

Transportation

This profile is intended to provide CUPE members with basic information about the sector they work in from a national perspective. Find all our sector profiles and more information online at cupe.ca



CUPE represents approximately 25,500 members in the transportation sector, including workers in airlines, airports, ferries, port authorities, rail, roads and highways, as well as public and private transit systems.

The airline division is the largest segment of the transportation sector, representing more than 13,100 members in nine airlines. Air Canada, which includes Air Canada mainline and the low-cost leisure carrier Air Canada Rouge, is the largest of two regularly-scheduled operators in the division with more than 7,500 flight attendants. In the summer of 2018, we welcomed more than 3,000 WestJet members. Over 2,000 members work at leisure carriers Air Transat and Sunwing Airlines. Cathay Pacific has over 340 members. The remaining members, just over 200, are employed at regional airlines: Air Georgian, Calm Air, First Air and Canadian North. The airlines are publicly-traded corporations with the exception of privately-held Air Georgian, First Air and Sunwing Airlines.

CUPE also represents a small number of maintenance workers at five municipal airports. Municipal authorities govern Canadian airports.

Representation at each airline consists of one or more locals based at airports. Air Canada and Air Transat each have a national executive committee responsible for higher-level grievances and collective bargaining. Smaller airlines generally consist of one local, even if their members operate out of more than one base. The CUPE Airline Division is the governing body for the sector and meets biennially prior to CUPE's national convention. Between conventions, the Council of Component Presidents (COCP) meets quarterly and is responsible for conducting issue-based campaigns, administering a division-wide defense fund, and convening meetings of two standing

committees – Health and Safety, and Regulatory and Legislative Affairs, as well as an ad hoc Political Action Committee.

The next largest transportation group is transit workers with almost 8,500 members. The vast majority – over 7,100 – are bus drivers employed by 10 municipal transit authorities in Quebec. These include transit authorities in major centres such as Montreal and Quebec City, as well as smaller cities and towns. Each municipality has a separate local and collective agreement. Sector representatives meet quarterly as CUPE Quebec's Conseil provincial du secteur du transport terrestre (CPSTT) to discuss issues of common concern and plan sector-wide campaigns.

Road and highway maintenance workers are another key component of the ground transportation network and form the third largest group in the sector with over 4,100 members. These members perform a wide range of inside and outside work related to provincial road repair and maintenance.

Another 1,000 transportation members are employed in the marine and rail sectors, including port workers in the Province of Quebec, SkyTrain and Southern Rail train operators in British Columbia, local port authorities and a small number of ferry workers in Ontario and Quebec.

THE TRANSPORTATION ENVIRONMENT

A well-funded, accessible and affordable transportation system is vital to the safe and reliable movement of people and goods. It's also an important determinant of economic and social growth. As the International Transportation Workers' Federation has pointed out, however, transportation workers worldwide are facing intense pressures – lower wages



and deteriorating working conditions as governments and corporations compete in a “race to the bottom” through privatization and deregulation, increasing precarity, and attacks on collective bargaining rights. “Open skies” commercial aviation agreements are a growing threat that will increase foreign access to national airline markets. These agreements allow operators to evade domestic labour laws by setting up in low-wage countries, an exploitative practice long recognized in the maritime sector as “flags of convenience.”

Despite the Liberal government’s commitment to greater transparency and more inclusive decision-making, Transport Canada continues to operate in secrecy and in the interests of corporations, prioritizing profitability over public safety in commercial aviation and rail transportation. In fact, the recent regulation allowing fewer flight attendants clearly states the cost savings airlines will accrue based on lower wages, per diems and other related labour costs.

Collective bargaining has been turbulent in Canada’s airline sector over the past 30 years. Following the 1988 privatization of Air Canada, deregulation, ruinous price wars and fierce global and national competition (especially the growth of low-cost airlines) have eroded flight attendants’ wages and working conditions. These factors are creating a new underclass of mostly young, precariously employed workers. Not surprisingly, recent rounds of airline bargaining have centered on protecting hard-won gains and preventing further reversals to job security, wages and work rules.

For ground, marine and rail transportation workers, austerity-minded provincial and municipal governments continue to privatize and contract out, placing downward pressure on wages, benefits and working conditions.

HOSTILE GOVERNMENT POLICY AND LEGISLATION

Regulatory changes made by Transport Canada in 2015 allowed airlines to reduce the number of flight attendants required on board aircraft. Fewer flight attendants compromises the safety of both passengers and crew, increases flight attendants’ workload, erodes the quality of their work, and undermines job security.

The work of transit drivers and highway and road workers is increasingly being privatized and contracted out, leading to the loss of well-paying jobs; more short-term, contract and flexible forms of employment; and attacks on collective bargaining rights. The result has been increased insecurity, work overload and decreased job satisfaction.

Two pieces of provincial legislation aimed at reducing municipal labour costs have significantly eroded collective bargaining rights for Quebec transit drivers. Bill 110 requires municipalities to negotiate agreements within 120 days for a minimum duration of five years. If the parties cannot reach an agreement, a mediator can be appointed, and the provincial government may legislate back-to-work conditions.

Bill 15 requires municipal workers to retroactively contribute toward one half the cost of their pensions, regardless of their collective agreements, and share the cost of accumulated deficits. It also caps pension contributions at 18 per cent of payroll and allows municipal governments to freeze cost-of-living increases.

These bills represent gross interference with collective bargaining rights. These pieces of legislation are part of a wider attack on transportation workers across Canada, one that legitimizes the ongoing efforts of provincial and municipal governments to introduce harsh, austerity-driven policy measures.



HEALTH AND SAFETY RISKS

Reducing the number of CUPE flight attendants required on aircraft is a major health and safety concern. Reducing cabin crew affects all safety procedures – especially in emergency situations – and leads to greater workload and increased fatigue. Flight attendants are also routinely exposed to the effects of cosmic radiation and aerotoxic fumes on board aircraft, both of which may result in short and long-term physical and mental impairment. Pregnant flight attendants are especially vulnerable to these hazards, with higher than average incidents of miscarriage and fertility problems.

Transit drivers also face a range of occupational health risks. Studies across 13 countries over three decades confirm the driving occupation has higher than average levels of physical and mental health effects. These include musculoskeletal problems, stomach and intestinal disorders, sleeping disorders and psychological problems. Cabins are often cramped, poorly designed and illuminated, and expose drivers to constant temperature changes and vibration. Work schedules are frequently erratic with split shifts, inadequate rest periods during and between shifts, and exhausting shift rotations.

Both flight attendants and transit drivers share concerns over the increased risk of workplace violence caused by reduced service. On Canadian airlines, added fees, reduced on-board service and higher-density aircraft have increased the number of dissatisfied and disruptive passengers. Transit drivers also face disorderly and sometimes violent passengers, with incidents of assault increasing. Both groups complain about feeling unprotected and unsupported by management and report high levels of stress.

Highway and road workers also face occupational risks related to fatigue and stress, including excessive hours of work during severe weather conditions and driving emergency vehicles in hazardous conditions.

Campaigns

Though transportation workers face formidable challenges from both employers and governments, CUPE continues to fight back to protect good wages, benefits and working conditions by defending collectively-bargained rights. CUPE actively fights regulations that jeopardize the safety and health of flight attendants and passengers.

Recent settlements at Air Canada mainline and Air Transat have maintained the safety-proven ratio of one flight attendant per forty passenger seats on some aircraft, even though Transport Canada now allows airlines to fly with fewer cabin crew.

CUPE is committed to fighting against privatization, as well as bringing services back into the public sector. In Quebec, for example, we are campaigning against the REM, which threatens the jobs of public transit workers in the province, by allowing the Caisse de dépôt et placement to develop a P3 project to design, build, finance, maintain and operate an electric train system in Montreal.

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