

Aircraft movement statistics: Major airports, March 2020

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Thursday, May 28, 2020

Highlights

The number of aircraft take-offs and landings shrank by almost one-third in March in response to a series of measures imposed by governments in mid-month to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

This relative decline was shared more or less equally by domestic movements, transborder movements between Canada and the United States, and other international movements.

The year-over-year decrease in overall transborder activity in March (-29.4%) surpassed the decline experienced in September 2001 (-22.1%).

Aircraft movements are down substantially

Aircraft take-offs and landings fell to 345,894 movements in March, down 31.6% from 505,481 movements in March 2019. Traffic at the 90 Canadian airports with NAV CANADA air traffic control towers and flight service stations dropped significantly during the second half of the month, as measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic took effect across the country. In response to the new restrictions, some Canadian air carriers shifted their operations to repatriation or cargo flights to facilitate the movement of essential goods. By the end of the month, the majority of companies had either reduced their regular operations significantly or suspended them entirely.

In March, itinerant movements (flights from one airport to another) declined 29.3% overall to 240,248, and local movements (flights that remain in the vicinity of the airport) fell 36.1% to 105,646. These decreases were driven primarily by the closure of the Canadian border to non-residents, coupled with the shutdown of non-essential businesses by provincial and territorial governments. Local activity, conducted by general aviation operations (including flight schools), was further affected by these enterprises' inability to comply with physical distancing protocols.

Declines felt across all sectors

Activity in all three sectors of itinerant traffic (domestic, transborder and other international) fell sharply in the latter portion of March, with all of the country's busiest airports posting major decreases. Domestic itinerant movements (within Canada) declined 29.5% to 197,255 movements, with the largest decreases occurring at Vancouver International, British Columbia (-4,867 movements); Toronto/Lester B. Pearson International, Ontario (-4,144); and Calgary International, Alberta (-3,832). Similarly, transborder activity (between Canada and the United States) dropped 29.4% to 29,327 movements. Toronto/Lester B. Pearson International (-4,378), Montréal/Pierre Elliott Trudeau International in Quebec (-1,638) and Vancouver International (-1,593) led the declines. Other international traffic dropped 27.5% to 13,666 movements, with the biggest decreases at Toronto/Lester B. Pearson International (-2,233), Montréal/Pierre Elliott Trudeau International (-921) and Vancouver International (-830).



Infographic 1 – COVID-19 impacts: Key events affecting air travel in March

March 11: COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization.

March 13: The Government of Canada advised Canadians to avoid non-essential travel outside of Canada until further notice.

March 18: Prince Edward Island was the first province to announce the closure of non-essential businesses. By the end of the month, all provinces and territories had ordered non-essential businesses or those businesses that could not conform to physical distancing rules to close.

March 18: The Minister of Transport required air carriers to deny boarding to Canada (with some exceptions) of foreign nationals from all countries except the United States. Most international arrivals were redirected to four airports: Toronto/Lester B. Pearson International, Vancouver International, Montréal/Pierre Elliott Trudeau International and Calgary International. Flights from the United States, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Saint Pierre and Miquelon were exempted.

March 18: Air Canada announced it would gradually suspend the majority of its passenger transborder and international flights by March 31 and significantly reduce its domestic network. The airline provided repatriation flights and continued to support the movement of essential goods and cargo.

March 18: Air Transat announced the gradual suspension of all its flights by the end of the month and announced it would be focusing on repatriation flights over the next two weeks to bring Canadians home.

March 20: This was the last day of operations before Porter Airlines temporarily suspended all operations.

March 21: The Government of Canada closed the border with the United States to all non-essential travel.

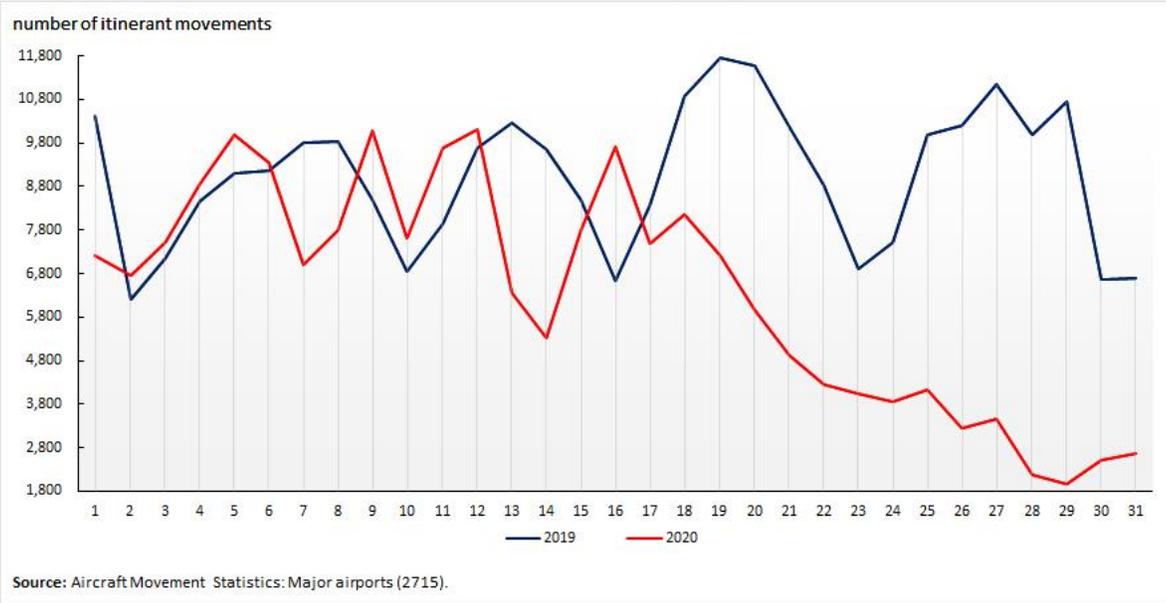
March 22: Swoop Airlines suspended transborder and international flights at 11:59 p.m. Mountain time. The following day, the airline began repatriation flights.

March 22 to 25: WestJet suspended scheduled commercial operations at 11:59 p.m. Mountain time on March 22 for all passenger transborder and international flights and reduced its domestic schedule by 50%. Between March 23 and March 25, the airline operated repatriation flights.

March 23: This was the last day of operations before Sunwing Airlines suspended all flights.

March 25: Air Canada announced it had begun offering cargo-only flights to Europe, with other flights planned for Central and South America. The aircraft moved time-sensitive shipments, including medical supplies.

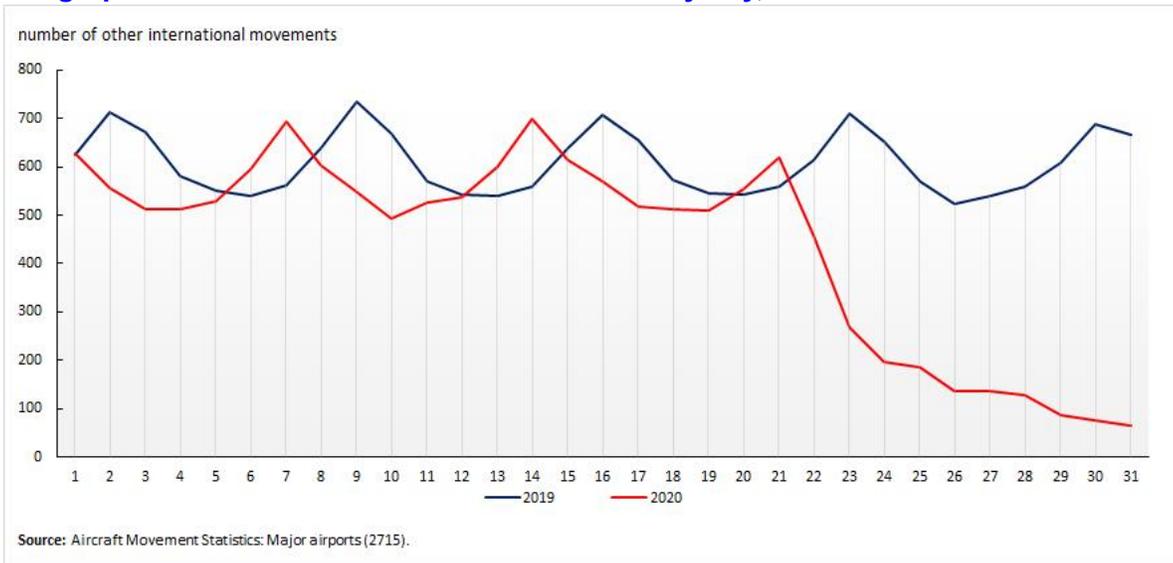
Infographic 2 – Domestic itinerant movements by day, March 2019 and March 2020



Infographic 3 – Transborder movements by day, March 2019 and March 2020



Infographic 4 – Other international movements by day, March 2019 and March 2020

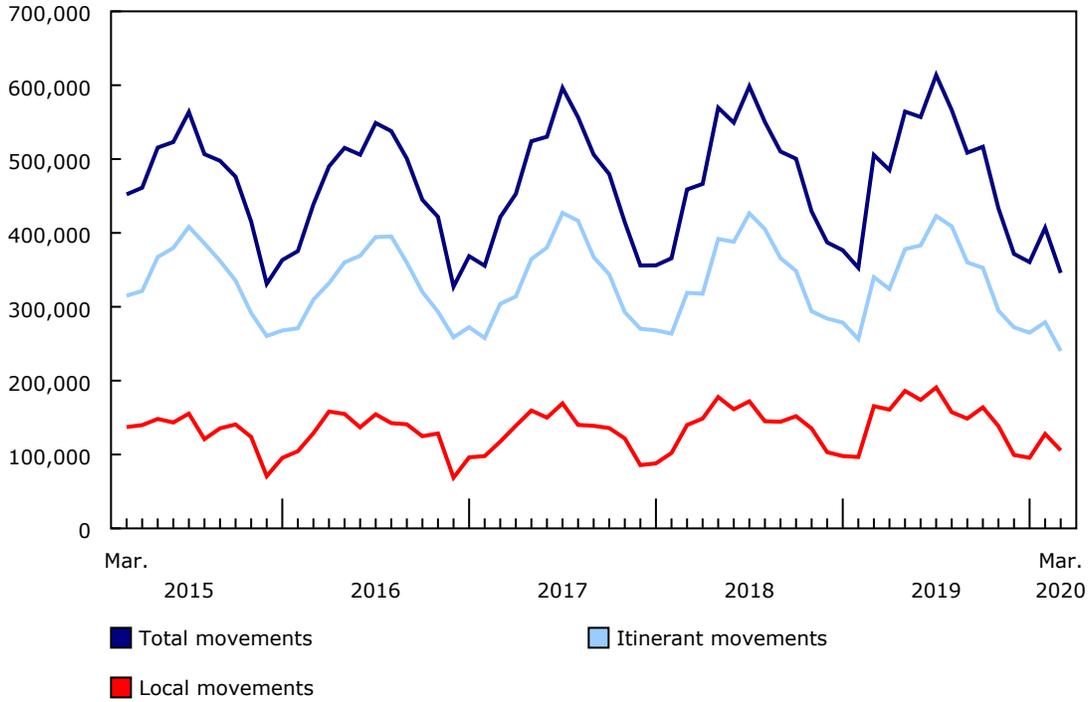


In March, the 10 busiest airports accounted for roughly 4 of every 10 (39.9%) movements. Toronto/Lester B. Pearson International, Canada's busiest airport, reported 27,997 movements (-27.9%). It was followed by Vancouver International, which reported 19,578 movements (-27.1%); Calgary International, with 15,189 movements (-25.5%); and Montréal/Pierre Elliott Trudeau International, with 14,945 movements (-25.4%).

Looking ahead to April data, air traffic should see unprecedented year-over-year decreases as Canada's major airlines suspended or dramatically scaled back their operations through the entire month. Air Canada was the only Canadian carrier to maintain a limited number of scheduled transborder and international flights. The carrier announced further reductions to its operations in April 2020 and suspended all service to the United States for 30 days, as of April 26, 2020.

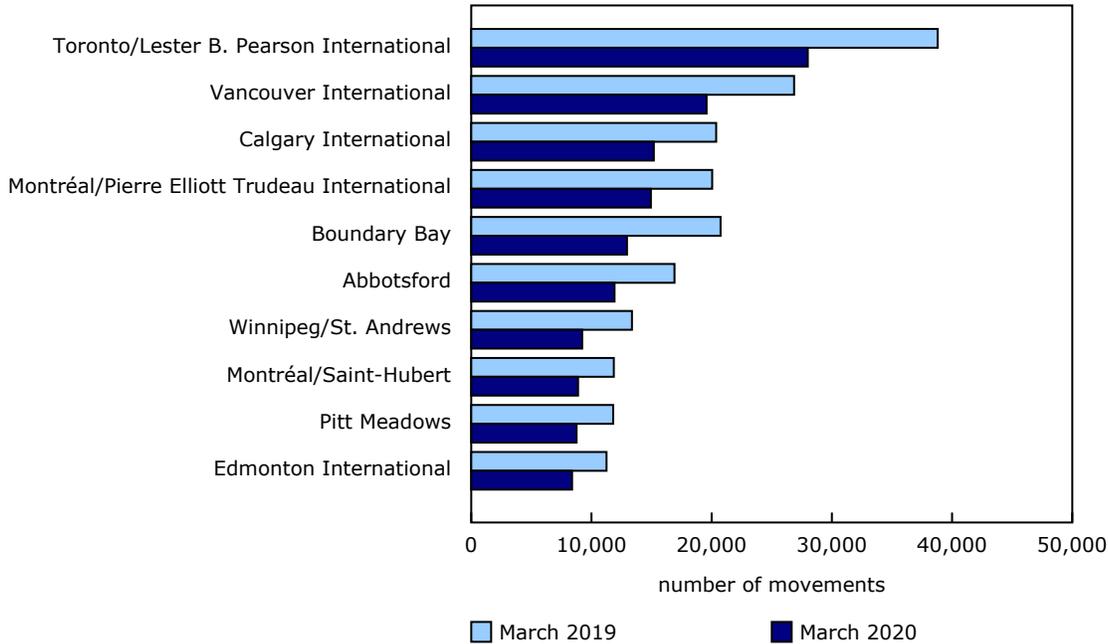
Chart 1
Total aircraft movements at major airports

number of movements



Source(s): Tables [23-10-0002-01](#) and [23-10-0009-01](#).

Chart 2
Total aircraft movements at top 10 Canadian airports, March 2020



Source(s): Table 23-10-0002-01.

Note to readers

This survey collects data on itinerant and local aircraft movements at major airports in Canada.

Major airports include all airports with either a NAV CANADA air traffic control tower or a NAV CANADA flight service station.

On January 30, 2020, NAV CANADA air traffic control (ATC) service was re-established at Montréal/Mirabel International, Quebec, for 16 hours per day. In 2008, because of a reduction in traffic levels, ATC service at the airport was replaced by a flight service station. As a result, effective February 1, 2020, monthly aircraft movement data for the airport will revert to tables 23-10-0002-01 to 23-10-0008-01 (airports with NAV CANADA towers). Data from December 2008 to January 2020 continue to be available in tables 23-10-0009-01 to 23-10-0015-01 (airports with NAV CANADA flight service stations).

An aircraft movement is defined as a take-off, a landing or a simulated approach by an aircraft, as defined by NAV CANADA.

Data for the same month in the previous year may have been revised.

The data in this monthly release are not seasonally adjusted.

Available tables: [23-10-0002-01](#) to [23-10-0015-01](#) .

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [2715](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).