other government agencies have different responsibilities in the area of accessibility, but we are responsible for accessibility as it relates to transportation.

We are also responsible for air passenger protection. We carry out our mandate in accordance with the legislation in place. Respectfully, I would say that if Parliament decided to make changes to the legislation, we would make new regulations and adjust our activities accordingly.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses as well, for being present with us this morning. Again, I apologize for some of the business we often have to deal with in this committee. Thank you for your patience in ensuring that we're able to get through some of the important business while also being able to conduct the review of the audit that has been presented by the Auditor General.

I am, of course, often displeased when I see the reports from the Auditor General. Most of them highlight the deficiencies that are found within our civil service and within the programs and services offered by the government or paid for in part by it.



It's no secret that persons with disabilities have significant barriers in our society writ large. However, particularly in a country like Canada, one of the largest in the world, a country where our charter and our constitution protect their mobility, the institutions that are responsible for delivering that do not.

It is a concern to me, and I would hope to parliamentarians from all benches, to find ways and means to ensure that we fix this problem and ensure that transport services like Via Rail can accommodate persons with disabilities in a way that centres on them and their experience.

I understand that the departments have in fact worked closely, in some part, in consultation phases with the community to find better ways of finding points of accessibility that make those barriers less significant. However, it's clear from this audit that they persist.

I want to find a better way to understand why they're continuing to persist. It's noted in the audit, for example, "In 2019 and 2020, nearly two thirds of the 2.2 million persons with disabilities who travelled on planes, trains, and other federally regulated modes of transportation faced a barrier."

They're not happy to hear that this huge population—this huge number of Canadians—were unable to access the beauties of this great country, whether to see their family or to get to services elsewhere.

Here's another quote:

While VIA Rail and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority—as transportation service providers—consulted with persons with disabilities to gather feedback on projects such as accessibility plans and the design of VIA Rail's new fleet, some ongoing issues that persons with disabilities regularly face remained.

It continues:

For example, websites for planning and booking trips were not fully accessible despite this being one of the most frequently experienced barriers in transportation for persons with disabilities.

This tells me that the Auditor General found you were able to identify the issue yourselves. Whether it was by consultation with persons with disabilities or by other means, the community offered themselves in the consultation to have that barrier identified, and then that barrier persisted.

I hope you can understand how unsatisfactory that is, not only to me but to the millions of Canadians with disabilities who have to rely on these services. It's a massive issue.

I want to start now with my questions to the Via Rail representative, who I believe is maybe online.

What are the remaining challenges that disabled Canadians face in terms of Via's online presence and its reservation system?

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** Thank you for your question.

I'm going to pass that over to Catherine Langlois, who can tell you about the plan we developed. The implementation phase is under way and will continue throughout 2023.

**Ms. Catherine Langlois:** Thank you for your question, Mr. Desjarlais. You asked about two elements, the website and the reservation system.

As far as our website is concerned, Via Rail has committed to an annual web content review by a digital accessibility consultant. The purpose is to determine whether the site contains any content that isn't accessible, so we can make any recommended changes. In addition, the members of our advisory committee, who represent people with a range of disabilities, test Via Rail's website once a year or more, as needed, to determine whether any accessibility improvements are warranted. That means Via Rail's website is subject to accessibility scrutiny on two levels.

As for the reservation system, we're launching a brand new system in the next few weeks. Under the new system, passengers with disabilities will be able to book trips completely on their own.

[*English*]

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much for that.

I'd like to follow up specifically on some of the responses you gave.

In relation to Via Rail's online portal, is there a target date for when that will be fully accessible for persons with disabilities? If so, do you have adequate resources to ensure that the online presence and reservation system are made and kept fully accessible as progressive updates occur?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Catherine Langlois:** Thank you for your question.

In terms of when the site will be fully accessible, we are targeting the end of 2023 given the immense amount of work involved. We are committed to ensuring that the website is fully accessible by the end of the year.

In terms of the reservation system, we believe we have the necessary resources to make it fully accessible.

[*English*]

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Finally, throughout this process you mentioned the end of 2023. Are persons with disabilities being consulted throughout this process, and will they be consulted for the product that will inevitably be created by that target date?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Catherine Langlois:** Thank you for your question.

Yes, the members of our advisory committee represent persons with a range of disabilities, as I mentioned, and they will be consulted throughout the process. We want to make sure that the changes we make to the website are in line with best practices in digital accessibility.

[English]

**The Chair:** I will allow one last question, Mr. Desjarlais. Go ahead.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Could you just describe the composition of this council, how the council is appointed and reviewed, and when or if new members are ever added?

[Translation]

**Ms. Catherine Langlois:** The makeup of the Universal Accessibility Advisory Committee was modelled on the Canadian Transportation Agency's advisory committee. We used the same list of participants and asked those stakeholders whether they were interested in sitting on our advisory committee. A large majority of them agreed to participate. They are members of disability rights groups all over Canada and represent persons with a range of disabilities. The committee meets once every quarter.

[English]

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

We're beginning our second round.

Mr. Kram, you have the floor for five minutes. Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here today. I would also like to thank you for all your work on this issue. I think all parties and all members can agree that creating a more inclusive transportation system and a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities is certainly very important. According to the audit, progress has been made, but there's always more work to be done.

With that, I would like to start with the witnesses from Via Rail. On page 14 of the accessibility plan, training for managers and executives as well as client service staff is spelled out. I am wondering if the witnesses from Via could clarify whether accessibility training is mandatory for managers and executives as well as client service staff.

• (1230)

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** Yes, it is mandatory.

**Mr. Michael Kram:** There are two things. Seventeen per cent of managers and executives did not take the accessibility training at all, according to the audit; nor did 3% of client service staff. How is it possible that so many people were missed, given that it's mandatory?

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** It is an unacceptable situation, and that's why we've put in place a stringent follow-up going forward, to ensure that we don't have this situation anymore.

**Mr. Michael Kram:** Could you explain how it got missed in the first place? Did someone just miss an email here and there, or was there a lack of communication to make it understood that it was

mandatory? Could you just shed some light on how it came about in the first place?

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** I think it was well known that it was mandatory training. As I said, it was unacceptable, and the training should have been completed.

**Mr. Michael Kram:** Of the 17% of managers and executives who did not complete the training, did any receive bonuses for the time period in which they did not get the training?

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** Our compensation regime is based on two main factors: individual contribution and corporate results. It was set up mainly to take into account the competitive environment for recruiting talent. Those who met key performance targets were compensated accordingly.

[English]

**Mr. Michael Kram:** If I understand you correctly, it is possible that some managers and executives could have received their bonuses, even though they did not complete the accessibility training. Is that correct?

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** I want to reiterate that accessibility is important, as are many other rules and laws that all Via Rail executives have to follow. As I mentioned, that's one of the key performance indicators we track. I can't be more specific than that, but I can tell you that a portion of our executive compensation is fixed and another portion is variable. We have to make sure that the compensation we offer is competitive for the market.

[English]

**Mr. Michael Kram:** I wonder whether you could provide a written response for the committee with the total number of managers and executives who received bonuses and did not complete the accessibility training.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** We will provide the committee with that information.

[English]

**Mr. Michael Kram:** Okay. Thank you.

I'll now switch gears and go to the witnesses from the Canadian Transportation Agency.

On page 16 of the report, it says that inspections to identify accessibility barriers were done virtually during the pandemic, then they continued a mix of virtual and on-site inspections after the pandemic was over.

For these virtual inspections, was it simply a Zoom meeting? I would be curious to know how one does a thorough inspection virtually.

**Ms. France Pégeot:** Perhaps I can share with you how we approached compliance with respect to that new regulation.

When the regulation came into force, we wrote to the 40 main transportation service providers and sent all of the regulatory requirements they had. We asked them for a written report on how they intended to meet those regulations. We received the reports and looked at what they answered, because it was a requirement. Then, we identified areas where there were some issues and asked them for a corrective action plan, which is a traditional way for regulatory agencies to ensure compliance with a new regulation.

After that, our enforcement officers went and did some on-site visits and checked certain aspects of those corrective action plans. In some cases, they actually went to terminals where, for example, signage was still a problem, and issued some administrative monetary penalties.

• (1235)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Kram. That is your time.

Ms. Bradford, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses here today and to those online for their patience.

This is a very important report, obviously. People with disabilities rely even more on public transportation means. Because they often don't have the luxury, due to their disabilities, of providing their own transportation, we need to make sure it is accessible.

For my first questions, I'm going to turn to the Canadian Transportation Agency.

The Auditor General identified accessibility barriers through inspections and worked with transportation service providers to remove some. You just explained to Mr. Kram that the vast majority of these were done virtually. As you described it, it almost seemed like a survey. You sent out questions, and they answered. I think it's a bit difficult to see how things are actually working on the ground.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of virtual? I know it's probably more efficient. You could cover more, but I'm not sure how effective it might be.

**Ms. France Pégeot:** The way we look at trying to identify the barriers...for sure, it's on-site inspections. In the work we've done on the new regulations, we started by asking companies how they intended to meet them. That's one way.

However, we have different ways to identify the barriers, as well. We have, for example, an advisory committee composed of groups that are representative of people with disabilities. That's a forum through which they can share with us the barriers they encounter.

We also have complaints. We receive about... It depends on the year, but I would say it's 160 to 170, more or less, per year. The complaints we receive are, again, another important source of information for us as to what kinds of barriers people with disabilities encounter. Then, of course, we have inspections.

I would say it's through a mix of those tools that we can identify barriers and focus our activities.

I should point out that there's also a new regulation that has to do with planning and reporting. All the service providers of transportation have been asked to prepare an accessibility plan in consultation with people with disabilities. Those plans are going to be put online. People will be able to comment. They will have to review them every three years. We're going to be using those plans, as well, to help inform ourselves on how the industry will advance on the issue of accessibility.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** You'll have to make sure that the online process is accessible, because that's been another issue, right?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** For sure, that's a very important point.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Also, the Auditor General found that you did conduct a few inspections, but you could request complaint data from service providers only in certain circumstances. That's troubling to me.

Why is that, and what are the certain circumstances? If you're supposed to be overseeing this, why don't you have access to the data all the time?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** The type of data the Auditor General was referring to was the complaints that the companies receive. Of course, we receive a certain number of complaints. We do some inspections, and in that context we can have access to the information we need to do our work.

The type of data we don't have access to includes all the various complaints that companies receive on accessibility, which for sure would give us a better sense of the barriers that people with disabilities identify and raise issues on with the company. For that information, we go to the transportation providers to see if they will share it with us on a voluntary basis. We know that in some cases they already do that in other countries, so we are going to look at that as well, and maybe eventually we will have some legislation here.

• (1240)

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** I just wonder why it would be voluntary.

Ms. Hogan, you mentioned also that the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority and Via Rail focused on resolving individual complaints, but that they missed opportunities to use complaint data to better understand travellers' lived experiences.

Would you like to expand on that? It looks as though that process could be better. They're not getting the overall.... They're dealing with the individual....

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** Absolutely. I encourage you to ask, as well, representatives from the two organizations. It's great to have them here instead of your always hearing from me.

When we looked at Via, we saw that while they handled individual complaints, they didn't sort of take that step back to do a more thorough analysis of all their data to look for trends or bigger-picture things that might indicate a barrier that they were not aware of. They were just focusing on meeting individual complaints.

With CATSA, we looked at the way they categorized their complaints. They categorized them by nature and not necessarily by the status of a person. We analyzed some of the data and felt that there was an opportunity there to do better mining of their complaint data, because while they had registered only about 83 complaints related to individuals with disabilities, when we did a word search linked to disabilities, we found almost 1,000. While I recognize that not all of them will be linked to this, it just shows you that there's an opportunity there to better understand and dig into the data to identify barriers and opportunities for improvement.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Thank you very much for that.

**The Chair:** That is your time, Ms. Bradford, unless you have a short question. If so, please go ahead.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Thank you so much.

Ms. Pégeot, in an earlier answer you referred to three categories of flight. Can you elaborate on what those are?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** This is in the context of air passenger protection. It's not in the context of accessibility.

When an incident happens, it could be within the control of the airline; it could be within the control of the airline but required for safety, or it could be outside the control of the airline. For example, something outside its control would be a snowstorm.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** You're very welcome. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have two and a half minutes. Go ahead.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Pégeot, I have only two and a half minutes, so I'm going to ask a pretty broad question, but I'd like you to be as specific as you can.

You said the current regulations were somewhat restrictive. What would you recommend in terms of changing the legislation, both to provide quality service to Quebecers and Canadians and to foster a more competitive system?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** Your fellow member just asked me to talk about the three categories of flight cancellations. One of the categories that's open to interpretation is the second one, situations within airline control but required for safety purposes. That's where

we've been involved, through tribunal decisions that help bring clarity to the definition.

Basically, the legislation needs more clarity around the responsibilities of the airlines and situations that are obviously exceptional but do not warrant passenger compensation. That's an example of how the current legislation could be clarified. It's actually a legislative responsibility, which falls on parliamentarians.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** All right.

If I'm not mistaken, you have four full-time employees in Canada responsible for the accessibility program in the transportation sector. Do you think that's enough?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** We do the best we can with the resources we are given. We recently received a fairly sizable infusion to help us improve our overall capacity for enforcing the law, including in terms of accessibility.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** That means you are looking at hiring more people.

Something else to consider is the fact that not all the complaints are brought to the agency's attention. Some are sent only to the airlines, so the agency could keep track of all the cases and tackle accessibility issues head-on.

• (1245)

**Ms. France Pégeot:** Yes, the complaints that go directly to the airlines and the complaints that come to the agency are completely separate.

I probably should have been more specific in my earlier answer. We don't have the authority to request that information.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Should the legislation be changed so you have that authority?

**Ms. France Pégeot:** That's certainly something that could be considered. Nevertheless, the financial resources we have just been given will strengthen our capacity to enforce the legislation.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** That means two significant legislative changes are worth considering. I hope the committee analysts took note of them.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

[*English*]

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor for two and a half minutes, please.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to follow up now with the Auditor General in regard to the end of my last comments to the Via Rail representative.

They mentioned that they had a body, that this body was a consulting body, and that it was monitoring the work they were doing to implement many of the objectives of Via Rail, including the work related to online reservations, booking and accessibility for that website. The representative also mentioned that this body was a group of people taken in some part from advice by the government.

This is an area that I think is really important: the requirements for what is a good level of consultation. What is the threshold for respectful consultation, where one takes into account the lived experience of the persons who are offering that consultation but also ensures that when they do offer those aspects of themselves that are important to consultation, there's actually follow-up in respect to the kinds of standards that persons with disabilities would expect from consultation?

My question is—and I do understand that this might be something that is not yet developed by the Auditor General's office—what are the best practices on how to consult inclusively, accessibly and in a meaningful way with persons with disabilities? In your view, did the audited organizations follow the best practices, or were there shortcomings?

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** I might see if Susie wants to add to this, since she did a lot of the detailed work, but I guess what I would tell you is that even the accessibility act says that there should be nothing about us without us, so obviously consultation is important.

What we found when we looked at the consultations linked to Via was that it wasn't always clear how they considered the input. That doesn't mean they didn't, but that we just couldn't identify it.

I don't know if Susie wants to add more about some best practices.

**Ms. Susie Fortier (Director, Office of the Auditor General):** We looked at various things for identifying best practices, including the guidelines from the United Nations on consulting persons with disabilities, as well as various other information from academia. We also consulted with persons with disabilities ourselves on how to consult persons with disabilities.

You mentioned inclusivity, accessibility and engagement.

For inclusivity, we want to make sure there is a broad variety of persons who are consulted, so they cover a broad variety of disabilities. We want to make sure that the consultation itself is accessible, because there are various means of communication, and if the consultation is using only one of those means, that can in itself be a barrier to participation in the consultation process. Also, we want it to be meaningful, meaning that the information gathered in the consultation should be decided upon in a meaningful manner.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** For the organizations, were they, from your perspective, or at least from the perspective of the Auditor General's office, consistent with those objectives?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** In some cases, they were. We mentioned in particular in the report the consultation for the new fleet of Via Rail, which we thought met a lot of these good requirements. There's always opportunity to do a broader consultation, and, as noted in the report, we have some cases of some elements of pro-

grams on which there was no consultation—for example, the teaching method on the training for accessibility. So—

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** There was no consultation. Wow.

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** The consultation was not done for specific content.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Okay. Thank you.

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

Mr. McCauley, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Cardin, I want to go back to you to follow up a bit on Mr. Desjarlais's and Mr. Kram's comments.

How much federal subsidy does Via get every year from taxpayers or from the government?

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** Is that in the context of accessibility?

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** No, I mean overall. How much in subsidies does the government deliver to Via?

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** I should have the number right away, but I would say it's about \$400 million per year.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Right, and this is what I want to get at, again, to follow up on Mr. Kram's and Mr. Desjarlais's comments. Taxpayers are shovelling almost a half a billion dollars a year to Via, yet it takes the Auditor General's report to get Via to act on accessibility issues. How could this have happened, and how is it acceptable that taxpayers are handing over \$400 million, yet a large number of Canadians are excluded from proper service?

This is not like dealing with old infrastructure. I understand that perhaps a station somewhere has limited use and limited infrastructure, but these are some very basic things that other companies without \$400 million in subsidies can get done for Canadians. How did this happen?

• (1250)

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** The fleet replacement program represents a \$1.5-billion investment. We have made sure that—

[English]

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm sorry. I'm not asking about the new fleet. Via got \$400 million. I'm talking about the general failure with regard to accessibility for a large portion of Canadians. How did this happen? How does Via come to the government every year for \$400 million but exclude a large number of Canadians from proper service?

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** We actually don't exclude people with disabilities from our service, quite the opposite. We have a plan, and we are implementing it. We don't have to talk about the new fleet, but as far as the plan is concerned, we have a team—

[English]

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Why do we need a plan at this stage? It's 2023. Since I've come on to this committee, you've received almost \$3 billion in subsidies, yet you haven't fulfilled your mandate to serve a certain demographic.

I'm trying to get across that I hope you take this seriously: the disappointment with regard to the inaction of Via. Tons of times you've come back to the government asking for more money, yet you've failed to serve those who have accessibility issues.

Getting back to Mr. Kram's comments, I'm seeing online that 650 Via managers got bonuses last year, for \$6.5 million dollars. I realize the bonus is based on various issues. I hope Via looks seriously at this and tells the managers that unless these accessibility issues are addressed, they won't be eligible for next year.

When will the accessible trains that you have running, like in the Windsor to Quebec corridor, be rolled out to the rest of the country? I realize that perhaps in the Prairies we don't have the volumes, but that should not mean that Canadians on the Prairies don't get proper access. When will we see those rolled out?

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** There are two things I would say.

First, as you mentioned, there's the new fleet. Outside the Quebec-Windsor corridor, our trains are accessible, but not fully. I'm going to ask Ms. Langlois to tell you the major differences.

As for the stations outside the corridor, we have an existing plan to put measures in place. The plan is being implemented as we speak, and that is of course thanks to funding received in recent years.

Ms. Langlois, I'm going to let you provide more information.

**Ms. Catherine Langlois:** All right.

Mr. McCauley, thank you for your question and your interest—

[English]

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm sorry to interrupt.

Can you provide us with that plan or provide a Coles Notes and a timeline for when these issues will be addressed?

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** Definitely.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thank you.

Is that my time, sir?

**The Chair:** You have about 20 seconds. That's time for a question, if you'd like.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** What is the percentage of employees in management who have not completed the training? You mentioned just two executives. What is the overall percentage for regular em-

ployees and management who have not completed the required training?

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** As we speak, I believe 91% of all employees have completed the training. Of course, we always have new people who join the company. When I say all employees, I mean frontline employees on the trains, maintenance centre staff and so on. As we mentioned, the training is mandatory. The training completion rate for executives is 100%.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Yip, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to welcome Ms. Semaan, as it's her first time. It's not our usual committee. Usually, we try to focus on the good work done by the Auditor General and her team.

On that note, my question is directed to Ms. Pégeot and Ms. Cardin. It's with regard to your opening statements about it being crucial for transportation service providers to instill a culture of accessibility at all levels of their organizations.

How do you propose to do this, especially when not everyone on the management team has completed the mandatory accessibility training on time?

• (1255)

**Ms. France Pégeot:** We have different tools to support that. Of course, the big framework is the legislative and the regulatory framework, which really serves as a foundation. We have the ATP-DR, the accessible transportation regulations. We have a brand new regulation with respect to reporting and planning. That's where transportation service providers have to provide publicly, every three years, based on consultations with people with disabilities, how they intend to advance accessibility.

With respect to the regulation for which we are also responsible, I responded to your colleague earlier about how we have asked companies how they intended to meet the regulation. We also asked for evidence about how they were meeting the regulation, so it was not just a survey, to be very precise on that. I would say that was a first step.

In the context of our mandate, we do compliance and enforcement activities. We also develop guides to help the various transportation service providers meet the regulation. When my colleagues and I meet with executives, we really encourage them and insist on the fact that they should treat this as a priority.

Recently, for example, the national airline association CEOs issued a statement in which they recognized that they have to do better and committed to doing better in the area of accessibility. We will certainly look with interest at how they intend to follow up on that, but the fact is that they recognized that. I don't take full credit, as that would not be fair, but I hope that the various interventions we've made in that area supported that.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Thank you.

Ms. Cardin.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Cardin:** As I mentioned, accessibility is definitely a major concern for Via Rail. As I've said a few times throughout the meeting, it's an issue our management committee talks about. We have made sure that everyone will receive the training, and we adhere to accessibility standards as much as we can. We still have work to do, but with each new project, we make sure that people with mobility issues and persons with disabilities are properly consulted.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Thank you.

I'd like to give the remainder of my time to Mr. Fragiskatos.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** It's a quick point, Mr. Chair. I don't think I'll have enough time to engage in questioning today.

Ms. Cardin, if you were here, I would have approached you after the meeting. It doesn't relate to the matters raised in the report, but it certainly does relate to Via. On behalf of constituents, and I know you're not primarily responsible for this at Via, but train 82, which services London to Toronto, has been in a difficult state. It hasn't been servicing commuters from our city. I hope that Via does its due diligence to restore service, because it's an ongoing issue for Londoners, particularly as they seek to travel to Toronto to carry out various activities, including work.

I'll leave that with you. I wouldn't be living up to my responsibilities if I didn't take the opportunity to put that on the record, Mr. Chair.

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

The work of an MP never ends, and there are many different aspects to our job, so your comments are certainly welcome here when we have officials before us.

I want to thank everyone for coming in today. I appreciate your patience with us.

I will now adjourn the meeting. We will see committee members back here on Thursday.

The 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>