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## **Airport Activity: Air Carrier Traffic at Canadian Airports, 2020**

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# Airport Activity: Air Carrier Traffic at Canadian Airports, 2020

## Highlights

In 2020, COVID-19 crippled the aviation industry and brought an abrupt end to 10 consecutive annual increases in air passenger traffic. The total number of passengers enplaned and deplaned at Canadian airports dropped to 45.9 million in 2020, a decrease of 71.8% from the previous year.

From 2019, traffic decreased significantly at Canada's largest airports. Toronto/Lester B Pearson International and Montréal/Pierre Elliott Trudeau International both saw decreases in passenger traffic of 73.6%, while traffic was down 71.9% at Vancouver International and 69.2% at Calgary International.

## Unprecedented declines widespread

In the wake of travel restrictions first imposed in March of 2020 in Canada and around the world, passenger traffic fell sharply for the rest of the year. Measures by provincial governments to control the virus, including closing non-essential businesses, further constrained air operators. Indeed, some Canadian airlines suspended operations entirely while others continued to curtail their operations.

This plunged air passenger traffic to levels not seen in more than 40 years, with domestic passenger traffic declining 69.4% (64.8 million passengers) from the previous year. With the border closed to non-residents in late March 2020, transborder traffic (with the United States) experienced an even steeper decline, down 78.1% (25.1 million passengers). Air Canada, the only Canadian carrier operating scheduled transborder flights at that time, suspended service in April, and in May resumed service, albeit sharply reduced, for the remainder of the year.

With the imposition of travel restrictions in mid-March of 2020, other international or overseas traffic fell by 72.5% (27.1 million passengers). The Canadian government continued to advise against all non-essential travel outside the country, required mandatory quarantine upon re-entry, and banned discretionary travel to Canada by non-residents. Initially, Canadian carriers maintained a limited number of scheduled flights to international destinations, with a focus on repatriation and the movement of essential goods.

**Table 1**  
**Passenger and cargo data**

	2019	2020	Change 2019 to 2020
	number		percent
<b>Enplaned and Deplaned Passengers</b>			
Domestic Segments	93,313,525	28,556,695	-69.4
Transborder Segments	32,192,583	7,053,138	-78.1
Other International Segments	37,357,969	10,287,310	-72.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>162,864,077</b>	<b>45,897,143</b>	<b>-71.8</b>
<b>Loaded/Unloaded Cargo (tonnes)</b>	<b>1,377,026</b>	<b>1,156,704</b>	<b>-16.0</b>

Source: Tables 23-10-0253-01 and 23-10-0254-01.

## Canada's busiest airports

In 2020, the four busiest airports accounted for roughly two-thirds (66.8%) of all passenger traffic in Canada including over half (53.3%) of all domestic traffic and even larger shares of transborder (87.2%) and other international traffic (90.6%).

Toronto/Lester B Pearson International enplaned and deplaned 13.0 million passengers in 2020, down sharply from almost 50 million in 2019. Domestic traffic fell 70.4% (from 17.7 million to 5.2 million), international traffic fell 73.4% (from 17.9 million to 4.8) and transborder traffic fell 78.0% (from 13.6 million to 3.0 million).

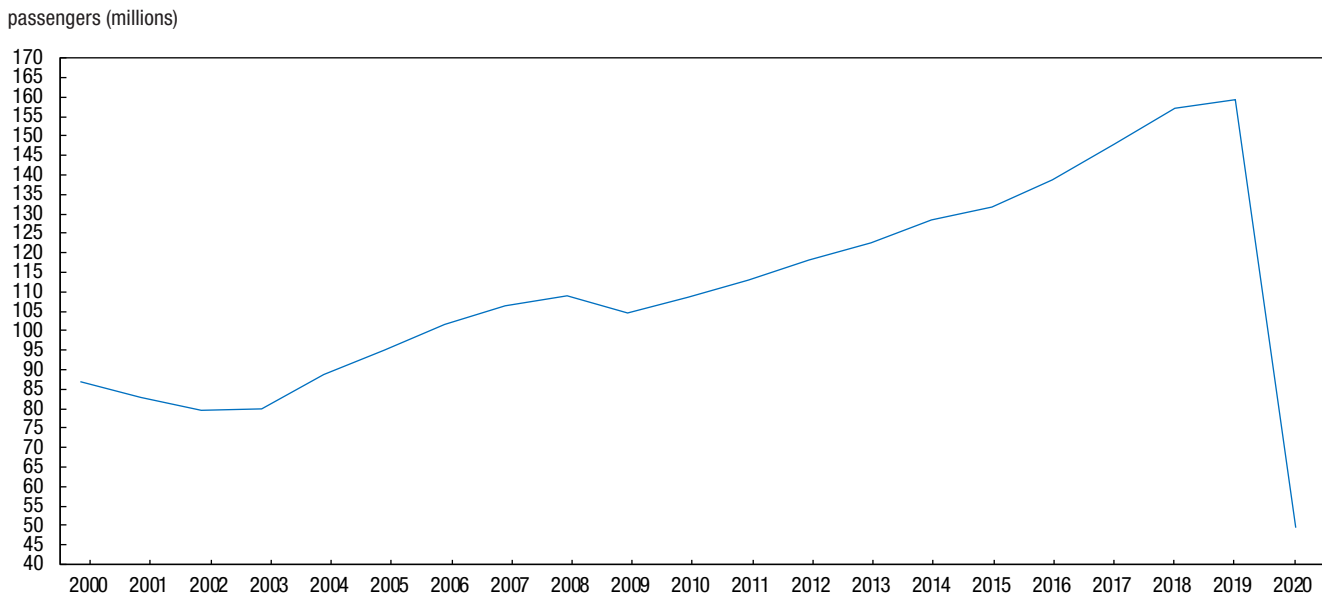
Next, Vancouver International enplaned and deplaned 7.2 million passengers, about one-third the traffic experiences in 2019 (25.7 million passengers). Domestic traffic fell 66.9% (from 12.3 million to 4.1 million), international traffic fell to one-quarter of its 2019 level (from 7.1 million to 1.8 million) and transborder traffic fell 79.1% (from 6.3 million to 1.3 million).

For the first time since 2014, Calgary International became Canada's third busiest airport, enplaning and deplaning 5.3 million passengers, but down from 17.2 million from 2019. Domestic traffic fell 66.4% (from 11.9 million to 4.0 million), international traffic fell 73.2% (from 1.9 million to 0.5 million) and transborder traffic fell 76.8% (from 3.5 million to 0.8 million).

At Montréal/Pierre Elliot Trudeau International, 5.2 million passengers were enplaned and deplaned, down from 19.6 million in 2019. Domestic traffic fell 72.2% (from 6.9 million to 1.9 million), international by 73.0% (from 8.2 million to 2.2 million) and transborder by 76.8% (from 4.4 million to 1.0 million).

At each of these airports, most of the passenger traffic was generated in the pre-COVID months of January, February and early in March.

**Chart 1**  
**Total enplaned/deplaned passengers**



Source: Table 23-10-0253-01; publication 51-203-X.

### Essential retail and e-commerce keep cargo in flight

With passenger traffic scarce, moving cargo helped to keep aircraft in the sky. Early in the pandemic, Air Canada began to operate cargo-only flights and modified some passenger aircraft to do so. The steady increase in scheduled cargo-only flights during 2020 helped to limit the year over year decline in the weight of cargo loaded and unloaded at Canadian airports to just 16.0% from 2019.

While the amount of domestic cargo transported by air increased 2.5% from 2019 to 608 000 tonnes in 2020, transborder cargo slipped modestly by 4.0% (230 000 tonnes). The increase in domestic cargo and the relatively small decline in transborder cargo was overshadowed by the large decline in other international cargo, which fell by 41.4% (319 000 tonnes).

During 2020, cargo operators benefited from transporting essential goods and from a rise in online shopping during the pandemic. According to the December 2020 [Retail Trade Report](#), retail e-commerce sales increased 70.5% in 2020, accounting for 5.9% of total retail sales in 2020, up from 3.5% in 2019. And according to the International Civil Aviation Organization, nearly 90% of business-to-consumer global e-commerce transactions involve some air delivery.

## Looking ahead

Increasing vaccination coverage rates provide some hope that Canadian air carriers will be able to further open up scheduled services, with some already beginning to ramp up domestic schedules.

Moreover, the federal government began easing border restrictions for international travel in July, as fully vaccinated Canadians flying home from abroad were no longer required to test on arrival with the hotel stopover and follow the 14 day quarantine. This easing helped to further bolster an already upward trend in [weekly transborder aircraft movements](#).

An expanded list of travellers eligible to enter Canada, as well as an easement of requirements for those entering, can only further help the industry recovery.

## Note to Users

### Cargo data

It is important to note that the air cargo data presented does not represent the total cargo loaded and unloaded in Canada. Comprehensive cargo data are not collected for the following reasons:

- i. the regional and local scheduled carriers do not file cargo data on the airport activity survey and,
- ii. the major charter survey does not collect data on domestic courier cargo or domestic entity cargo flights.

Passenger flights which carry cargo on them are classified as passenger flights. The cargo carried on these passenger flights is defined as belly-hold cargo. The belly-hold cargo data are included with the pure cargo data in the cargo table, Table [23-10-0254-01](#).

## Services offered by carriers

### Scheduled Services

ABX Air Inc.  
Aer Lingus  
Aeromexico  
Air Algerie  
Air Canada  
Air Canada Rouge  
Air China  
Air Creebec Inc.  
Air France  
Air Georgian Limited  
Air India  
Air Inuit Ltd.  
Air New Zealand  
Air North Charter Training Ltd.  
Air St Pierre  
Air Tahiti Nui  
Air Tindi Ltd.  
Air Transat A.T. Inc.  
Air Wisconsin  
Aklak Air  
Alaska Airlines  
All Nippon Airways  
American Airlines  
Amik Aviation Ltd.  
Austrian Airlines  
Avianca Costa Rica  
Bearskin Airlines  
Beijing Capital Airlines  
Bradley Air Services Limited  
British Airways  
Brussels Airlines  
Calm Air International Ltd.  
Canadian North Inc.  
Cargojet Airways Ltd.

Cargolux Airlines International  
Caribbean Airlines  
Carson Air Ltd.  
Castle Aviation  
Cathay Pacific Airways  
Central Mountain Air Ltd.  
Champlain Enterprises  
China Airlines  
China Eastern Airlines  
China Southern Airlines  
Compass Airlines (North America)  
COPA  
Corilair Charters Limited  
Corse Air Intl.  
Cubana Airlines  
Delta Air Lines  
EgyptAir  
El Al Israel Airlines  
Emirates Airlines  
Endeavor Air  
Envoy Air Inc.  
Ethiopian Airlines  
Etihad Airways  
EVA Airways Corporation  
Exploits Valley Air Services Ltd.  
ExpressJet  
FedEx  
Flair Airlines Ltd.  
GoJet Airlines LLC  
Griffing Flying Service  
Gulf Island Seaplanes  
Hainan Airlines  
Harbour Air Ltd.  
Hong Kong Airlines  
Horizon Air Industries Inc.  
Icelandair

Inland Air Charters  
Interjet  
Island Express Air Inc.  
JAL-Japan Airlines International Co. Ltd.  
Jazz Air Inc.  
JDR Pacific Ventures  
Kenmore Air Harbor Inc.  
KF Aerospace  
KLM Royal Dutch Airlines  
Korean Air  
LOT-Polish Airlines  
Lufthansa German Airlines  
McMurray Aviation  
Mesa Airlines  
Montmagny Air Service Inc.  
Morningstar Air Express Inc.  
Nolinor Aviation  
North Star Air  
Northern Air Charter (P.R.) Inc.  
Northway Aviation Ltd.  
Northwestern Air Lease  
Northwright Air  
Omni Air Express  
Pacific Coastal Airlines Limited  
Pakistan International  
Pascan Aviation Inc.  
Perimeter Aviation Ltd.  
Philippine Airlines Inc.  
Piedmont Airlines  
Porter Airlines Inc.  
PSA Airlines  
Qantas Airways  
Qatar Airways  
Republic Airways  
Royal Air Maroc  
Royal Jordanian



SATA Internacional  
Sichuan Airlines Co. Ltd.  
Sky Jet M G Inc.  
Sky Regional Airlines Inc.  
Sky West Airlines  
Skylink Express Inc.  
Smartwings  
Sunwing Airlines Inc.  
Swiss International Air Lines Ltd.  
Swoop  
TAP Air Portugal  
Thunder Airlines Limited  
Tofino Air  
Trans States Airlines  
Transwest Air  
TUI  
Tunisair  
Turkish Airlines  
Ukraine International Airlines  
United Airlines  
United Parcel Service  
Wasaya Airways Limited Partnership  
West Wind Aviation Limited Partnership  
WestJet  
WestJet Encore  
Wilderness Seaplanes  
Xiamen Airlines

**Major Charter Services**

ACASS  
ACM Aviation  
Aeroméxico  
Air Alsie  
Air Canada  
Air Canada Rouge  
Air Foyle  
Air Hamburg

Air Inuit Ltée / Air Inuit Ltd.  
Air Rutter International  
Air St Pierre  
Air Transat A.T. Inc.  
AirNet II  
American Air Services Inc.  
Ameristar Air Cargo Inc.  
Anderson Air  
Atlas Air Inc.  
Aurora Jet Partners  
Aviation Consultants Inc.  
Avjet Corporation  
Bearskin Airlines  
Buffalo Airways  
Canadian North Inc.  
Chartright Air Inc.  
China Eastern  
Chrysler Aviation  
Condor Flugdienst  
Delta Air Lines  
Elite Jets  
Ethiopian Airlines  
Exeaire  
Executive Fliteways Inc.  
Fast Air Ltd.  
Flair Airlines Ltd.  
Flexjet  
Flightexec  
Gestair  
Global Aviation  
Great Western Air  
Gulf & Caribbean Cargo Inc.  
Image Air Charter  
Independent Flight Leasing Inc.  
Jazz Air Inc.  
Jet Access Aviation

Jet Linx Aviation  
Kalitta Air LLC  
Kenn Borek Air Ltd.  
Korean Air  
Landmark Aviation  
London Air Services Limited  
Lynden Air Cargo LLC  
Miami Air International  
NetJets  
Nolinor Aviation  
Novajet  
Pacific Coastal Airlines  
PAL Aerospace Ltd.  
Paradigm Air Operators Inc.  
Partner Jet Inc.  
Priester Aviation  
Saturn Aviation  
SC Aviation  
Skycharter  
Skyservice Business Aviation Inc.  
Smartwings  
Solairus Aviation  
Southern Air  
Sunwest Aviation Ltd.  
Sunwing Airlines Inc.  
Thunderbird Airways

### **Factors which may have influenced the data**

For additional contextual information on events affecting air travel, including summaries of selected Canadian economic events, as well as international and financial market developments by calendar month, check out the [Canadian Economic News](#).