



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 028

Monday, April 13, 2026

Chair: Peter Schiefke



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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 28 of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, December 11, 2025, the committee is resuming its study of supporting, diversifying and modernizing Quebec and Canada's ports. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Before we continue, I'd like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all of our participants, including, of course, our interpreters. You'll notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of our witnesses and members.

First, please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

This is a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Colleagues, I'd now like to welcome our witnesses for the first round today. From the National Maritime Group, we have Mr. Derrick Hynes, interim president and chief executive officer. From the Railway Association of Canada, we have Mr. Eric Harvey, president and chief executive officer. From the Toronto Port Authority, we have Mr. Atul Sharma, senior director of government and stakeholder relations, who is joining us by video conference.

Welcome.

We'll begin our opening remarks. For that, I'll turn the floor over to you, Mr. Hynes. You have five minutes.

Derrick Hynes (Interim President and Chief Executive Officer, National Maritime Group): Thank you, Chair, and good day, honourable members.

The National Maritime Group represents nearly 100 private sector maritime employers and operators from coast to coast and through the St. Lawrence. Our members work 24 hours a day to keep the flow of goods moving in and out of the country, handling over a quarter of Canada's total traded goods.

The status quo is no longer an option. Canada faces an economic crisis. We need to act with a sense of urgency to improve the performance of our transportation infrastructure. It is imperative that we not shy away from difficult conversations in areas like labour productivity, technological improvements and supply chain connectivity.

We have a series of recommendations organized under four themes.

Our first theme is labour stability. Our transportation network has endured 60 work stoppages in the past two years. Yes, there is a fundamental right to strike, but no one can argue that this pattern is acceptable. Collective bargaining is not functioning as it should.

Government has already studied this problem. The Industrial Inquiry Commission on West Coast Ports recommended solutions. Its report was released a year ago; no change has yet been introduced. Two recommendations would help.

The first is that geographic certification of unions along west coast ports be established. This would allow for one employer and one union, in line with all other major ports around the country. This would bring greater stability and certainty to the bargaining table.

For background, bargaining is currently conducted at only two tables under a voluntary agreement between the parties. There is a real risk in the year ahead that this could balloon to up to 39 tables. This could bring chaos. According to the IIC report, “the uncertainty created by the parties’ largely voluntary bargaining structure is not consistent with the need for reliability in Canada’s national supply chain nor with the structure of other ports in Canada nor around the world.”

The report also goes on to recommend the introduction of a special mediator to keep the parties at the bargaining table working towards a resolution. Strikes and lockouts would be paused during this mediation process. We support this recommendation.

Our second topic is labour availability.

We currently have a government-imposed labour availability challenge. Legislative changes over the past decade have simply disincentivized worker availability. One example is 10 days of government-mandated paid medical leave. We can find no jurisdiction in North America with such a requirement. Adding insult to injury were the three paid personal leave days mandated by government about a year before paid medical leave was announced. That’s 13 days, most of which are now being taken with limited recourse for employers. The evidence suggests that these paid days have become entitlements in the “use it or lose it” basket. Shift shortages have become common.

We propose some changes, the first of which is an exemption for the longshoring industry, as this employment model does not align with such a benefit. Second, if no exemption is permitted, we propose a reduction in the number of days from 10 to five. Third, employers should be permitted to request medical certification where they are concerned about sick leave abuse. The final recommendation is that the stacking of this leave on similar leave not be permitted.

Our third topic is performance.

NMG members are private sector companies that want to invest in infrastructure and technology. Public investments should be made where a clear business case exists and where there are private sector partners present. Port modernization benefits us all; more efficient throughput means more traffic and more jobs.

We also believe government can help improve port performance with the following advancements: digitizing CBSA processes around customs container clearing, requiring electronic documentation throughout the shipping process, and encouraging real-time data sharing between federal agencies and private sector partners.

Our final topic is governance.

Our members want to invest, but our project approval process takes too long. Often there are dual federal and provincial reviews, leading to costly delays. The newly established Major Projects Office could be empowered to take leadership on project reviews via a one-window approach, or even the port authorities could do this under valid land-use plans, if more appropriate.

With respect to port authorities, the NMG believes more transparency and accountability are needed in their operations.

First, standard criteria should be established for sending port rent rates. Currently, there is limited visibility and transparency here.

• (1105)

Second, we need a borrowing code for port authorities that requires consultation with stakeholders. Our members ultimately pay this borrowing cost.

Third, a guidance document should be created that outlines all community consultation requirements for port projects. Social licence is critical. We need a clear process for how to attain it.

Finally, port authorities, like all others in the maritime industry, should be required to report all lobbying activities for greater public visibility.

Thank you, Chair.

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

We’ll now turn it over to Mr. Harvey.

Mr. Harvey, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Eric Harvey (President and Chief Executive Officer, Railway Association of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

At a time when U.S. tariffs and shifting trade policies are creating uncertainty, the efficiency, diversification and modernization of our port system has never been more important. As many parties have already explained to you, Canada’s ports are not isolated assets. They are essential components of an integrated supply chain that supports our economic resilience and trade sovereignty. Strengthening ports, therefore, strengthens the entire supply chain that connects Canada to global markets.

Canadian railways are part of this supply chain and contribute to the collective effort. Every day, across more than 43,000 kilometres of track, rail networks connect farms, mines and production sites to export terminals. Last year, the railways transported \$400 billion worth of goods, reaching a record volume of 348 million metric tons, half of which was destined for export through Canadian ports. Last year, the railways also achieved their best-ever safety record for freight transport, reducing the accident rate by 4.8%. It is important to note that this is a privately funded system. Railroads reinvested \$4.5 billion in their Canadian network last year alone, and more than \$35 billion over the past 10 years.

[English]

When we talk about diversifying trade, reaching new markets and strengthening our export capacity, we're glad to be part of that discussion, because railways can enable trade diversification. The good news is that our rail network is strong and resilient. Canadian railways operate with among the lowest average freight rates in the world, helping Canadian exporters stay competitive. There remains, however, a need for additional port capacity.

If we are serious about growing exports beyond the U.S., we must also accelerate the approval of projects by focusing on substance and results over process. One simple but telling example is grain-handling at the port of Vancouver. Today, grain is often not loaded onto vessels during inclement weather. In a region where rain is common, that matters. According to the port, this reduces effective capacity by about 7%. The railway industry is encouraged by the work being done by Transport Canada, in collaboration with stakeholders, in that respect. Now it's time to act and fix this long-standing capacity issue.

Like many witnesses who have appeared before you, our view is that we need to strengthen the investment environment in Canada in the interests of our entire economy. Private capital is essential to building the infrastructure we need, but it will only flow if conditions are competitive.

The U.S. has implemented permanent 100% depreciation, creating a strong incentive to invest south of the border. Canada needs to level the playing field and expand the productivity superdeduction for all sectors to access immediate depreciation. This policy would unlock investment, support productivity and ensure that capital is deployed here at home.

We must also address labour stability. Over the past three years, Canada's transportation sector has experienced more than 100 work stoppages. In 2024 alone, that resulted in more than 1.3 million lost workdays, the highest level in decades. These disruptions affect businesses and workers and how international partners see Canada. Reliability matters.

A modernized framework that supports timely dispute resolution, especially where there is a risk of broader economic harm, is essential. This includes rapid implementation of the Industrial Inquiry Commission's recommendations, including B.C.-wide certification, while avoiding fragmented bargaining and enabling binding arbitration when needed to protect the national interest.

Finally, we agree with port witnesses that effective governance requires diligent appointments to their board with strong supply chain experience. The rail industry fully supports this direction.

Canada is well positioned. We produce what global markets are looking for, and we have a strong, integrated supply chain connecting inland production to our ports. Each part of that system has a distinct role to play. Ensuring that every link in the supply chain performs reliably and competitively will be key to expanding into new markets.

Thank you.

• (1110)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harvey.

[English]

Mr. Sharma, you have five minutes, sir.

Atul Sharma (Senior Director, Government and Stakeholder Relations, Toronto Port Authority): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for the invitation to speak with the transport committee about port modernization. This topic is both timely and important as we seek ways to operate more efficiently and effectively and with greater resilience.

The Toronto Port Authority has served Toronto's harbour for over 150 years. Many Canadian cities have grown up around their ports, and Toronto is no exception. We continue many of the traditions from those early days as well, including our "top hat" ceremony, where we celebrate the first saltie arrival within the harbour.

While the Toronto Port Authority shares many similarities with the 16 other Canada port authorities, it stands apart in one key way. Under the Canada Marine Act, we are the only port authority that also owns and operates an airport. Although there has been much debate recently about the airport's growth and future, today's focus is on the port and its modernization opportunities.

The Toronto Port Authority operates as a gateway for imports, bringing in over two million metric tons of bulk materials each year to fuel the local economy. Key products include sugar from Central America and South America, primarily used for the food and beverage industry; salt for keeping Toronto roads safe during the winter; and cement, aggregate, and products like rebar for local construction projects.

Utilizing the port for regional deliveries has eliminated roughly 51,000 trucks annually from congested roads and highways. Marine cargo and vessel vehicles directly support nearly 700 jobs at the Port of Toronto and generate close to \$500 million in economic activity.

Beyond cargo, the port also acts as a turnaround destination for a Great Lakes cruise industry. In 2026, we anticipate nearly 50 itineraries from five cruise lines, bringing over 20,000 passengers to Toronto. As a turnaround port, passengers either embark or disembark, often spending a couple of days, which contributes to local tourism as well.

Despite being limited to 52 acres along the harbourfront, we see great potential for growth and to further boost Toronto's economy. This was recognized by the City of Toronto in their 10-year economic action plan, "Sidewalks to Skylines", and the mayor's recent economic action plan as well.

Although the federal government does not directly protect employment land, a clear statement of principles and directions could demonstrate support for preserving areas that create jobs and facilitate national trade. There are several specific actions the government can take to assist and modernize ports, both in Toronto and nationwide. I've categorized them into four areas: containers within the Great Lakes corridor; upgrading aging infrastructure; access to capital, which we've heard from a few of the other witnesses as well; and improvements to governance.

Last year's budget recognized that bringing containers into the Great Lakes could build local resilience and drive economic growth by bringing containers to where the goods are actually required. The St. Lawrence and Great Lakes region, spanning two provinces and eight states, is the world's third-largest economy. Enhancing port operations and efficiency in this region would significantly contribute to economic prosperity. The federal government could also look to address aging infrastructure, some of which is nearly 100 years old and is in desperate need of replacement or repair.

Another improvement could be easier access for ports to get capital. Airport authorities can invest based on their credit ratings and access to debt funding, but port authorities must come to the government and obtain approval for increasing borrowing limits. This process involves requests to Transport Canada, co-operation from Finance and then final approval from Treasury Board, all of which is time-consuming and can take months and sometimes years.

Another area burdened by bureaucracy is board appointments. Timely federal appointments are essential for an effective board of directors.

These are just some of the areas where I think the government can play a key role. I welcome further discussion during the Q and A.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1115)

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

We'll now begin our lines of questioning. For that, I have the pleasure of turning the floor over to Mr. Albas.

Mr. Albas, you have six minutes, sir.

Dan Albas (Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for coming today and sharing their expertise with our committee.

I'll start with you, Mr. Harvey. I know that your association has partnered with other industry groups in talking about the need for regulatory reform writ large. Right now with Bill C-5, even with the powers that have been given to the Prime Minister and his government, they have not made use of Bill C-5 to really get things going. They've opened up a new office, but they have not actually gotten anything designated under schedule 1.

Do you believe the tool should be utilized more? What would you like to see? Hundreds of other projects that could advance your industry—bridges, tunnels and culverts—need to be done, but right now the regulatory side, from my understanding, holds a lot of that up.

Eric Harvey: The rail industry, as you said, is not the only industry that is asking for faster permit approvals. I think it's a general demand from most industries.

If we look at the coalition you were referring to—moving economies—we have representatives from the marine sector, the mining sector, lumber, automotive, etc. Everybody is agreeing on the fact that, in Canada, the approval for projects takes time. As reported by the OECD, we trail. We're the last in that aspect, which is critical.

When Bill C-5 was adopted, intuitively, we thought that this was exactly a step in the right direction. It is basically centralizing and having a single desk for approvals to avoid delays among the various jurisdictions. At this stage, I would say that we remain confident that this office will deliver on those representations.

Dan Albas: Do you think there needs to be more of a writ-large approach to regulatory reform and not just necessarily favoured projects that in certain parts of the country could be influenced by politics or by connections?

• (1120)

Eric Harvey: The acceleration of projects should be for big or small projects, in our view. I certainly agree that sometimes what could be considered small infrastructure could have a big impact on throughput.

If you're thinking of the west coast in particular, where sometimes people say that investments need to be done, I would simply say.... I talked about grain in the rain, which is a typical example of something relatively simple to fix and would increase capacity by 7%. From that perspective, we'd like to think this could be accelerated, just like many other little projects.

Dan Albas: Speaking about little projects, there's the trade corridors funding. A lot of railroads have received support from the government over recent years for digitalization. I'm sure that's been very successful on their part, but my understanding is that the ports don't connect with that information, so you essentially have ports that are not part and parcel of an information-sharing regime. Is that your experience?

Eric Harvey: I'd say there's definitely good communication between railways and their individual customers. In other words, customers in Canada are now very sophisticated. They're very aware of their supply chain. The railways provide tools for them. They have their own tools as well, and there's constant communication. Generally speaking, I would say that from that perspective, it's working well.

The coordination, though, among the various players at ports is sometimes where we sense that there might be a need to establish some priorities based on different considerations. This is why, historically, we've been asking for some form of push towards the sharing of data of all the supply chains that go to one port, so that coordination can happen and priorities can perhaps be better established to make sure that the traffic that goes first is really needed prior to other traffic.

Dan Albas: There seemed to be a bit of a governance issue with the CN Second Narrows Rail Bridge in British Columbia when it was closed for about four days in February. You mentioned that some priorities should be raised. The fact is that this stopped shipments of our energy to international markets at a time when that's something the government wants. One small piece of infrastructure caused a close to \$40-billion pipeline, which was bought by the government, to come to a standstill.

Do you believe there needs to be a more strategic coming together of parties—Transport Canada, the port of Vancouver, CN and others—to try to make sure that these priorities are mapped out ahead of time?

Eric Harvey: In regard to Second Narrows in particular, I'm very aware that there have been communications and discussions between the port and CN about managing when the bridge is open in order to facilitate rail movement so that it happens at scheduled moments and so that capacity is maximized.

On the specific event you're mentioning, I think it's fair to say that CN acted very quickly. They assigned a lot of resources. In our view, the impact on the overall economy was not that significant. There was a little blip, but historically, February this year was equal to February last year. We believe that the numbers are pretty consistent.

[Translation]

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

[English]

Thank you very much, Mr. Albas.

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

Chi Nguyen (Spadina—Harbourfront, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I extend a huge thank you to the witnesses for joining us today. It's very helpful to have these perspectives as we consider the whole ecosystem of our ports as part of important critical infrastructure.

As a downtown Toronto MP, I see first-hand how critical the port of Toronto is to the movement of goods into our region and city. This port is part of a much broader system, through its connection to the Great Lakes corridor and Canada's overall trade strategy, especially as we look to diversify beyond the U.S. I want to focus my questions on how we strengthen that role, both locally and as part of the national infrastructure.

This is a question for the Toronto Port Authority. Given the port's proximity to major road and rail networks, are there any gaps today in integrating those systems? What specific improvements would allow the port to function more effectively as part of the broader supply chain?

● (1125)

Atul Sharma: Certainly, one of the things that would really be helpful in enhancing the future growth of the port would be access to rail. Historically, the port had some access to rail. Some of those spurs and lines are still in place but not actively used. If we could continue to bring them back into the port of Toronto, that would certainly help to integrate within the larger network.

There are a number of transportation boats that exist around Toronto with respect to rail. It's actually not that difficult for us to connect to them and utilize that ability as well.

Chi Nguyen: Given the diverse range of activities happening on the waterfront, I was wondering if you could share with us any of the practices or effective approaches you have in place to engage with stakeholders, residents and other community partners on an ongoing basis.

Atul Sharma: As the locally federally mandated organization, the harbour provides regulation as well, and we are consistently and constantly speaking with our community stakeholders and having those discussions. As I mentioned before, we're in a bit of a unique position, as we also have the airport. There are a number of discussions that happen around the port and its development and economic importance, as well as with the airport.

One thing we are seeing and that we certainly recognize is the need for local housing. We are working with our coalition partners on the waterfront to see how we can most effectively ensure that housing gets developed, while at the same time ensuring there is a balance for and protection of employment lands to ensure that industrial lands continue to service the local economy as well.

Chi Nguyen: With some of the resourcing that's coming online through the trade diversification corridors fund, the federal government is making significant investments in trade-enabling infrastructure. Could you speak to whether these kinds of investments would help with improving capacity and reducing some of the congestion we see in the city?

Atul Sharma: The trade diversification corridors fund is something we are looking at very seriously to see what kind of opportunity there is for how to utilize it within the 52 acres we have, as well as in other innovative projects that as the Toronto Port Authority we could engage in with some of our local stakeholders.

That is something from the federal government that we are looking at very closely and is certainly very much appreciated by the port authority.

Chi Nguyen: I have one final question for Mr. Hynes.

In your pre-budget submission, you raised questions about labour productivity and workforce capacity. You spoke to some of the potential recommendations or changes we should be considering as we look to create more labour stability in the maritime sector. Is there any other information you'd like to provide in terms of recommendations or steps forward?

Derrick Hynes: From our perspective, if we were to leave this committee with one single recommendation on where we can make the biggest impact around labour stability for the year ahead, it's the implementation of the Industrial Inquiry Commission report. It has recommendations that we think would bring great stability to the system of labour relations.

This year, ports in Saint John and Halifax are bargaining. Vancouver is coming up later this year. Montreal is in the midst of a process of binding arbitration. The risks are very high that we may find ourselves back in a period like 2023, when we saw a work stoppage.

The geographic certification of unions along the west coast will bring greater stability to that bargaining. The implementation of a special mediator would help keep parties at the table, which is what we want. We want the parties at the table finding a deal and not essentially grinding the economy to a halt, which is what happens when we shut down major transportation infrastructure such as railways and ports.

Our message to this committee and to government writ large is to implement this report. It's a no-cost solution and it will bring a great benefit.

Chi Nguyen: I have just a few seconds left, so I will ask a final question of the Toronto Port Authority.

As the Great Lakes cruise industry continues to expand, could you talk about what kinds of investments or policy changes would help strengthen the port of Toronto's position to welcome more cruises?

Atul Sharma: On the size of the ships that can come in and the frequency, one of the physical limitations is around the Welland Canal, because they have to be able to physically fit within the canal. We have spoken with the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation about how we could work together. In fact, we are reaching out to the cruise companies as they design future ships to work with them and the seaway to make sure they are designed to access the Great Lakes. Sometimes we take the Great Lakes for granted, but many of the operators are booked two years in advance, mostly with American and European tourists.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Nguyen, and thank you, Mr. Sharma.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for six minutes.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here with us.

I'll start with Mr. Harvey from the Railway Association of Canada.

Mr. Harvey, earlier you mentioned the importance of rail networks because they are connected to ports and make it possible to move goods in and out. Do you think that the current rail capacity allows for the smooth flow of goods passing through the ports? My question implies that if a port terminal were to be expanded in one location or another, are there places where bottlenecks already exist at this time and where such an expansion might be difficult to carry out?

Eric Harvey: If the goal is to double exports to countries other than the United States, it is clear that investments will be needed in several areas, including in our infrastructures and supply chain, including rail.

At a broad level, we can say that rail capacity is available in Canada, both in the eastern and western parts of the country. However, it's also clear that if we want to double the volumes moving from east to west, targeted infrastructure investments will be necessary, based on the specific demand that would result from those changes. In other words, existing infrastructure is suited to current volumes, but if those volumes are expected to double, it's obvious that investments will be needed in specific corridors, at specific ports, and so on.

According to our analysis, market forces would likely be well positioned to determine where those investments should be made.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Specifically, are there any particular locations where we're approaching maximum capacity and that should be monitored? Have any been identified already?

Eric Harvey: Obviously, I'm well aware that, for example, representatives from the Port of Montreal told you that they were approaching a certain capacity threshold. I believe they said it was at 85%. Representatives from the Port of Vancouver also mentioned that they needed investment.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: My question is mainly about the rail sector.

Eric Harvey: Thank you for the comment.

What's important to understand is that railways don't sell or produce what they transport. This means that we depend entirely on the demand of our customers and the service provided at the destination.

In my opening remarks, I talked about an integrated system. That's really important because, for us in the rail sector, if volumes double, we will inevitably have to invest in our own infrastructure, just as others will have to invest in theirs, particularly ports and so on. As I said, where and to what extent those investments will be needed will depend, in our view, on demand at the time.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: So there aren't really any specific or major bottlenecks at the moment in the rail sector that are hampering traffic.

However, what about the future? The answer wasn't entirely clear to me. Are there any specific locations where investments would be needed if volumes were to increase?

Eric Harvey: I'd love to answer your question, but it's difficult to do so because that demand hasn't yet materialized. Once it does, we'll be able to see where the demand is. It isn't something we can predict. We don't determine demand for our services ahead of time. That's part of the challenge.

I'm sorry I'm unable to answer your question.

• (1135)

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I think I understand what you mean: You don't control where your customers are located or where the volumes are coming from.

Eric Harvey: That's without taking demand into account.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I assume that when a port terminal is expanded or a new one is built, you anticipate that there could be additional demand.

I know you worked for rail companies. Generally speaking, how does it work internally, or even from the perspective of the Railway Association of Canada? Do you invest ahead of the arrival of volumes, on the assumption that it will be important to have a smooth supply chain, or do you invest once the volumes are already there, because you don't want to spend dollars unnecessarily?

Eric Harvey: Generally speaking, decisions are made on the basis of a business case that justifies the investment. In our sector, investment in rail infrastructure is very costly. I mentioned investments of \$4.5 billion just for maintenance, in addition to targeted investments at a few locations last year alone. So we're talking about \$4.5 billion in a single year.

I would simply say that, before investing, railway companies make sure that the investment will be profitable. That's a given.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: So I understand that you wait until demand is there, or at least until the signals are very clear. You wouldn't necessarily anticipate an investment for something you might need in 10 years' time; you invest in something that is expected to materialize in a foreseeable way.

Eric Harvey: You mentioned a 10-year time frame. For me, the question of timing is important. There's a balance to be struck. I would say that if we simply wait before investing in infrastructure, we will inevitably miss opportunities that arise in the coming years.

The idea is that, in many places, our supply chain is already operating very close to full capacity, so if we wait for demand to materialize before justifying those investments, it's possible that we'll miss opportunities.

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

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Muys.

Mr. Muys, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook—Brant North, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses who are here.

I'm going to direct my questions to Mr. Hynes and Mr. Harvey.

I'm going to pick up on a question asked by my colleague Ms. Nguyen about work stoppages. Both of you raised that issue. That's not something we've heard thus far from witnesses for this study. That's an important area to delve into as we think ahead to the report and the recommendations that the report will make.

First off, why is it so important that we address that now?

Eric Harvey: It is so important because it really affects the throughput of our economy. It's the fundamental thing here.

What we're talking about is that whenever you have a work stoppage in the rail world or the ports world, our trading partners need to redirect their traffic somewhere else. If Canada won't take it, somebody else will.

Recent years in particular have been basically and unfortunately a perfect illustration of that. We lost opportunities for our country because of the work stoppages in ports and railways in 2024, or you had this thing looming that affected the way the traffic was directed. It's clear. On my association's website, we're publishing data that shows that whenever there's a work stoppage, the drop in traffic is immediate. It's a direct consequence.

The short answer is that it's a question of our own economy. On the other side, I would say we believe it's about the ability to provide our employees with good working conditions and salaries without affecting their rights, while maintaining and sustaining the economy.

Dan Muys: I'll switch over for a moment.

I know you've made a recommendation, Mr. Hynes, about the singular act of implementing the report, and you've made some other recommendations. Say a bit on the "how." What do we do to address this?

Derrick Hynes: To bring greater stability in the short term, particularly in the west coast port space, it is about the implementation of the Industrial Inquiry Commission report. Currently, under the Canada Labour Code, if a collection of unions wants to work together to bargain as one, they have the authority under the Canada Labour Code to apply under section 34 for the right to do that. The employer has no capacity to do that.

Our request, as recommended by this objective, third party report, is to allow the employer to apply under section 34 to have one union and one employer bargaining. That, in the near term, for us, is a pretty simple solution that would bring greater stability, rather than the potentially chaotic outcome starting later this fall of 39 bargaining tables along the west coast. I don't think that's what we want.

Building on my colleague's comments from earlier, we've gone through a period over the last couple of years post-COVID where we've had a great deal of instability at the bargaining table in aviation, in maritime and in rail. We've seen a tremendous number of work stoppages. Nobody here is arguing against the right to strike, but we think there need to be some limits. We need some balance in this system such that we can keep parties at the bargaining table to avoid some of the highly consequential work stoppages we've experienced.

● (1140)

Dan Muys: Thank you for that.

Mr. Chair, given world events and the increasing cost of fuel, which is having an impact on the transport sector, like in trucking and in other parts of the sector, and certainly on the economy overall, I'd like to give verbal notice of a motion as follows:

That, given that:

surging oil prices are increasing costs for Canadian families and businesses;
higher oil prices are generating an estimated \$9 billion to \$10 billion in additional annual federal revenue;

this additional revenue exceeds the cost of suspending federal fuel taxes; and

high fuel and diesel costs are driving up the price of essential goods across the economy,

the committee report to the House that it calls on the Government of Canada to:

immediately suspend the federal fuel excise tax;

suspend the GST on gasoline and diesel; and

permanently eliminate the clean fuel standard tax and the industrial carbon tax,

in order to provide immediate, meaningful relief to Canadians at the pumps while reducing cost pressures across the economy.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much for tabling that motion, Mr. Muys. Your time is up.

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Lauzon, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

You talked a lot about maintenance plans and upgrades. The numbers are impressive.

Mr. Harvey, you mentioned that more than \$4.5 billion has been invested in maintenance, as well as infrastructure deficits. Would it be better to maintain the existing rail network before thinking about adding services? What is your strategy for meeting demand while, at the same time, maintaining the rail network? Can you tell us a bit about that?

Eric Harvey: Thank you for your question.

I would say that the Canadian rail network is currently very well maintained. Generally speaking, the existing network is one that is actively used. There was a rationalization process in the late 1990s, which means that today, most of the rail network in Canada is in use, maintained and compliant with standards set by Transport Canada.

Where we see a need is in investing to make marginal increases to rail capacity when demand justifies it in very specific locations. I always speak in terms of demand, with the understanding that it is expected to grow. That's what everyone is hoping for.

That's why we're specifically calling for the cost-of-capital allowance to be made applicable to more industries, not just manufacturing. This would be very helpful in increasing demand and production across all sectors.

In Canada, we have two major railways, but we also have short-line railways. These are smaller, highly localized railways, and I would say that they may require support more tailored to their reality. I'm referring here to a tax credit similar to the one introduced by the Province of Ontario last year. That measure should be commended, and the federal government should be encouraged to adopt it and extend it to all short-line railways across Canada.

• (1145)

Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hynes, perhaps you could answer this question. The way our network is structured may serve the United States more than us, making us dependent on them for our supply chain and our customers. When the Prime Minister says that the forestry, steel, goods and commodities sectors should become more independent, does that have any implications for the network you represent today?

[*English*]

Derrick Hynes: From a port perspective and from the maritime industry's perspective, we think it's important that we look at the transportation infrastructure system as an ecosystem and that as we contemplate investment in that ecosystem, whether it's rail, roads, bridges, inland warehousing or port infrastructure, we do it in such a way that we are building for the future the Prime Minister is striving for.

We are obviously supportive of increasing Canadian trade, and we are very supportive of those particular investments to permit that to happen.

[*Translation*]

Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Harvey, what's your perspective?

Eric Harvey: What I would say about that is that most of the infrastructure we are familiar with today was built many years ago. The reality is that population growth, combined with growth in gross domestic product—in other words, we produce more today than we did 50 years ago—means that in many places, infrastructure may now be nearing its limits.

Earlier, in response to a question from one of your colleagues, I spoke about the need to take a long-term view, meaning not just to think about today, but to consider that the infrastructure we need to build must continue to serve us for many years to come. It's therefore essential to approach this from a medium and long-term perspective. So there are two objectives that need to be achieved.

Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Sharma gave us some impressive figures about the number of trucks being taken off the road because of their impact on road conditions and road safety. We are in the process of doing a study on Driver Inc.

In each of your studies and deliberations on deploying the network to properly serve your customers and work with the ports, do you take into account that every use of rail transportation means one less truck on the road?

We did not hear you give any testimony along the lines of what Mr. Sharma said. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Eric Harvey: Basically, it's obvious that, from a fuel consumption point of view, rail transportation is a much more efficient form

of transportation. It takes one quarter the amount of gas to transport the same traffic. That alone is huge.

Stéphane Lauzon: You mean the same volume.

Eric Harvey: Yes.

Stéphane Lauzon: What about safety?

Eric Harvey: Obviously, a 150-car train, as you just said, amounts to 150 trucks off the road. We therefore feel that we are strategically well positioned to transfer traffic, keeping in mind that if it were transferred, there would necessarily be requests that would have to be met.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harvey and Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue with you, Mr. Hynes.

We heard from witnesses who told us how disappointed they were with some of the federal government's policies in the marine sector, particularly with regard to decisions on the subsidy for steel transportation.

In fact, there is a steel plant in my riding.

In the context of the U.S. tariffs, I understand the federal government's idea of putting in place a subsidy system to fund 50% of the cost of transporting steel by rail from one place in Canada to another. Unfortunately, the subsidy applies only to rail transportation, not marine transportation. In a way, this creates a form of unfair competition, because people in marine transportation don't benefit from the assistance, whereas it would sometimes be more efficient to use marine transportation than rail transportation.

I would like to know if your members have talked to you about that. What is your organization's position on that?

• (1150)

[*English*]

Derrick Hynes: Truthfully, I'm not well briefed on the issue. It seems reasonable that marine would also be captured by any such subsidy, but I would have to consult with my members and come back to you after the fact.

[*Translation*]

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Harvey, if the opposite were to happen, that is, if we decided to subsidize the marine sector without subsidizing the rail sector, would you find it acceptable to make a deliberate choice not to let market rules apply, to a certain extent?

Eric Harvey: First, it is important to note that this is not a subsidy to the rail sector. What we understand here is that this is a subsidy that the government chose to give to two economic sectors affected by the U.S. tariffs: wood and steel. It's important to note that, initially, this isn't something that was done at the request of the railway industry. However, we understand that this is simply an approach where the government wants to support industries that are affected by the U.S. tariffs.

You also talked about the market. I think the question that hasn't been answered in this conversation is, what is the volume? What I understood is that, for example, there's a concern about transporting steel to British Columbia, which obviously can't be done by boat. At the same time, there's also the transportation of forest products, which, again, depends on local market dynamics. There is a source in Ontario and a source in the west, in British Columbia and in part of Alberta. All I want to tell you is that, in our opinion, the measure that applies is first and foremost a temporary measure intended to support industries that are suffering. That's how we understood it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harvey and Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Next we'll turn the floor over to Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Lawrence, you have five minutes, sir.

Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Clarke, CPC): Thank you.

My questions will be for Mr. Sharma.

I'm going to focus specifically on the Billy Bishop airport. Of course, the Ford government announced that they were going to expand it. My understanding is that it is currently governed by a tripartite agreement that includes the Toronto Port Authority—your organization. What obstacles will the Ford government face if in fact they go forward with the expansion plan of Billy Bishop airport?

Atul Sharma: You're right that the airport is governed under a tripartite agreement, which involves us, the City of Toronto and Transport Canada, representing the federal government.

Given that cities are governed under provincial jurisdiction, it is up to the province and the city to make the calculation as to who will be the representative. The reason there are three parties within that governance model is that, historically, there were some sandbars in that area, which our predecessor organization, the harbour commission, filled in. The sandbars were originally owned by the City of Toronto.

The land we filled in was and is owned by us. The representation is that about 78% of it is the Toronto Port Authority, 20% of it is the City of Toronto and about 2% of it is Transport Canada.

In terms of the obstacles, certainly they would have to work that out with the city directly.

Philip Lawrence: One of the other parties is, of course, Transport Canada and the federal government. Minister MacKinnon has been a little coy in whether he will support this, saying he's going to work with the province "to design a path forward". That's the exact quote, which is far from an approval.

If Transport Canada is not supportive of the expansion of Billy Bishop, could that stop the expansion plans?

Atul Sharma: It certainly could. You'll recall that back in 2015, there was a different proposal with the three parties. The city and, at that time, Porter Airlines made that proposal, and the federal government decided that it would not allow for the reopening of the tripartite agreement to accommodate that. Of course, that stopped all activity on that proposal at the time.

Should the federal government take the position that it does not want to see an expansion of the airport, that would certainly stop it. However, I would point out that the government did make an investment in pre-clearance of about \$30 million at the airport. It also made some recent decisions with respect to Pickering, so there are two airports within the city of Toronto that are looking to accommodate future aviation demand.

• (1155)

Philip Lawrence: Mr. Sharma, what would be the next step? What approval needs to happen to get this plane in the air, as it were?

Atul Sharma: I think the immediate next step would be for the province and the city to determine who's going to be the representative within the agreement. Once that's been settled, the three parties would get together to look at what the future development could look like.

Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Sharma.

I'm going to move to Mr. Hynes for the last question.

I think I'm hearing you call a potential work stoppage a "fire alarm" if the federal government doesn't take any action. You've said that it's been a year. That's almost exactly how long the new Liberal government has been in place, and you've seen no action on this from the federal government. Is that the case?

Second, maybe you could build upon some of the other answers. What will be the long-term impact to the Canadian economy if there is a work stoppage in the near future?

Derrick Hynes: The report started under the previous government. It was commissioned by a previous minister of labour after the 2023 13-day strike along the west coast ports, with a monumental impact on the economy.

Almost a year's worth of analysis went into that report, done by two outside experts. They came up with a series of recommendations. There were seven in total. Four of them speak to the geographic certification piece, which is the structure underlying bargaining along the west coast, where they think improvements could be made to bring more stability there. The special mediator piece is another one where the objective would be to keep the parties at the table.

That report was finalized and then publicly released about a year ago. I can't overstate how much we have been advocating for its implementation. We don't think it's very difficult. It's a low-cost, easy solution.

To your second question, it's really about our reputation. Mr. Harvey talked about this earlier. These work stoppages are really hurting our reputation as a country. Business is going elsewhere. Some of that business doesn't come back. There are competitors up and down the coast in the east and west ports that want this business and want this traffic, and sometimes these are long-term contracts. When we lose them, they don't come back.

We just want more stability. We want to keep the parties at the table to get collective agreements that meet the needs of both the union and the employer.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hynes, and thank you, Mr. Lawrence.

Finally for this round, we'll go over to Mr. Kelloway.

The floor is yours, sir.

Mike Kelloway (Sydney—Glace Bay, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions will be for Mr. Harvey and Mr. Hynes.

So far in this study we've talked to a decent number of ports on the Atlantic coast, and they have talked about the importance of rail in terms of being more competitive. In addition, I've talked to ports on the east coast. They haven't come here, but they have said the same thing. I'm wondering, from an Atlantic Canada standpoint, about the state of rail, we'll call it, in terms of readiness.

Mr. Harvey, you talked about not waiting to build infrastructure. We need to build it now. I'm wondering if I can get a sense from both of you of the priorities when it comes to rail, where we are in the current rail structure and what needs to be done to ensure Atlantic Canadian ports are indeed competitive.

Eric Harvey: As to the rail service to Atlantic Canada—the west coast to the east coast—there's certainly capacity available there. You have the two national railways, with one serving various ports, including the port of Halifax, and another one serving the port of Saint John in New Brunswick. We understand that these two ports in particular are not at capacity now and that therefore, if there is any opportunity for growth, both railways would be present and would answer to that demand.

• (1200)

Mike Kelloway: In terms of rail as it exists now, how would you grade the state of affairs of rail in Atlantic Canada? Would you grade it as an A, meaning nothing needs to change, or is it a B, C, D, E or F?

Eric Harvey: Look, I'm not sure I want to provide an assessment—

Mike Kelloway: You don't have to provide a grade, but can I get an assessment from your perspective?

Eric Harvey: The sense I have is that, first of all, the rail corridors are in place, and the infrastructure that exists seems to be answering to the demand.

The question links a bit to what I was saying earlier—that if indeed there is a significant increase in demand, everything is there and available. It would be just an incremental improvement to what you already have in order to meet that demand. This is how I would see that picture. It's that the railways would be present and ready to support traffic to the east coast.

Mike Kelloway: Thank you for that.

I want to touch on some things with respect to your recommendations. I found them very interesting.

I come from Cape Breton Island and I come from a union family. Most of what I have today wouldn't have been possible without a strong union and a strong business sector, where my dad worked for many years as a coal miner. It's provided me with a lot. At the same time, your testimony with respect to the challenges of the supply chain was that labour stability in particular hasn't been there, clearly.

You talked about the business opportunities that we lost with existing companies that utilize rail. I don't know if it's quantifiable or not, but in terms of potential business, I want to start there.

You've talked very eloquently, both of you, about opportunities lost. In terms of businesses that may have been thinking of coming to Canada or thinking about laying a flag somewhere on the east coast, in central Canada or on the north coast, can you give us a sense—if it's not quantifiable, then anecdotally—of how much that has impacted our ability to attract businesses that you probably wouldn't see in any kind of data sheet?

Derrick Hynes: I don't think it's quantifiable today. What I will say is that when I talk to our members, they tell me that when they talk to their counterparts internationally, Canada's recent record around labour instability is becoming more well known, and it doesn't make us look good. I think we have an absolutely golden opportunity in a very difficult time to position Canada as a place to do business, as a place to import and export, but we need better labour stability.

We do not need to undermine unions, so I'm with you 100% on that. We need mature, respectful, reasonable collective bargaining in which trade-offs are made and deals are struck. We have to end this pattern of really consequential work stoppages, and the only way to do that, we think, is to make some tweaks to the system and do all we can to keep parties at the bargaining table.

If all else fails and we reach a situation in the critical supply chain industries where bargaining seems beyond fixing in a particular round of bargaining, we need to bring in some form of alternative dispute resolution to get us to a deal.

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

Mr. Hynes, Mr. Harvey and Mr. Sharma, I want to thank you. Unfortunately, we are out of time. We do have another panel.

Mr. Harvey, if you have additional thoughts, I invite you to share your written thoughts with our clerk, and we'll add them to the testimony.

With that, I want to thank all three of you for contributing to this very important study.

Colleagues, we're going to suspend for a couple of minutes to allow the clerk to set up for the next round of witnesses.

The meeting is suspended to the call of the chair.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1220)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Colleagues, I'd like to welcome our witnesses for the second panel today. Appearing before us is Mr. John Grech, director of commercial development at Picton Terminals, and Lorna Campbell from the Port of Sydney Development Corporation.

Welcome to you both. We'll jump right into your opening remarks.

For that, Mr. Grech, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

John Grech (Director, Commercial Development, Picton Terminals): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to participate in your study.

I'm here today representing Picton Terminals, a privately owned deepwater facility located at the east end of Lake Ontario. Originally established in the 1950s as a marine loading facility for iron ore pellets, the site operated through the late 1970s. In 2014, the property was purchased by Doornekamp Construction with a vision that it could once again play a meaningful role in Canada's supply chain.

Since acquiring the facility, Picton Terminals has invested over \$50 million to modernize the port and ensure that environmental and regulatory requirements are met. We have successfully built customized logistics solutions for such partners as Kimco Steel, Parrish & Heimbecker and Windsor Salt. The once dormant port is forecast to handle over 500,000 metric tons in 2026.

In today's economic environment, one marked by supply chain fragility, shifting trade relationships and increasing demand for resilience, the importance of strengthening Canada's transportation network has never been clearer. Marine transportation remains a critical and underutilized component of that network.

The St. Lawrence Seaway is operating below its potential capacity. This underutilization places growing pressure on rail and truck networks, contributing to driver shortages and congestion across major corridors. These are systemic indicators of an overreliance on land-based transportation.

Marine transportation is the natural relief valve. Expanding marine corridors improves overall logistics efficiency, reduces costs and emissions, extends the lifespan of our highway infrastructure and improves safety by easing congestion. However, while we have focused significant attention on expanding truck and rail infrastructure, we have not applied the same system-level thinking to our marine network. Container flows, for example, remain concentrated through a limited number of major gateway ports. These ports are essential, but they are also facing growing pressure. As congestion increases, system efficiency declines and the entire national supply chain becomes more vulnerable.

Canada has been highly effective at moving bulk commodities through the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence system, yet we continue to lag in containerized marine transport. This is not due to geography. It is due to network design.

Canada operates with a limited number of container entry points that do not reflect the distribution of population and economic activity. We are already seeing cargo destined for Canada increasingly routed through U.S. ports and inland corridors. If this trend continues, Canada risks growing dependence on foreign gateways for its own trade flows.

While investments in existing infrastructure, including expansion initiatives such as the one at Contrecoeur, are important, expanding only existing nodes is not enough to build a resilient national system. A stronger approach is to expand the network itself. Within the Great Lakes basin, home to approximately nine million Canadians, there are strategically located facilities that can complement existing gateways, including Thunder Bay, Goderich, Windsor and Picton.

Picton Terminals is uniquely positioned between Montreal and Hamilton, with direct access to Lake Ontario and proximity to the eastern GTA. This location supports short-sea shipping container movement that can remove millions of truck kilometres from Highway 401 annually, easing congestion and improving supply chain efficiency.

This is not theoretical. Picton Terminals and Parrish & Heimbecker have recently completed a major expansion project, investing approximately \$50 million in private capital to expand marine handling capacity. As a result, we are enabling the movement of approximately 1.2 million tonnes of agricultural products—wheat, grains and beans—to global markets more efficiently. Trucks travel shorter distances, road and port congestion is reduced and supply chain costs are lower. This demonstrates what is possible when Canada treats its marine system as a network rather than a set of isolated gateways.

In closing, Picton Terminals is asking not to replace existing ports but to complement them. We are asking Canada to fully utilize the capacity of its Great Lakes-St. Lawrence marine system.

We are requesting two specific recommendations. The first is targeted federal investment to expand marine infrastructure capacity at underutilized facilities such as Picton and for them to be treated equally to the CPAs. The second is timely designation and support from the Canada Border Services Agency to enable container processing.

• (1225)

Canada has an opportunity to build a more balanced, resilient and efficient port system that reflects where Canadians live, where goods move and where future growth will occur. Picton Terminals is ready to play its part.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome your questions.

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

We'll now turn the floor over to Ms. Campbell.

The floor is yours for five minutes.

Lorna Campbell (Chief Executive Officer, Port of Sydney Development Corporation): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Lorna Campbell. I'm a professional engineer and the CEO of the Port of Sydney Development Corporation.

The Port of Sydney Development Corporation is a self-funded not-for-profit organization that was originally established in 2002. We have a community-based board of directors, including representation from the Membertou and Eskasoni first nations and the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. I'm here to speak to what is practically needed to support, diversify and modernize Canada's ports, based on our direct experience.

Sydney Harbour is a year-round deepwater, sheltered port located on the northeastern shores of Cape Breton Island. We are strategically located approximately six miles off the North Atlantic great circle route. Sydney commands the Cabot Strait and is truly the gateway to the north.

Sydney is a federally owned public port. The submerged lands remain under federal ownership, while the port assets have been either transferred or sold. There is no official single local authority responsible for harbour-wide operations and coordination. Revenues generated by port activity are not consistently reinvested into

the harbour. Critical infrastructure gaps persist, which limit our ability to grow and compete.

The port board has prioritized the resolution of the decades-old governance issues in Sydney. The Cape Breton Regional Municipality council unanimously supports the establishment of a local harbour authority, with the port corporation recognized as the unifying local proponent to advance governance modernization with Transport Canada. That level of alignment reflects both the urgency of the challenge and the opportunities facing us. Without effective port governance, opportunities are missed, and we risk trade and investment being diverted elsewhere. Viewed from a high level, modernizing Canada's ports is not just about infrastructure, but about governance, connectivity and the ability to reinvest and compete globally.

If ports are the gateway, rail is what connects Canada to global markets. We consistently see that ports with integrated rail connections are able to move goods more efficiently, attract larger-scale investments and access broader domestic and international markets. Without rail, even well-positioned ports struggle to compete, regardless of their geographic advantages, which are self-evident in Sydney Harbour.

In Sydney, we are advancing a practical governance model that reflects what's needed nationally. We are proposing the establishment of a local harbour authority for the port of Sydney through a management agreement with Transport Canada. Under this model, federal ownership and jurisdiction remain unchanged. However, a locally governed authority would be responsible for coordinating operations, improving efficiency and reinvesting revenues generated by harbour activity.

Importantly, this model fills an existing governance gap and forms the catalyst needed to advance strategic port planning and investments. It is a catalyst to access new global markets more directly, to support emerging industries such as offshore wind and critical minerals, to bolster defence capabilities and to strengthen Canada's overall supply chain resilience.

Without governance reform, infrastructure investments lack coordination and long-term sustainability. Without connectivity, governance reform cannot translate into economic growth. The two must work together.

From a federal perspective, there are three practical actions that can help unlock this opportunity. We recommend the following. First, enable and support management agreement models that allow for locally governed harbour authorities. Second, provide barrier-free transitional funding to fast-track strategic port investments and the establishment of sustainable local operations, bridging the gap between current constraints and long-term self-sufficiency. Third, recognize rail and intermodal connectivity as core components of port modernization.

In closing, Sydney Harbour is not a theoretical opportunity. It's a locally supported, ready-to-implement example of how Canada can modernize port governance, strengthen supply chains and advance trade diversification today. With the right tools, this model can be replicated in other regions across the country.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

• (1230)

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

We'll begin our lines of questioning in the second round with Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Lawrence, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much.

My questions will be for you, Mr. Grech. I have been to the Picton port, and it is truly amazing what the private dollars, the entrepreneurship and the owners have done there. I'll give a big thank you to you from some of my local farmers in Northumberland. They appreciate it.

I want to give people a bit of an understanding of the service that Picton currently provides and could provide going forward. For folks who aren't from Ontario, the ships come in from the St. Lawrence Seaway right now, and Picton is on the north shore of Lake Ontario. They literally go right by Picton, Northumberland and Cobourg—many communities—and go to either Toronto or Hamilton, or even further, at which point they are off-loaded and then trucked all the way back to our eastern Ontario communities.

Is that correct? Am I correct in believing that tremendous efficiencies could be gained by off-loading more items at Picton and other local ports?

John Grech: You're absolutely correct. As I said earlier, it's about creating another node within the network.

As our population stretches, bus routes change and our commuters change. We go to where the commuters are. With the Picton terminal being situated where it is, absolutely there are a lot of goods that are going past and then coming all the way back.

It's not only that, but even ships are going past Picton. It was funny, actually, that when Parrish & Heimbecker came to our site to look at the site to determine whether or not they wanted to build their grain facility, there was a ship off-loading steel. The person from P&H looked at his phone and said, "You know, that ship is going to Hamilton to load grain. If we had those silos up, that ship would have off-loaded the steel, stayed right there at that facility, reloaded the grain and been on its way to international markets. We

could have avoided that ship sailing all the way to Hamilton and all the way back."

Philip Lawrence: Thank you for that.

One ask that you outline—and it's been out there, I think, for a couple of years or more—is to enable your port to receive containers. In order to receive containers, you need CBSA support and, specifically, inspection. I believe you've even made offers to financially support this, but CBSA has rebuffed your request, despite the obvious benefits it could have for the surrounding communities in the Bay of Quinte, in my area, in Belleville and in other surrounding communities in eastern Ontario. Is that correct?

John Grech: That is correct.

Philip Lawrence: What type of support would be required, specifically? We have members of the government right there, and I'm sure they would love to tell Minister MacKinnon that this is a very easy thing to do to increase trade diversification, which supposedly they support.

• (1235)

John Grech: Absolutely. All we require is CBSA agents' presence at the facility. We, along with the port of Windsor, the port of Goderich and the port of Johnstown, have asked for the same. They have insisted that they do not have the manpower to do that.

We, at one point, did offer to cover the cost of that manpower. We would pay for the agents to come in and out of our facility to help facilitate these containers. At one point, we had a ship that was destined for Picton, and it was rebuffed three days before the ship was due to arrive, just because CBSA agents, unfortunately, could not be there.

Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much, Mr. Grech. I appreciate it. I truly hope, in a non-partisan way, that the Liberal members over there have heard this, because this is an easy, cost-efficient win that could help eastern Ontario tremendously, including the member for Bay of Quinte.

I'm going to move on from there to a notice of motion. I want Liberal members to listen to it fairly carefully, because we've done it in a very pointed way, in a way that's limited. I think it's easy, and I'm hopeful that when we eventually move the motion, we'll get unanimous support, because we've done it in a very limited way.

Here is the motion:

That, given that on March 25, 2026, the CEO of the Canada Infrastructure Bank stated that "if the committee wants an answer, I can aim to provide one", and further stated that he is "always at the will of the committee" with respect to providing information on the repayment terms of the Canada Infrastructure Bank loan to the Mersey River Wind project,

a) the committee order the Canada Infrastructure Bank to provide the committee with the unredacted repayment terms of the loan to the Mersey River Wind project within 72 hours of the adoption of this motion, and

b) the committee instruct the chair to summons the CEO of the CIB to appear before the committee within five parliamentary sitting days following the 72-hour deadline, should the CIB fail to produce the full, unredacted repayment terms.

We're not asking for a million documents here. We're making a very specific request. There is almost no commercial reason that they shouldn't release this. It's a highly regulated industry, and all of this should be publicly provided.

As I said, we've done this in a very precise way, and I'm hoping we get unanimous support for those repayment terms, if for no other reason than to clear the air.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lawrence. It's greatly appreciated. The time is almost perfect. Well done, sir.

We'll now turn the floor over to Mr. Kelloway.

The floor is yours. You have six minutes, please.

Mike Kelloway: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions will be for Ms. Campbell.

First and foremost, I want to thank you, your board and your staff, past and present, for the work you're doing on the port file, as well as Mayor Clarke and council, Eskasoni and Membertou.

For those who don't know, the port of Sydney is known for its cruise traffic, but I know that your motivations and your goals go beyond that. I'm wondering if you'll walk the committee through where the port of Sydney stands with respect to significant near-term and long-term opportunities in relation to the trade diversification front.

Lorna Campbell: Sydney is very well known for our cruise industry. Cape Breton Island is a beautiful island, and we work very well with the Atlantic Canada ports, our partner ports. We are the home of the iconic big fiddle that maybe some people know about.

Cruise generates approximately \$70 million in direct and indirect economic benefits island-wise, but cruise is not the only activity in Sydney Harbour. Sydney Harbour is home to Marine Atlantic, which is the constitutionally mandated service that connects Newfoundland and Labrador to Canada for year-round service. The port receives coal for Nova Scotia Power's power plant for energy generation, and we receive petroleum products at our terminal. There's a lot of existing activity around the harbour.

The key thing is a recent federal announcement by the Canadian Coast Guard that the port of Sydney would be the preferred location for the development of the maintenance base for the polar class icebreakers. That is a significant announcement for Sydney Harbour. It would be co-located adjacent to the Canadian Coast Guard Academy.

Sydney has ample land for development. We see further development with respect to northern supply and support, defence, and marine services, and we have seen significant activity with respect to supporting offshore wind activities for projects along the northeastern seaboard of the U.S.

That is what we are seeing for Sydney as imminent opportunities. What we need is to modernize our governance to provide the foundation to support all of these potential developments and current operators.

● (1240)

Mike Kelloway: Let's talk about the governance model, because you touched upon it just now and in your testimony. With respect to a local harbour authority, that's what you're looking to become.

What are the benefits of a local harbour authority compared to the structure you have now? Could you walk through the benefits of the local harbour authority compared to what you have now with respect to the goals of the port of Sydney?

Lorna Campbell: As I stated previously, Sydney Harbour is a public port. The federal government maintains ownership of the submerged lands, but over many years the federal assets landside have been either sold or divested.

We are under the management of the Transport Canada ports group, but we have a limited local presence of Transport Canada. The port corporation I work for is a not-for-profit, and we are the deferred to or assumed port authority for Sydney Harbour in the absence of another presence in the harbour. We see opportunities and see stakeholders wanting to advance projects, but there is a lack of a unifying group, or what I'd like to say is the catalyst to really unify, promote and advocate on behalf of these individual stakeholders.

We're looking to establish the local harbour authority and be resourced by the revenue generated through port activity that is currently remitted to Transport Canada general revenues. There's a gap that needs to be filled.

We submitted a proposal in 2024 with respect to divestiture and the thought that we could possibly fit under the ports asset transfer program, but we are not eligible to be in that program because there are no federal assets, with the exception of the submerged lands, that enable us to fit in that criteria.

We are not a Canada port authority, nor are we currently checking the boxes to be a Canada port authority. We are proposing this path forward as a potential opportunity to establish governance that gives local control through a management agreement with Transport Canada that will essentially be in accordance with the Canada Marine Act, but will really fulfill the objectives of the national marine policy.

Mike Kelloway: How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Mike Kelloway: I want to thank you, Ms. Campbell, and the folks who came up with you from Cape Breton. I know this is an important initiative for the community. The mayor, the council, the chiefs and you are supportive of the port and all that it will become. I really appreciate your coming today.

Lorna Campbell: Thank you.

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

Thank you, Ms. Campbell.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for six minutes.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to share my discomfort with the way things are going at the committee right now. For the past few weeks, we have been parading port representatives like a line of ballerinas, making them sing along to the Liberal song sheet to maintain the narrative that all the countries of the world will suddenly be fighting over goods produced here and exports will explode thanks to the “Carney effect”. Ports are not stupid: They cozy up to the government to get money to meet their needs. I can understand them.

What bothers me a little more is that the Port of Montreal is being portrayed as if it were soon about to be overwhelmed, when, in fact, that is far from the case. Actually, volumes at the port have been stagnating for 10 years. They have pretty much stalled. Recently, there has even been a downward trend. Therefore, what I'm wondering is this: Is the expansion of the Port of Montreal necessarily a national emergency? I'm not yet convinced of that.

What we're hearing is that Mark Carney the magician is going to change everything. We must not ask any questions, only trust him. We are told that everything will be fine. I get the feeling that, at the end of the day, what we're being asked to do is take a leap of faith. In Quebec, we've played that game before with people like Pierre Fitzgibbon, who gambled at the casino with public funds. They say they have a host of colossal projects, such as the Port of Montreal and the Alto HSR. Soon, it will be the turn of the pipelines. However, in the meantime, we have no figures and we have a government that is using creative accounting to hide its astronomical deficit.

The worst part is that, last week, I had the good fortune, so to speak, of seeing Mr. Carney and his gang show up in my riding without warning to announce an investment of \$1.16 billion for the Contrecoeur terminal. However, a few weeks ago, I warned Minister MacKinnon that there were a lot of problems to solve: shoreline erosion, the abandonment of the Verchères wharf, the redevelopment of the rail line, which is a challenge for the people of Boucherville, and concerns about increased rail traffic. At the time, Mr. MacKinnon seemed to be acting in good faith by telling me that he would follow up and work with me to resolve these issues. Unfortunately, there was absolutely no follow-up. Instead, he showed up without warning. Let's say that things are off to a bad start in terms of co-operation.

I have no illusions: I know that the Liberals intend to do whatever they want. Anyway, it's only a matter of time before they patch together a majority. However, I would still like to see the government act in good faith, and I think there's absolutely nothing pre-

venting it from doing so. Before we blindly invest billions of dollars, can we at least have the assumptions and figures they are using to spend these public funds so that we can ask questions and verify them? At the end of the day, we just need to know what we're getting into. It seems to me that this is not too much to ask and that it is entirely reasonable.

What is even more worrisome is that we are plowing ahead with this project when we do not even know if we really need it. Maybe we do, maybe we don't, but I am not yet convinced. Meanwhile, there were three rather intriguing departures from the Port of Montreal management team. In March, the head of the Contrecoeur terminal, Paul Bird, left his position. In April, just a week and a half ago, the CEO, Julie Gascon, seems to have resigned. We have no idea why she is no longer in her position. This morning, we learned that the chief financial officer, Alban Fournier, had left his position at the port. We have no idea what happened. That said, it seems to me that, when the pilot and his two co-pilots leave the plane in mid-flight, there is cause for concern. Personally, it worries me, and I think it should worry committee members as well. We should all be wondering what's going on at the port. I feel like there's a bit of a crisis.

Therefore, I have two motions to introduce today, and I would like to present them to committee members. The first motion reads as follows:

That the Canada Infrastructure Bank, or CIB, and the Montreal Port Authority, or MPA, provide the committee, within 30 days, with a copy of the financing agreement related to the \$1.16 billion loan granted for the construction of the Contrecoeur terminal; that the CIB submit its risk analyses and financial assessments that led to the granting of the loan; and that the MPA table with the committee its calculation assumptions supporting the project's profitability, as well as a copy of its agreement with DP World once it has been finalized.

The second motion reads as follows:

● (1245)

That the committee invite the former head of the Contrecoeur terminal, Mr. Paul Bird, the former president and chief executive officer of the Port of Montreal, Ms. Julie Gascon, as well as the former director of finance of the Port of Montreal, Mr. Alban Fournier, to appear as part of the study entitled Supporting, Diversifying, and Modernizing Quebec and Canada's Ports.

I would now like us to deal with these motions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

We can debate only one motion at a time.

Can we start with one of them?

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: We could start with the second motion I moved, the one to invite the three people who left their positions unannounced.

The Chair: That's fine.

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank my colleague for moving these motions.

We're ready to debate the second motion. We'll come back to the first one later.

I would just like us to be able to debate the first motion starting on April 20, which is next Monday, on the condition that we debate the second motion today.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

[*English*]

Dr. Lewis, the floor is yours.

Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): My concerns are related to the first motion, so I will reserve my time until then.

The Chair: Colleagues, we have two motions on the table. We will begin debate on the second motion.

Are there any others who would like to speak to it, or are we prepared to vote on that particular motion?

I think the idea, as discussed before we resumed, was that we would debate the first motion on Monday and make that a point on the agenda.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, we'll put it formally on the agenda for Monday, April 20.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: That's great.

Mr. Chair, I'm fine with that, out of respect for the witnesses who are here today. I understand that they have things to tell us and that we want to question them. However, I think it's important that we debate it and that it be on Monday's agenda.

The Chair: I couldn't agree with you more.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I think we all have an interest in getting the numbers and knowing what the data is so that we can make up our own minds. Right now, it's hard to sort it all out.

The Chair: Are we all in agreement to vote on the second motion today, and to debate the first motion on Monday, April 20?

I see that everyone is fine with that.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we're going to a vote on the second motion put forward by Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: There is an agreement publicly that we will be debating the first motion as the first order of business on Monday, April 20.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Colleagues, now we'll turn over the floor to Mr. Albas.

You have five minutes, sir.

Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to say thank you to both of our witnesses for being here today.

I would like to start with Picton Terminals.

Sir, let me start by saying that offering to pay for the CBSA not only is a sign of faith that your port can handle the business, but also signals the seriousness of this to the government and that it is absolutely necessary.

The government has talked about hiring 1,000 CBSA agents. I imagine you would wish for a few of them to be allocated to Picton. Is that correct?

John Grech: Absolutely.

Dan Albas: In terms of your port development, I'm sure you have a capital plan. Do you have a plan for the expansion of the port that you're considering, or right now is it just renewing the infrastructure?

John Grech: We do have an overall vision, but we base what we're going to do on the opportunities that present themselves. As I said in my testimony, we custom-build logistics solutions for our port partners. We have seen that containers are in demand. Actually, from an agricultural perspective, there is a lot of demand to export agriproducts through containerization. With us having the bulk facility there now, it makes it that much easier.

Several farmers have come to us and asked, "Are you going to adopt that?" We said that right now it does not make sense. They're going all the way to Brampton to pick up containers and sometimes not even getting one, and then coming all the way back home just to go back the next day because the containers are not situated.

If we were able to create this hub where the demand is, it would be much better. We know what we would like to do at Picton to set ourselves up for success. Unfortunately, we're limited by our dock space. Now that we have Parrish & Heimbecker there, we're expecting about 20 to 25 ships this year, and possibly as many as 60, because the port is capable of handling that. We need more dock face in order to facilitate that, because time is money. It's important that these ships are in and out, and we don't want to create delays like the congestion that everybody talks about at all of the other facilities. We want to try to avoid that.

Dan Albas: How can you best do that? Is there a privatized capital plan, or are you looking for partnerships in government?

John Grech: There is, and there are partnerships. Our partners have suggested that they would be willing to help invest in that as well. We have Windsor Salt and other salt customers coming online that have expressed that concern, but we are looking into the trade diversification corridors fund, and we're hoping to apply for some funding through that.

Dan Albas: Thank you, sir.

I want to impress upon the government members who are here today that when someone is asking for the government to just do its job so they can expand their operations to the benefit of the region, that's a great candidate to start with.

Mr. Chair, I have given notice of a motion that I was hoping we could quickly slip in with regard to B'nai Brith and their request to appear. I want to make sure with the clerk that it's eligible. I sent it in on Friday, on the 10th, so it should be eligible. Yes, okay. I was just making sure.

I move:

That, in relation to the motion adopted by the committee on December 11, 2025, the committee invite representatives from B'nai Brith to testify as part of the committee's study on the challenges facing Canadian airports.

I hope this is a common-sense thing. They're actually the ones who wrote to us originally, saying this was an important thing, so we should consider having them.

• (1255)

The Chair: Do we want to discuss that now?

Dan Albas: I'm looking for unanimous consent.

The Chair: Is this something we'd like to give unanimous consent to, or is this something we'd like to discuss further, colleagues? It's really up to the will of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

Stéphane Lauzon: That was quick. I would like to have the text of the motion in French and I would like us to discuss it further.

Dan Albas: Mr. Chair—

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Albas.

[*Translation*]

Dan Albas: I sent the text of the motion to the clerk.

[*English*]

The Chair: Give me one second, Mr. Albas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

Stéphane Lauzon: What I said was that we had received the motion that was just moved. I would like to discuss it with my team so that we can determine the direction we're going to take. We didn't know it might be moved today.

[*English*]

The Chair: Colleagues, given that there's only five minutes left, if it is something easy, can we do it in Wednesday's meeting? It might be something that can be taken care of in Wednesday's meeting.

Dan Albas: I figured this would be a simple one. If members need more time, I guess that's what we'll do.

The Chair: Mr. Albas, we'll make note that this may be something you bring up on Wednesday. Hopefully we'll be able to rectify it then and take care of it.

Dan Albas: Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Campbell, Sydney Harbour has benefited from historic federal investments, including for the dredging of the harbour. However, based on what you've told us, it's at a turning point.

Right now, whether in terms of infrastructure or transitional funding, what type of federal support or regulatory measure would be the most instrumental in helping you more? How could we do better to help you more? What recommendations could the committee make to that effect?

[*English*]

Lorna Campbell: The core issue we are dealing with is a fragmented governance structure and the need for local authority to advance the interests of the harbour users, the existing terminal operators, and developers. I see personally very often in meetings with key stakeholders that there is great opportunity for investment and for diversifying the services within the port. What we are looking to do is establish the foundation or basis for supporting all the existing terminal users.

As you can appreciate, in terms of the individual landowners, everything has been divested. We have a fragmented group of people. We have a grassroots.... We have a great partnership with the existing port users to advance opportunities and requirements for the benefit of all users.

At the port corporation, we are very focused on marine services and enhancing what is needed for ships coming in and out of the port. We have aging infrastructure. I've already indicated that we have a very robust cruise industry at the terminal we operate, but we have legacy federal infrastructure that is essentially condemned. Without transitional funding, we are at risk in the ongoing operations to service the cruise industry. That would be the self-dock facility on our terminal site. It's an estimated cost of \$10 million.

We have additional thoughts, depending on the responsibilities that are downloaded to us under a management agreement, if we get there, with Transport Canada. The transitional funding, which is in the tens of millions, would be very beneficial to us, but that does not speak to the upgrades to the rail alignment. The most comprehensive capital cost estimate I saw, which was from 2017, was just north of \$100 million for those repairs. We have an existing rail alignment that's not been in use, but we have a rail alignment that connects our port to inland.

I don't know if you appreciate the history of Cape Breton with our steel and coal exports. It was a very robust industry all centred around our harbour. With the decline and lack of those industries, probably our biggest asset now is the available land surrounding the port. We're an underutilized harbour that has significant opportunity to complement the other ports and take some pressures off where it makes sense. We see rail as a key aspect of that.

Investment-wise, we need transitional funding and access to harbour dues that are currently remitted to Ottawa. The CPAs and even the fully divested smaller ports maintain the revenue generated by the transiting vessels for reinvestment back into the port. We don't have that opportunity in Sydney, and we would like that opportunity.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

It goes quickly, I know.

[*English*]

Mr. Grech and Ms. Campbell, I want to thank you both for appearing before us today and for contributing to this very important study.

With that, colleagues, the meeting is adjourned. I look forward to seeing you all on Wednesday.

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