

Aircraft movement statistics: Major airports, December 2021

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Highlights

In December, there were 298,233 total aircraft movements at Canada's major airports, an increase of 16.5% from December 2020 but 19.7% lower than the same month in 2019.

In the last month of 2021, international movements reached their highest point since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020. While up sharply from December 2020, movements to and from the US and other international destinations were 60.3% and 72.3% of the amounts recorded in December 2019 (respectively).

In December, Toronto/Lester B. Pearson International was Canada's busiest airport, and Montréal/Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau re-entered the top five for the first time since March 2020.

In 2021, there were 4.3 million aircraft movements at Canada's major airports. This was 11.8% higher than in 2020, but 26.8% lower than in 2019.

On an annual basis, Boundary Bay, British Columbia was Canada's busiest airport in 2021 for the second consecutive year.

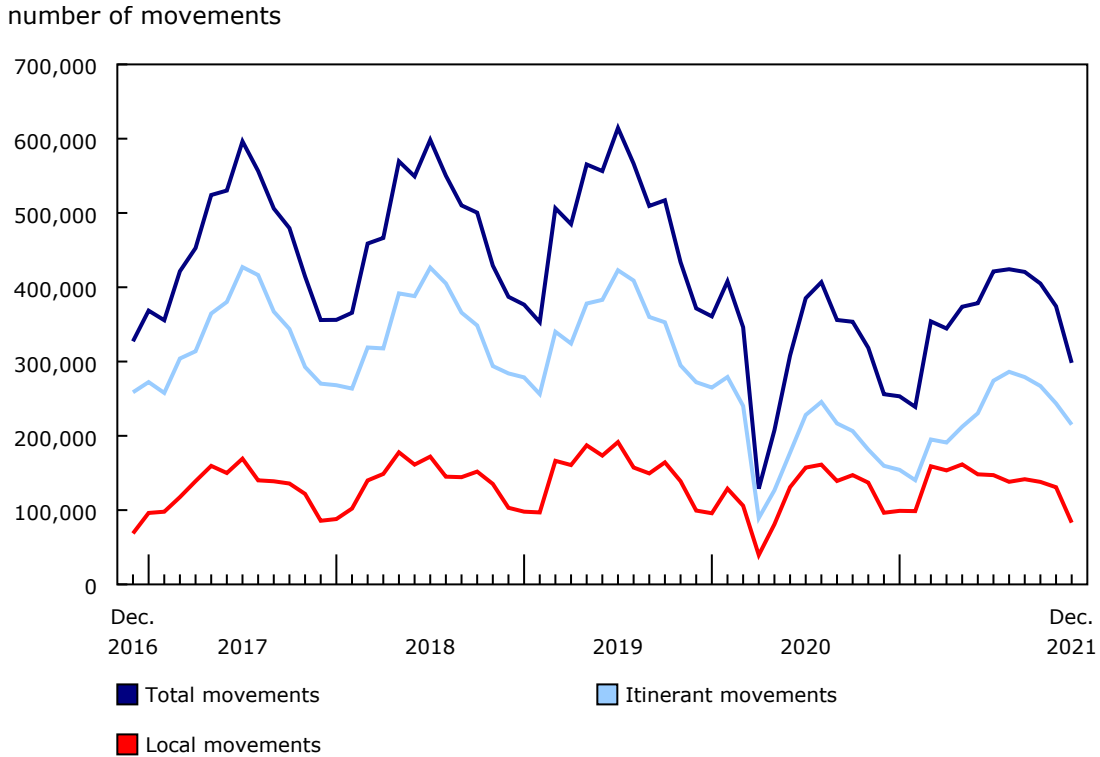
Total movements in December

Total aircraft movements (take-offs and landings) at the 90 airports with NAV CANADA towers and flight service stations were 298,233 in December, up 16.5% from December 2020. Itinerant movements (from one airport to another) rose 34.7% to 215,081 while local movements (within the vicinity of the airport) declined 13.8% to 83,152.

Compared with December 2019, before the pandemic, total movements were down 19.7% in December 2021. Itinerant movements fell 21.0%, while local movements declined 16.3%.



Chart 1
Total aircraft movements at major airports, by class of operation



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

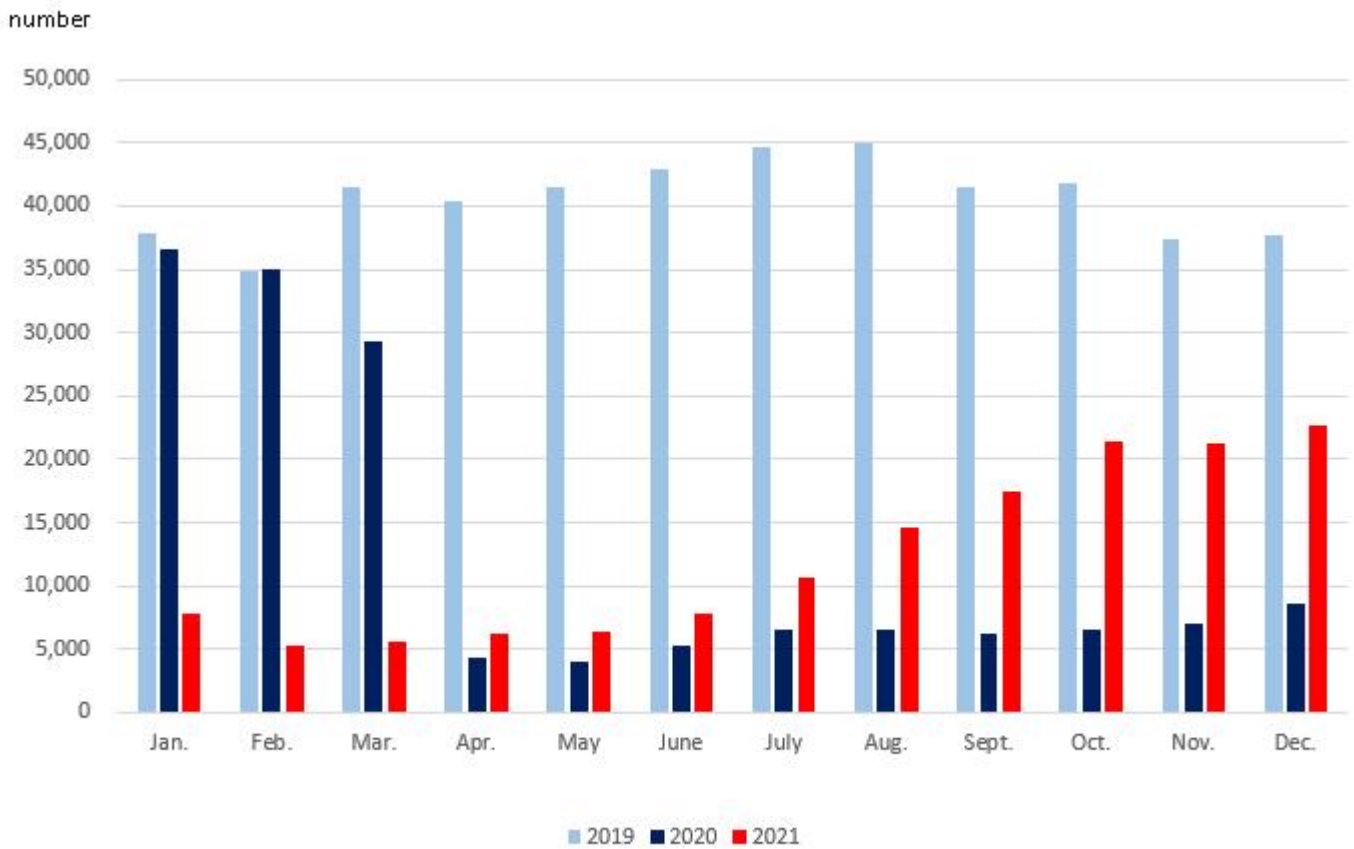
On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization and, in the months that followed, total aircraft movements remained well below historical levels. Unless otherwise specified, comparisons are made with the same month of 2019 (also referred to as "pre-pandemic"), when aircraft movement levels were in line with historical trends.

International movements peak

Despite a mid-month surge in Omicron infections and an advisory to avoid non-essential travel outside Canada, December recorded the highest number of international aircraft movements since the start of the pandemic. Transborder movements (to and from the US) were 22,720, while other international traffic reached 11,908. These figures were 60.3% and 72.3%, respectively, of their activity in December 2019.

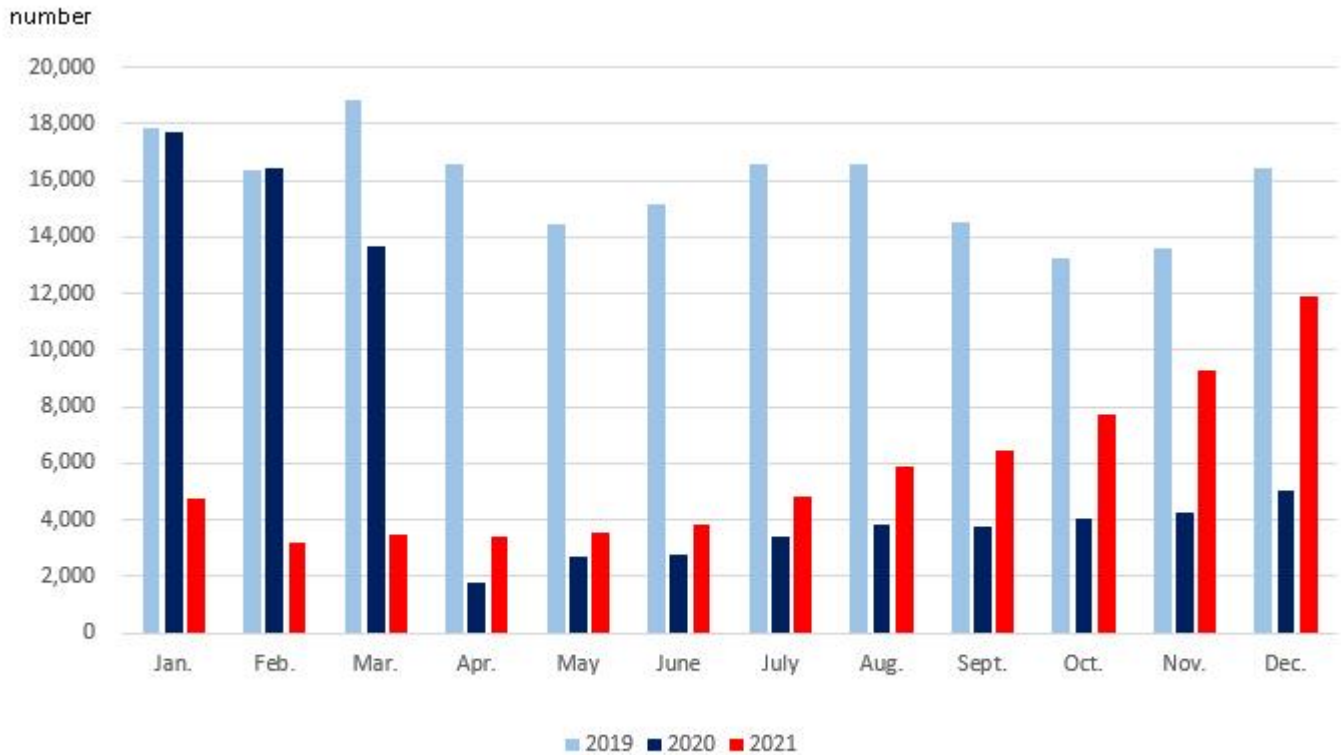
Within Canada, there were 180,453 domestic movements in December, 82.8% of the level in December 2019. Those conducted by Level I-III and foreign carriers were at 77.7% of their pre-pandemic level.

Infographic 1 – Transborder movements at major airports, 2019 to 2021



Sources: Tables 23-10-0008-01 and 23-10-0015-01.

Infographic 2 – Other international movements at major airports, 2019 to 2021



Sources: Tables 23-10-0008-01 and 23-10-0015-01.

Montréal back in the top five

Toronto/Lester B. Pearson International recorded the highest number of movements (25,613) in December, followed by Vancouver International (18,831), Calgary International (13,789), and Montréal/Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau (13,115). This was the first time Montréal/Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau has been in the top five since the pandemic began in March 2020.

Another challenging year for aviation

As the pandemic dragged on for a second year, 2021 proved to be another challenging period for air travel. The year began with evolving advisories and restrictions, which included the suspension of all passenger flights to Mexico and the Caribbean by Canadian airlines from the end of January through the winter travel season.

There was some optimism in the second half of 2021, as vaccination rates climbed and Canadian border measures gradually eased. In fact, transborder movements in the last six months of the year nearly tripled from the first half, and other international traffic more than doubled. However, the year ended in more uncertainty as a new variant, Omicron, was identified in late November.

Total movements up but below pre-pandemic levels

Overall, aircraft movements in 2021 reached 4.3 million, up from 3.8 million (+11.8%) in 2020, with increases in both itinerant (+11.3%) and local movements (+12.6%). The domestic sector increased year over year (+13.4%), with most airports (78 of 90) recording more movements in 2021. Conversely, transborder (-5.5%) and other

international movements each declined (-14.0%), largely due to strong passenger traffic during the first two months of 2020, before the pandemic. In fact, excluding January and February, transborder movements increased almost two thirds (+59.3%) from 2020 while other international movements were up by one-third (+33.4%).

Compared with 2019, before the pandemic, total aircraft movements in 2021 were down 26.8%. Itinerant movements declined 34.0%, and local movements fell 10.4%.

Total domestic movements were 72.8% of the amount recorded in 2019, and those conducted by Level I-III and foreign carriers were 58.5%. Transborder movements stood at 30.2%, while other international movements were at 35.9% of their pre-pandemic levels.

Fires, flight training and freight

While passenger transport was noticeably curtailed by pandemic restrictions, other types of air traffic continued. For example, the summer of 2021 was a significant fire season in British Columbia and Ontario, with increased traffic reported at several airports engaged in combatting wildfire activity.

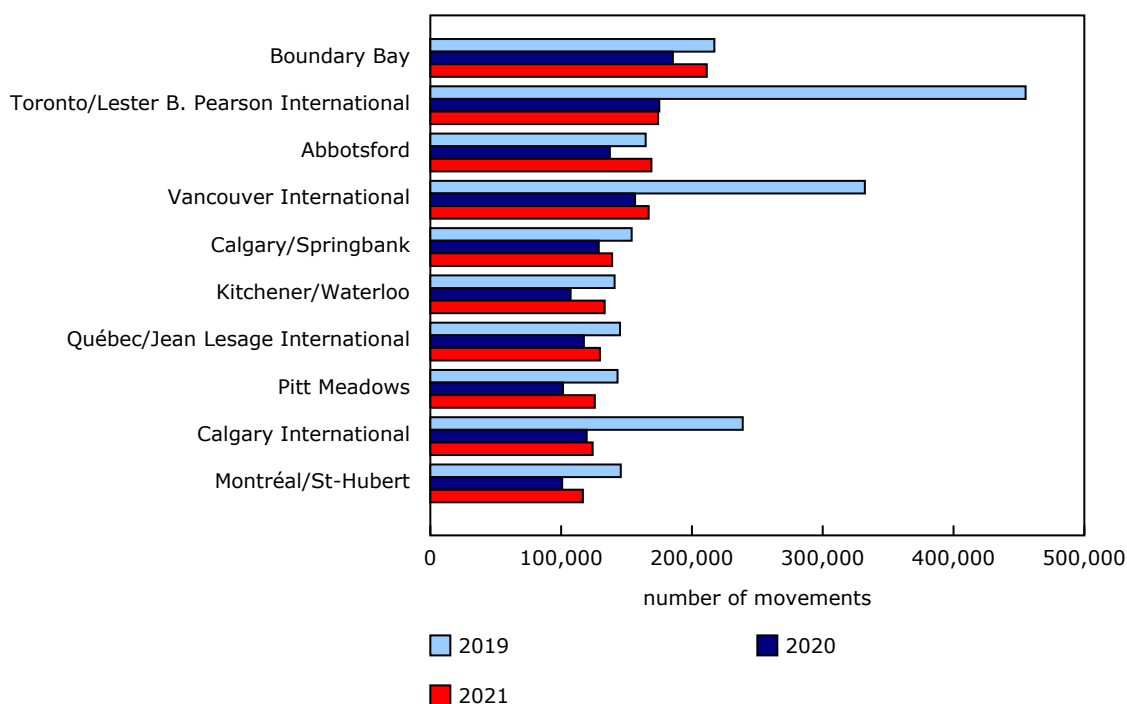
Other commercial movements, a grouping which includes flying schools, agricultural sprayers and aerial photography, also recorded increases (+2.5%) from the pre-pandemic number in 2019.

Demand for air cargo remained high in 2021. Over the course of the pandemic, Air Canada operated more than 13,000 cargo-only flights and began service with its first dedicated Boeing 767 freighter aircraft in December 2021. Montréal/Mirabel, a 24/7 cargo hub, was the only airport in 2021 to record more movements to both the United States and abroad than in 2019.

Busiest Airports in 2021

Boundary Bay was Canada's busiest airport for the second consecutive year (211,335 movements), followed by Toronto/Lester B. Pearson (174,138) and Abbotsford, British Columbia (169,017). Local movements made up more than three fifths of traffic at both Boundary Bay (63.5%) and Abbotsford (60.7%).

Chart 2
Total aircraft movements at the top 10 Canadian airports, 2019 to 2021



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

Note to readers

The Aircraft Movement Statistics: Major Airports 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.

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

Data for 2020 and 2021 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.

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