

Aircraft movement statistics: Major and select small airports, December 2022

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Thursday, February 23, 2023

Highlights

In December, Canada's major and select small airports recorded a total of 311,351 aircraft movements, a 2.6% decrease from December 2021 and the only year-over-year decline in 2022. Total movements represented 79.7% of the level from December 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Domestic movements from Level I to III and foreign carriers were at 77.8% of the December 2019 level, while movements to and from the United States were at 82.4% of the pre-pandemic level. Other international movements (outside the United States) finished off a year of steady growth, reaching 94.1% of the December 2019 level.

During 2022, there were a total of 5.2 million aircraft movements at Canada's major and select small airports. This was 14.1% higher than in 2021 and represented 84.9% of the movements in 2019.

Winter storms wreak havoc on air travel

In December, demand for holiday travel was high as the full slate of travel restrictions were lifted. However, many air travellers were left stranded, as flights were delayed or cancelled due to a series of winter storms that swept across the country.

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.

Total aircraft movements

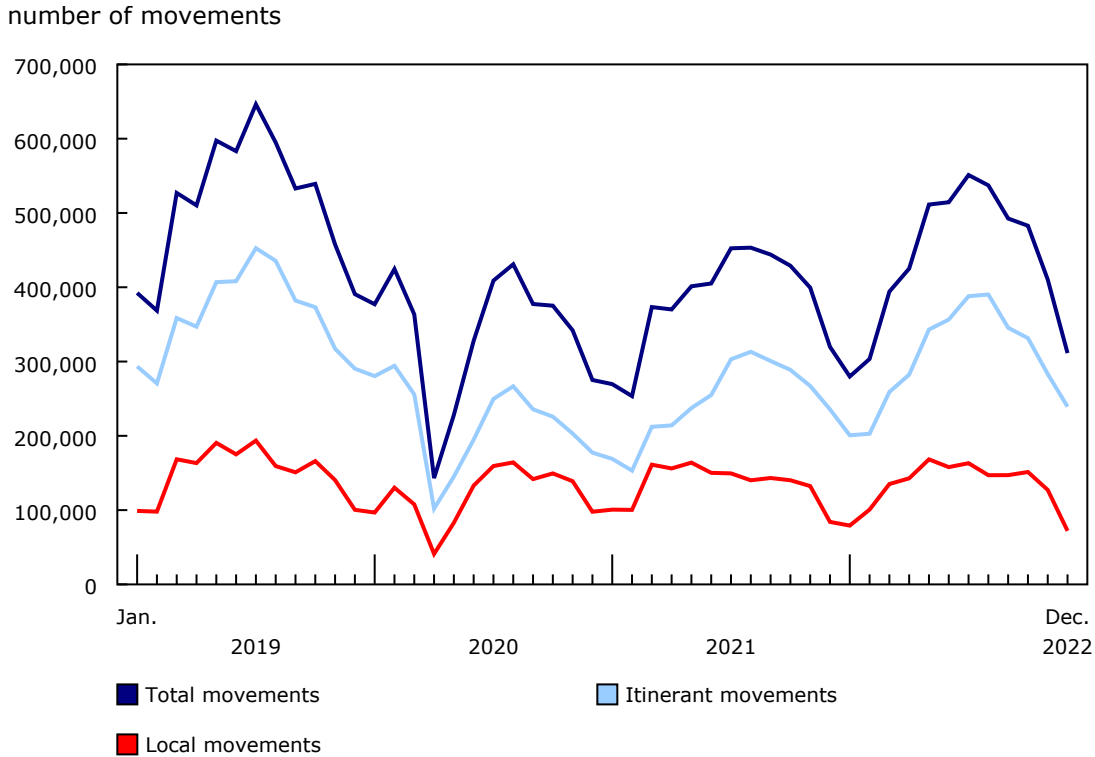
Total aircraft movements (take-offs and landings) at the 90 airports with NAV CANADA towers and flight service stations, combined with the 34 select small airports, totalled 311,351 in December, down 2.6% from December 2021.

Itinerant movements (from one airport to another) rose 1.5% year over year to 239,257 in December 2022. Local movements (within the vicinity of the airport) fell 14.3% to 72,094, the largest year-over-year decline since March 2022.

Total aircraft movements were at 79.7% of the pre-pandemic level from December 2019, with itinerant movements at 82.4% and local movements at 71.8%.



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



Source(s): Table 23-10-0296-01.

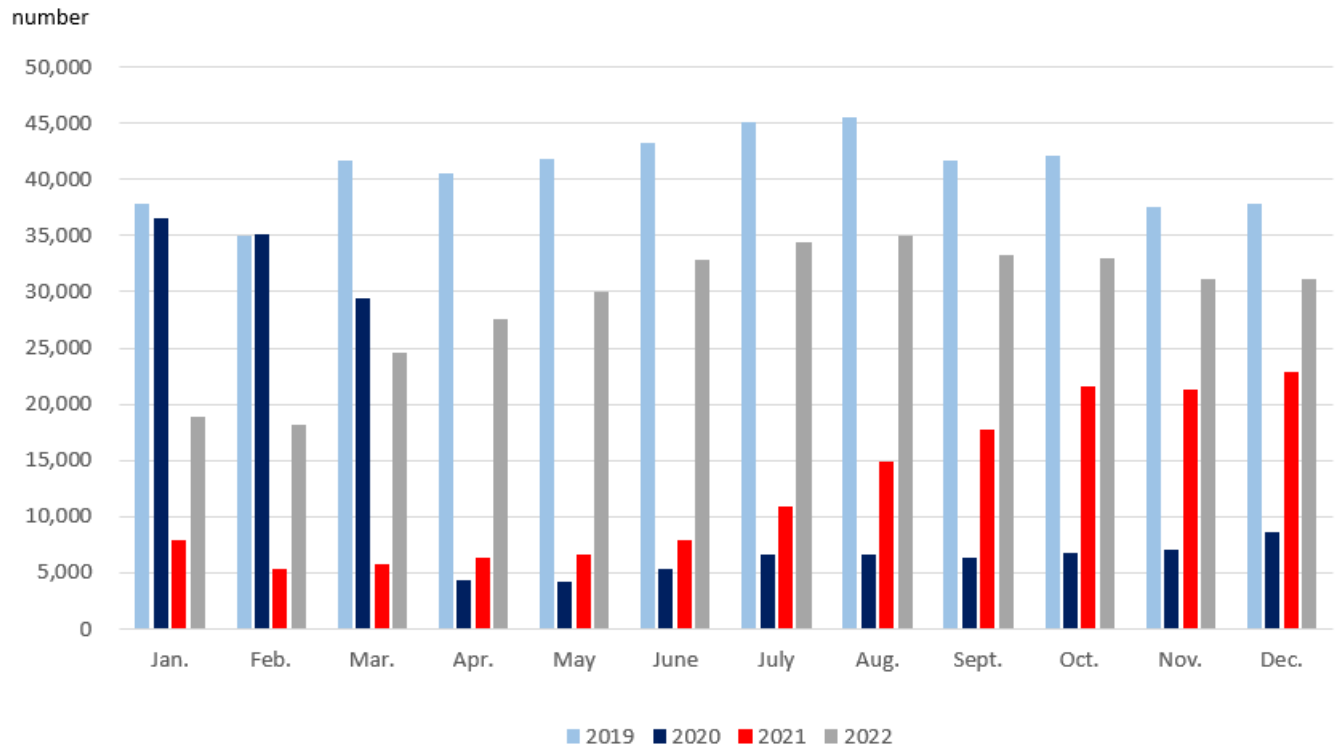
Domestic travel takes a hit

As the winter storms brought disruption to much of air travel in late December, total domestic movements (within Canada) declined to 81.6% of the pre-pandemic level in December 2019, following an 89.9% proportion in November 2022. The number of domestic movements from Level I to III and foreign carriers was at 77.8% of the December 2019 level.

Transborder movements (to and from the United States) were at 82.4% of their December 2019 level, a proportion little changed from that reported in November.

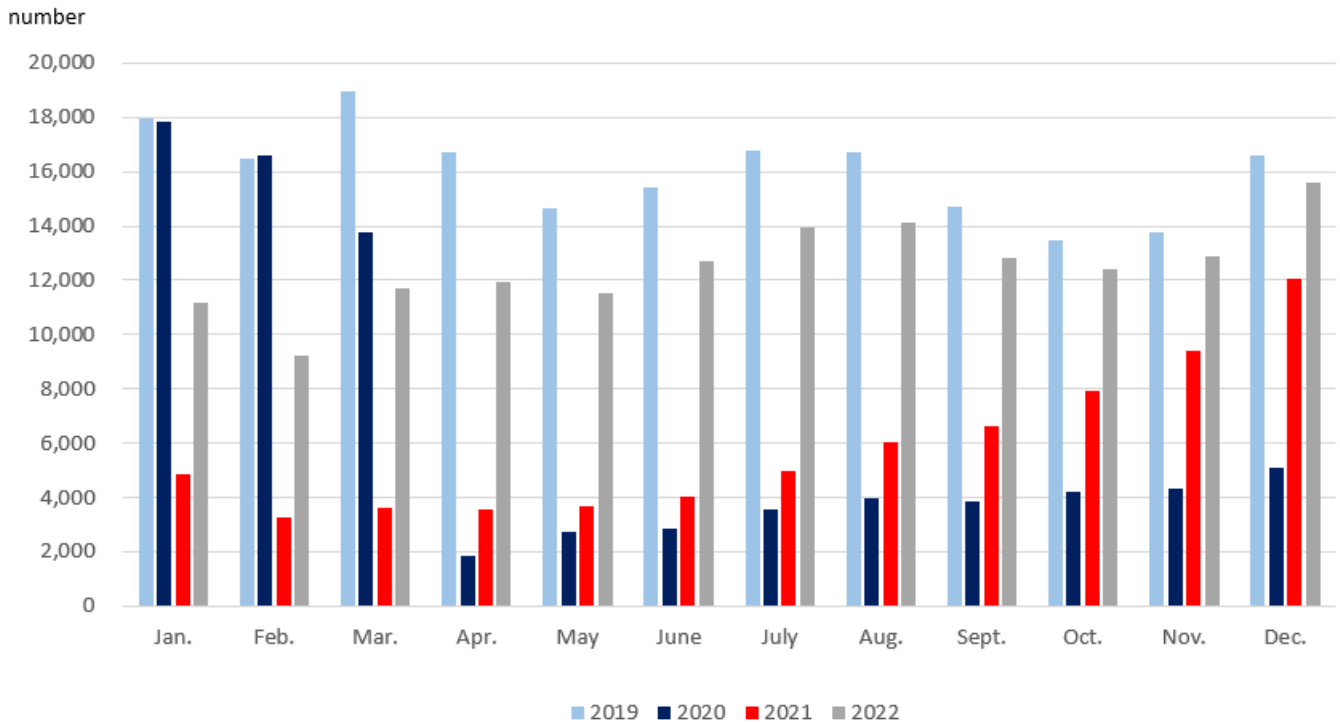
In December, other international movements (outside the United States) reached 94.1% of that reported in December 2019, capping the steady growth observed since February 2022, when the proportion of the February 2019 level was 55.8%.

Infographic 1 – Transborder movements at major and select small airports, 2019 to 2022



Source: Table 23-10-0302-01.

Infographic 2 – Other international movements at major and select small airports, 2019 to 2022



Source: Table 23-10-0302-01.

Ontario airports busiest in December

Toronto/Lester B. Pearson International remained the busiest airport, with 29,413 movements, up 14.8% from December 2021 and representing 81.7% of the December 2019 level. Propelled by an increase in local movements, Toronto/Billy Bishop Toronto City leaped into the top five busiest airports in December, with 8,547 movements, rising from the 15th position in November.

In December, airports in Ontario had 91,184 aircraft movements, almost 26,000 more than British Columbia (65,399), the second-highest province. The top five provinces accounted for 86.9% total aircraft movements.

Recovery in 2022 not without challenges

Initially, following the large uptake of vaccines during 2021, there was hope for a more normal 2022. This hope dissipated following the emergence of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in late 2021, which prompted the Government of Canada to reinstate the advisory to avoid non-essential travel outside the country. In response, several major carriers reduced their schedules and suspended routes.

The easing of some border restrictions in the spring of 2022 sparked renewed interest in air travel. However, the rapid increase in demand coupled with labour shortages across the industry led to widespread disruptions during the busy summer season at the country's major airports.

By the fall, the typical seasonal decline of air travel helped relieve the strain on airports to maintain service. The Government of Canada lifted vaccination requirements, mandatory use of the ArriveCAN app and any testing and quarantine requirements for travellers entering Canada.

Despite the ensuing passenger optimism generated by the prospect of a restriction-free holiday season, the year ended on a low note, as winter storms across the country resulted in many flight cancellations and delays.

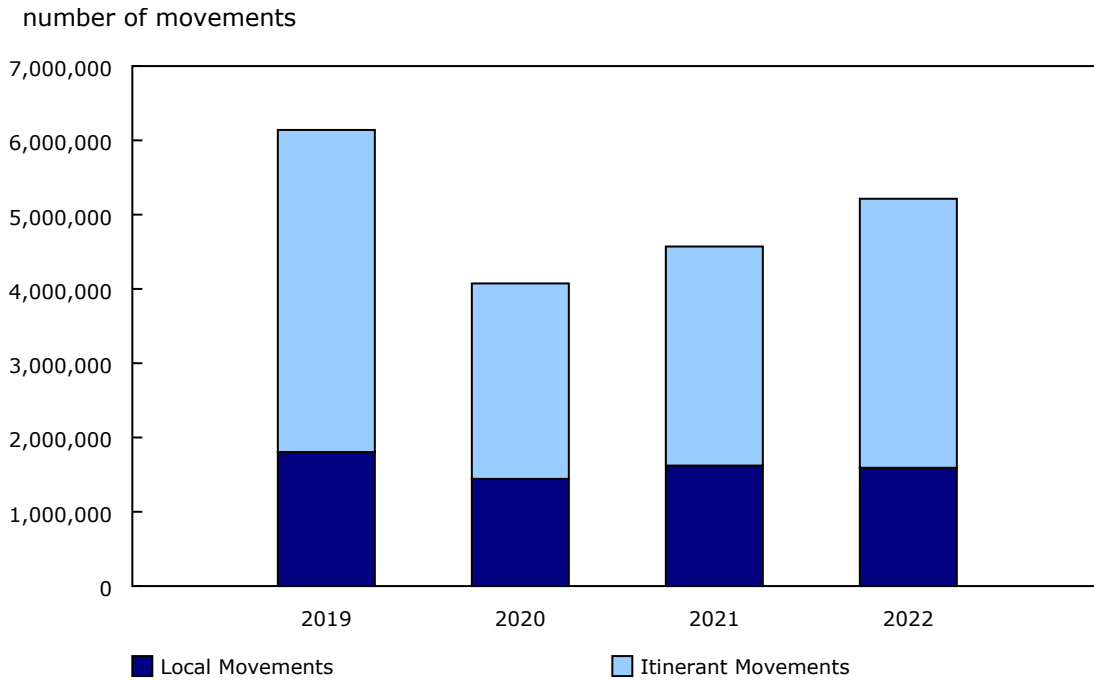
Total aircraft movements up in 2022

There were 5.2 million total aircraft movements in 2022, up from 4.6 million (+14.1%) in 2021 and reaching 84.9% of the 2019 level. Itinerant movements increased 22.8% from 2021 to 3.6 million. In contrast, local movements edged down 1.9%, falling to 1.6 million.

Movements in the domestic sector increased 14.4% year over year to 3.1 million, with those by Level I to III and foreign carriers increasing 29.7%. Total domestic movements stood at 85.5% of the 2019 level.

Following two years in which levels were below those pre-pandemic, traffic in the transborder sector bounced back to reach 349,791 movements. This was 71.4% of the 2019 level and a substantial increase from the 30.4% proportion reported in 2021. Similarly, other international movements rose to 150,046, representing 78.1% of the 2019 level.

Chart 2
Total aircraft movements at major and select small airports, 2019 to 2022



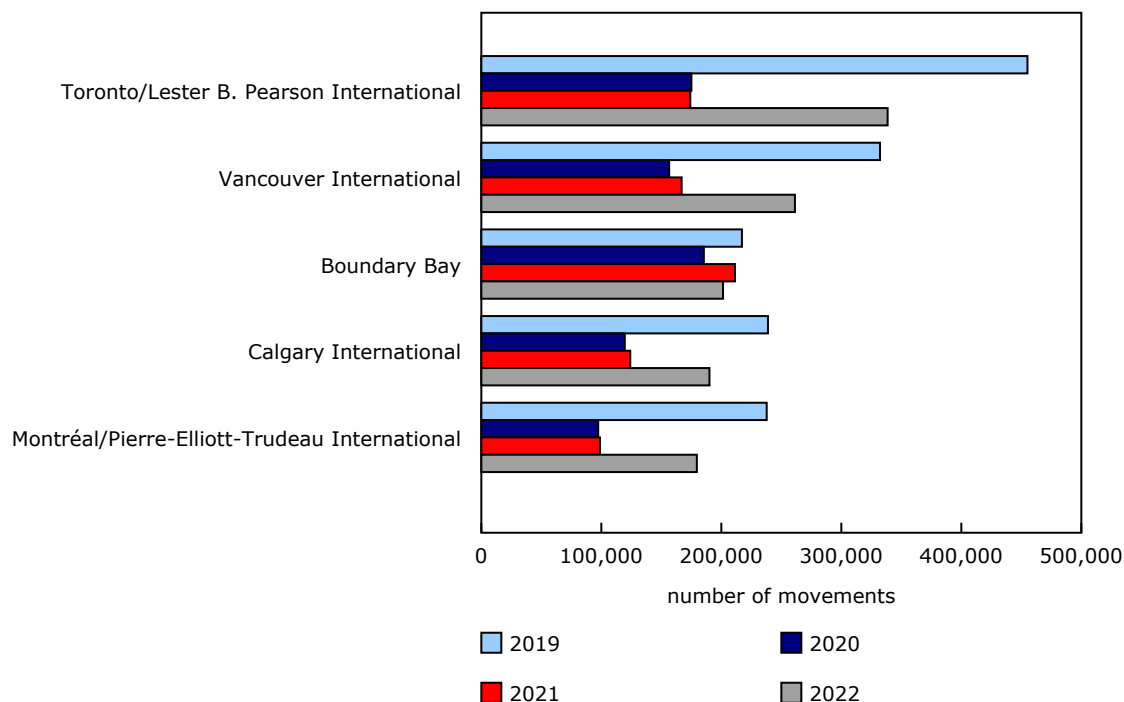
Source(s): Table 23-10-0296-01.

Toronto/Lester B. Pearson back on top in 2022

Aircraft movements across Canada are comprised of a wide variety of activity. Throughout the pandemic, the impact of the travel restrictions was largely focused on itinerant movements and passenger service as opposed to local movements. As a result, Boundary Bay, which is primarily engaged in local non-passenger aircraft movements, was the busiest airport in 2020 and 2021.

In 2022, however, movements at Toronto/Lester B. Pearson almost doubled from 2021 to 338,577 and retook the top spot. Activity at Boundary Bay decreased 4.7% to 201,413, dropping to third spot behind Vancouver International, which had 261,331 movements.

Chart 3
Total aircraft movements at the top five Canadian airports, 2019 to 2022



Source(s): Table 23-10-0296-01.

Note to readers

Starting with October 2022, the "Aircraft Movement Statistics: Major airports" series has been replaced by "Aircraft Movement Statistics: Major and select small airports." This series collects data on itinerant and local aircraft movements from both major airports (those with towers and flight service stations operated by NAV CANADA) as well as a selection of airports previously available in the small airport data series. This enhancement will improve the overall coverage of aircraft movements in Canada.

Releases in The Daily are now accompanied by a new set of data tables (23-10-0296-01 to 23-10-0304-01), of which two, 23-10-0296-01 and 23-10-0302-01, contain historical data beginning with 2019. The remaining tables (23-10-0297-01 to 23-10-0301-01, 23-10-0303-01 and 23-10-0304-01) have data commencing with reference year 2022.

Data prior to 2022 for the major airports can be found in tables 23-10-0002-01 to 23-10-0015-01. Data prior to 2019 for the selected small airports can be found in tables 23-10-0016-01 and 23-10-0017-01.

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

Data for 2022 may have been revised.

The data in this monthly release are not seasonally adjusted.

Available tables: [23-10-0296-01](#) to [23-10-0304-01](#) .

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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).