



**GREATER VANCOUVER
BOARD OF TRADE**

Greater Vancouver Board of Trade
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Bridgitte Anderson, ICD.D

2023-24
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May 29, 2024

Canada Industrial Relations Board
C.D. Howe Building
240 Sparks Street
4th Floor West
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0X8
Delivered via email

Re: Timelines for Possible Work Stoppage for Canadian Rail

Dear Canada Industrial Relations Board members,

On behalf of the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade and our 5,000+ members, I am writing to express the urgent need for the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to provide clear and definitive timelines for their decision-making regarding any potential work stoppage related to Canada’s rail system. The livelihood of tens of thousands of workers and the economic stability of Canadian companies are hanging in the balance. As such, we are calling on CIRB to urgently and clearly communicate when we can expect a ruling.

This letter follows two submissions (Board files 037674-C & 037673-C) regarding the specifics of the possible CN and CPKC strikes. In these letters, we called on CIRB to communicate timelines as soon as possible regarding when a ruling can be expected. In speaking with our members and business associations from across Canada, we know that others are also urgently seeking this clarity. We understand and appreciate that the CIRB needs to be deliberate and diligent as it considers the matters put forward by the Minister. We in no way seek to alter or affect that good and important work. At the same time, we want to ensure that the CIRB understands the effect on the economy from the lack of certainty on the timelines for potential job action.

Businesses across sectors thrive on certainty for planning, human resources and operations. Without clear timelines from the CIRB, companies are stranded in a limbo of indecision and unable to make informed decisions, leading to increased costs, uncertain shipments, operational disruptions, and a general atmosphere of instability. The absence of definitive timelines makes it nearly impossible for businesses to effectively plan for the future.

As a result of the possibility of a work stoppage, companies are already diverting cargo from Canada¹ and making plans to divert away from Canada based on the possibility of a work stoppage. In a fiercely competitive global market, we cannot afford to be complacent about our position in the supply chain network. The west coast port strikes last summer saw cargo rerouted to U.S. ports, and the resulting uncertainty damaged our international as a reliable trading partner. We are on the brink of a repeat performance.

It cannot be understated just how massive and fundamental Canada's rail system is to our economy, supply chains and trade relationships. Canada's rail system serves customers in almost every part of the Canadian economy, including agricultural, natural resources, wholesale, and the retail and manufacturing sectors. It is estimated goods valued at \$1.04 billion moves by rail every day in Canada, a total of \$380 billion per year.² In 2022, through a network of intermodal terminals, railways helped to deliver \$200 billion worth of Canadian exports to markets across North America and around the globe. From coast to coast, Canada's railways serve as the lifeblood of our economy, facilitating the movement of goods essential to both domestic and international commerce. Any interruption to this vital artery threatens to destabilize not only our economy but also our global reputation as a reliable trading partner.

We appreciate and trust that the CIRB will complete its work in the utmost professional manner. We also note that the CIRB has just extended the deadline for submissions as it considers these matters, which will further delay any certainty for businesses. This uncertainty is unsustainable and, as this letter notes, is already having a damaging effect on business operations, planning and overall economic stability. It would benefit the business community greatly if it received clear and timely communication from the CIRB on the next steps to mitigate these negative impacts and ensure businesses can plan accordingly.

We appreciate your immediate attention to this urgent matter and look forward to your timely response.

¹ <https://www.maersk.com/news/articles/2024/05/09/canada-rail-strike-contingencies>

² <https://www.railcan.ca/supply-chains/#:~:text=Canadian%20railways%20move%20half%20of,in%20other%20modes%20have%20ballooned.>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bridgitte", with a long, sweeping underline.

Bridgitte Anderson
President and Chief Executive Officer
Greater Vancouver Board of Trade

Copies to:

The Honourable Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Labour and Seniors

The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Transportation

Sandra Hassan, Deputy Minister, Labour

Arun Thangaraj, Deputy Minister, Transport

Robert Dick, National Supply Chain Office