

*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](http://cupe.ca)*

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CUPE represents approximately 27,400 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 15,000 members in ten 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 9,700 flight attendants. In the summer of 2018, we welcomed more than 3,000 WestJet members, along with low-cost carriers Swoop and Encore. Over 2,000 members work at leisure carriers Air Transat and Sunwing Airlines. The remaining members, just over 300, are employed at regional airlines: Calm Air, Flair, PAL, First Air and Canadian North (the last two airlines are currently undergoing a merger). The airlines are publicly-traded corporations with the exception of privately held First Air and Sunwing Airlines.

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

Air Canada and Air Transat have several locals, with an executive responsible for each local, and a national executive committee that deals with collective bargaining and grievances at the national level. Members of other carriers are represented by one single local. The CUPE Airline Division is the governing body for the sector and meets biennially prior to CUPE's national convention. Between conventions, the Airline Division Component Presidents (ADCP) 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.

## Issues

### 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.

### **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 Canadian Aviation Regulations (CARs) is currently undergoing a once in a generation review – CUPE has made submissions to the consultations and is fighting to get regulations to include flight attendants and recognize them as safety professionals, similar to pilots, which would improve health and safety concerns such as hours of work.

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.

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

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. Unlike their pilot colleagues, flight attendants are not regulated at all by the Canadian Aviation regulations (CARs) which means that there are no rules dictating how many hours they can work in a day or week. 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 of workers 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.

### **COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the transportation sector extremely hard. As airlines grounded flights and international travel following public health restrictions, thousands of flight attendants were either laid-off or furloughed. While transportation workers were deemed essential by the government in order to bring Canadians back home, they were not supported, as they should have, in their ability to refuse unsafe work, or from the economic impacts of the travel shut down. As countries reopen their borders and restrictions ease, flight attendants who have been recalled are now faced with anti-mask wearers onboard flights. CUPE lobbied Transport Canada hard to ensure mandatory face coverings for passengers. Transport Canada is now fining unruly passengers and many operators are placing these individuals on “no fly” lists.

In response to the pandemic, CUPE has called for federal government funds to go to workers rather than directly and unconditionally to corporations. CUPE continued to push for a safe return to skies through the SaferSkies campaign which calls for better PPE, stronger regulations for workers, better guidelines to keep workers safe and recognition that flight attendants are in fact safety professionals. Public transit workers represented by CUPE have been campaigning for adequate PPE, service adjustments to ensure the safety of workers and passengers and

financing from all levels of government to preserve the integrity of public transit as they continue to battle layoffs.

## **Bargaining**

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.

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. CUPE is currently challenging this legislation in court.

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. Following our challenge to Bill 15, the Superior Court of Quebec declared unconstitutional

sections 16 and 17 of the law relating to the suspension of indexation for retirees, while rejecting the other demands CUPE brought forward. CUPE Quebec filed its appeal against the Superior Court decision in August. The arbitration process set up in the law does not make it possible to overcome the obstacles to the right to negotiation, a right recognized by the *Charter*.

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.

## 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.

During the last rounds of bargaining, CUPE members at Air Canada mainline and Air Transat managed to maintain 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 also recently wrote a submission focused on environmental concerns on the Quebec tramway at the BAPE (Québec environment board) which has not broken ground yet.

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. CUPE is engaged in consultations on the Gatineau tramway in Quebec.