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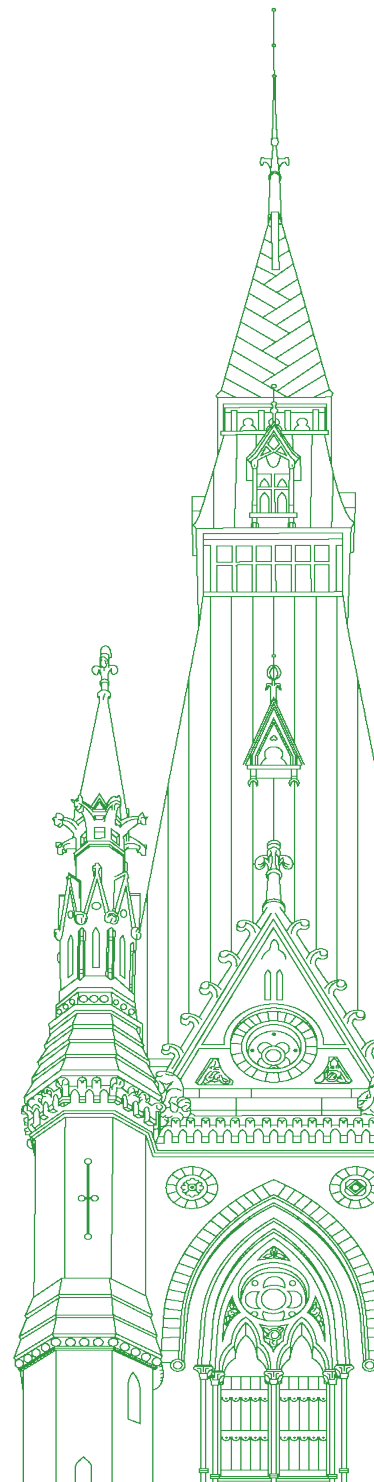
# Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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**NUMBER 075**

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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey



## Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Tuesday, June 20, 2023

• (1615)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)):** Welcome to meeting number 75 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Today all members and witnesses are appearing in person in the room.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to remind committee members to wait until I recognize you by name. Do that by simply raising your hand to get my attention, since everybody is in the room, and I will, along with the clerk, maintain a speaking order.

You have the option of speaking in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available by using the headset in the room. I would remind all those participating that, if there is a loss of translation services, please get my attention and we'll suspend while that is corrected.

No screenshots are allowed to be taken in the room while the meeting is in session.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the decision made by the committee on Tuesday, June 13, the committee will receive a briefing from the Office of the Auditor General on accessible transportation for persons with disabilities.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. As you are aware, the Auditor General, due to a family situation, is not available to be with us today. The assistant auditor general Ms. Thomas is here. Mr. Duvnjak, principal, is with us. Susie Fortier, director, is with us as well. Welcome.

We will start with the opening statement from Ms. Thomas for five minutes, after which we will open the floor to questions. Since we have only one panel today, we'll just keep going around.

With that, Ms. Thomas, you have the floor.

[Translation]

**Ms. Casey Thomas (Assistant Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General):** Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to discuss our report on accessible transportation for persons with disabilities, which was tabled in the House of Commons on March 27.

I would like to acknowledge that this hearing is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

Joining me today are Milan Duvnjak, the principal who was responsible for the audit, and Susie Fortier, the director who led the audit team.

This audit looked at whether VIA Rail, the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, and the Canadian Transportation Agency worked to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for travellers with disabilities. In 2019 and 2020, more than a million persons with disabilities who travelled on a federally regulated mode of transportation faced a barrier.

We found that all three organizations had identified some barriers and taken steps to improve accessibility. VIA Rail held consultations with persons with disabilities while designing its new fleet. It also consulted on its accessibility plan and training programs, as did the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority.

However, improvements were still needed in many important areas. For example, online information was not fully accessible. According to Statistics Canada, this is one of the barriers most frequently experienced by travellers with disabilities. Poor accessibility means that information is difficult to find or is incorrect for someone using a screen reader. This makes it difficult for persons with disabilities to plan or book a trip by themselves.

[English]

We also found that staff and management did not always complete accessibility training. This can affect the service provided to travellers with disabilities and their companions.

As the organization responsible for enforcing accessibility regulations in the transportation industry, the Canadian Transportation Agency identified accessibility barriers through its inspections, and it worked with transportation service providers to remove some. However, we found that the agency conducted few inspections, and it could only request complaint data from service providers in certain circumstances. Consistent access to this data would help the agency improve its oversight.

Meanwhile, the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority and Via Rail focused on resolving individual complaints, and they missed opportunities to use complaint data to better understand travellers' lived experiences.

Every person has a right to participate fully and equally in society. If access to these rights is delayed or denied, the impact is that some members of society are excluded or left behind.

To further improve the accessibility of trains, planes and other federally regulated modes of transportation, responsible organizations need to broaden their consultations with persons with disabilities, make their online content fully accessible, and use complaint data to identify, learn about and prevent barriers. This work is necessary to achieve the federal government's goal of a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening statement. We would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Thomas.

We will now begin the questioning with Mrs. Gray, for six minutes, please.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here today from the AG's office.

In your opening statement you mentioned staff training and mandatory training for both managers and executives. I'm looking at the numbers from your audit. They're quite high on how many executives and managers, in particular, either took the mandatory accessible training late or didn't actually fulfill that mandatory training.

In your experience, how would you rate the mandatory training compliance at these transportation agencies compared to other agencies that maybe you've audited over time?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** Thank you so much for the question. I will start the answer, and then I will ask if Milan or Susie has anything to add.

You're absolutely right. Training is critical. Training helps people to develop their skills in order to deliver their services. It improves awareness and understanding, and helps to remove unconscious bias. When it comes to management, they have that additional responsibility of being supervisors. In addition to building their skills, they need to support those who are in those positions and roles.

With respect to Via Rail in particular, 39% of their managers and executives took the training late, and an additional 17% had not taken the training at all at the time of our audit. I do believe that has since changed. I will ask my colleagues to give you an update on that.

We did see that improvements needed to be made. Therefore, we would say that they need to do better.

I'll pass it over to Milan.

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak (Principal, Office of the Auditor General):** I'll add to Ms. Thomas's answer.

We do know for Via, for example, that most of the managers have taken most of the training—if not all of it. That's our latest information. I'll add also that Via had made accessibility training mandatory for all management. That's a positive. As Ms. Thomas stated, we did see that some training was not taken on time, but there have been some positive developments since then.

For CATSA, we did note that the training was mandatory for most of the managers, except for the managers who were not working directly with persons with disabilities. For example, a manager in charge of maintaining certain aspects, who didn't have frontline support, was not supposed to take that training. We made the recommendation that in our view all management should take the training.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

I guess part of that as well was that this is mandatory training that comes through the regulator. I know from working previously in the financial sector that there was mandatory training we had to do as board, executive and then staff, and it was really pressed on us to make sure that we met those deadlines.

Where's the accountability here? I guess that would be my question. Is this something that you've seen in other audits that you've done in other industries where there's mandatory training for different things that maybe isn't fulfilled? Who's ultimately accountable for that?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** Again, it's a good question in terms of accountability, because you're absolutely right. Managers and executives need to hold themselves accountable. During the course of our audit, we found that they were receptive to what we brought to them, and they were made aware of these important responsibilities.

I'll ask Susie or Milan if they have anything additional on that.

**Ms. Susie Fortier (Director, Office of the Auditor General):** We did make the recommendation that they ensure that their staff and their manager be trained. The specific regulation requires an update in training, a refresher every three years, so they will have an opportunity to demonstrate if they are taking up the recommendation on time with the oversight of the regulator.

• (1625)

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Just to tie on to that as well, presumably it would be the regulator who would hold them to account, and that would be the Canadian Transportation Agency. Is that right? It would be the regulator who would press on them and hold them to account. Is that correct?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** It's part of this, yes, as well as their accessibility plans. As part of their accessibility plans, they can define their timelines and their process, which has an accountability component from the review and consultation of persons with disabilities. They're also accountable to their client and to the population.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Ultimately, it would be the minister who would hold the regulator to account, who then would hold those they oversee accountable. Would that not be a sort of chain of command, I guess you would say, for holding people to account?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** In terms of the chain of command, I would start with the executives and management within the agency itself. It's important that they hold themselves accountable and that they understand the importance of training. This isn't just a tick-box exercise. That training is an important element of what they do in order to support their clients.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** To add on to that, why would you think these particular organizations might have been lax? Did you get any sense, when you did their audit, as to why they were lax in this particular training? Was there a real rationale? Maybe it wasn't a priority or they were focused on other things. Do you have a sense as to why this wasn't a priority for them?

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** We spoke to them, of course, when we examined this, but there was no specific reason the training wouldn't have been taken. As I mentioned just before, both organizations had identified mandatory training for all or most of their management.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

Mr. Long, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothsay, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

Good afternoon, colleagues.

Bill C-81, the Accessible Canada Act, I think was one of the most profound and transformational pieces of legislation that we've passed. I know that MP Chabot was involved. I think MP Falk was involved in earlier HUMA days. Obviously, Minister Qualtrough was. It's life-changing for Canadians.

It was passed in 2019 with a goal to basically have Canada barrier-free by 2040. It hit home to me when I had a constituent come into my office before we passed that act. They literally couldn't get on a bus. They were in a wheelchair. They couldn't access the bus.

For those listening in, the many people listening in today, this covers the federal government, obviously, and then organizations that are regulated by the federal government. Just for the record, it's banks, airlines, phone companies, trucking, rail, shipping and what have you.

There's just one point I want to make before I ask questions. The Accessible Canada Act is good for everybody. Ramps and elevators obviously help the disabled, but they're also there to help people who are elderly or to help a mother with a stroller. Signs that are easily legible help people who are learning new languages. Captions on TV help people in a busy, loud airport.

The things that we will do, things that we will legislate, are good for all Canadians, but I mean, it's going to be a while. Obviously, there's great work happening and we're going to get there, but it will take time. It will take a lot of work from all Canadians.

My first question for you, Ms. Thomas, would be about how in the audit you found that while Via Rail and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority consulted with persons with disabilities on their projects, persons with disabilities continue to face ongoing challenges, such as websites that are not accessible. Can you elaborate on that finding, please? Thank you.

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** Thank you very much for the question.

Online is often a place where many travellers start their journey. Travellers will expect complete and clear information. Persons with disabilities also need complete, clear and accessible information. This makes the experience equitable for persons with disabilities.

What we found during the course of our audit was that 17% of the online criteria in relation to Via Rail had not been met. Some of this information may not have affected a traveller's journey or a traveller's ability to book, but some of it would have.

For example, a person with a disability or a person using a screen reader may get a wrong departure time, which could obviously affect their ability to plan their journey. We also found that in information for persons using a wheelchair it wasn't always easy to find the accessibility in the stations. It would require a person to click on each station to determine where and how they were going to be able to manoeuvre around the stations.

With respect to CATSA, we also looked at their online criteria and found that about 15% were not met. With respect to CATSA, it was difficult to find out for a person travelling how they were going to get through security. This might not affect how they were going to plan their journey, but it definitely could cause stress for the traveller when they were arriving at a station and when they were trying to get to the next place they needed to be.

I'll ask Milan if there's anything to add.

● (1630)

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** I'll just add that we tested a large portion of these online criteria. We have the numbers in here. We used international standards, which are basically around the four principles: perceivable, understandable, operable and robust. Those are the principles we tested against.

As Ms. Thomas said, not all of the 17% and 15% were crucial. For example, a description of the Canadian flag not being available is not going to stop somebody from travelling, but not knowing at which stations or where you can access rest stops, that is something that's important.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you for that.

Being in HUMA, when I travel, I'm always looking at the airports, or what have you, as to who has what and what's missing. Obviously, there still remain many challenges for persons with disabilities.

Would you agree this indicates there are issues with the consultation process? Can you share your thoughts on that?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** I'll start off, then I'll pass it over to my colleague to add a bit of detail.

Consultation needs to be meaningful, accessible and inclusive. We found that both Via Rail and CATSA had consultation processes that included persons with disabilities in order to get their input. Having said this, we were unable to determine with Via Rail whether that input was actually used in part of the development of their accessibility plan.

I'm going to pass it over to Madam Fortier to add a bit of detail.

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** We looked at the consultation process for those two entities. The regulation requires that consultation be done for the accessibility plan for all transportation service providers. However, in our audit, we only looked at the two Crown corporations.

The other transportation service providers need to have their accessibility plans later, in the upcoming months and years, so we didn't look at their consultation process and how the information was used.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Long.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Thomas, thank you for having travelled to inform the committee about the audit you prepared.

It gives me the opportunity to tell you that the audits provided by the Office of the Auditor General on various matters are invaluable for accountability purposes. They shed light on various situations for parliamentarians.

This audit is informative. However, as I was reading it, I felt that I would like to know more about it. I understand that you may not be able to tell us much more.

As you said in your address, there are after all a million people with disabilities who have encountered barriers. These people are of course not a homogeneous group. Some have a mental disability and others a physical disability, such as blindness, while others face mobility and accessibility problems. For example, people in wheelchairs require ramps.

Of these barriers, which are the most pressing and need to be better known? I understand that it was difficult for you and your office to identify them concretely. However, if we want to eliminate these barriers, which is the objective, it's important to be able to target them more clearly. It's rather like when you read a good book, and it leads you to want to know a little more. What do you feel are the

major barriers being faced by persons with disabilities who use the major carriers?

• (1635)

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** I'll make a start on answering, and then I'll ask Ms. Fortier or Mr. Duvnjak to add details, since it's details you're looking for.

The Canadian Transportation Agency is responsible for monitoring the enforcement of regulations. Its representatives have conducted inspections over the two-year period of the audit, but owing to the pandemic, they were only able to do one inspection in person, given that the pandemic had clearly eliminated the opportunity to do more. They were nevertheless able to identify a number of barriers, but we found that these representatives only looked into how the services were designed, but not the extent to which they were actually provided.

I will now ask Mr. Duvnjak or Ms. Fortier to take it from here and provide further details.

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** One source of information on disability situations that might arise is the Statistics Canada's Accessibility in Federal Sector Organizations Survey, which was a useful source of information for us. The survey reports on the frequency and types of barriers to travel that were encountered over the past two years.

As was mentioned, one of the most frequent barriers is access to information on websites. For travel, the types of barriers may vary considerably depending on the disability, no matter which form of transportation is used.

That's also why we recommended to the two Crown corporations we audited that they needed to work harder and analyze the complaints they receive. That would enable them to address the most serious situations in their specific contexts, based on an indicator...

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Were these Crown corporations receptive to these recommendations?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** They were, and they accepted all the recommendations made in the report, including the two I just mentioned. They are now working on an action plan...

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Are there timelines?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** Yes, their response provided timelines, along with their action plan, which was sent to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Personally, what stunned and surprised me was that at the Canadian Transportation Agency, the regulatory organization, there were only four people to handle the application of over 450 provisions for 130 service providers. Do you seriously think that the agency can do the work required, or should the number of employees be increased?

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** Thank you for the question.

[English]

We do state that four full-time equivalent staff—not necessarily four full-time staff—at CTA are doing this work. It is a large number of transportation service providers. Canada is a large country and that doesn't help, but it's not up to us to say what the right number is, because it's not just the number. It's the type of inspections that are done.

We noted how many inspections were done over a period of a couple of years. We also have a recommendation to the CTA to look at how it's doing inspections and of what type, and to look at the resources needed to do the proper inspections, because we also understand that these people have an increasing number of regulations—not just the accessibility regulations—that they have to look at and inspect every year.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Chabot.

Madam Zarrillo, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP):** Thank you so much for coming today, and thank you for this work that's already resulted in change.

We heard today that Via Rail executives have already taken up the challenge and have done the work. I hope their understanding of the regulations and the gaps in their services are now well understood.

I wanted to go back to the comments that were made about the audit and about its being on schedule for the Crown corporations. When was the last similar audit to this? When is the next one planned?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** I'm going to hesitate to say this is the first audit that we've done in this area. I believe it was 2019 when the act came in, so this is the first time we've had an opportunity to audit under the Accessible Canada Act.

In terms of follow-up work, we're in the process of determining what our next audits will be, and there are certainly topics related to this one that are on our radar. Another mechanism that we use is our update on past audits, and that's a way we can go in to look at the observations and look at our findings in the current audit. Rather than going back and doing a full follow-up to determine whether recommendations have been implemented, we follow up on whether the outcomes that we found in this audit may have improved—or maybe not. That's another mechanism we're thinking of in relation to the work we've done here.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Okay.

You mentioned that the Crown corporations were in here. I'm wondering when, and if, the airlines will be included in an upcoming audit, the next audit.... I know we hear a lot of complaints about persons with disabilities and their treatment on the airlines.

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** With respect to including the Crown corporations in our audit, as our mandate allows us to, we can go in and audit those organizations. Airlines are privately owned and run corporations, and therefore, they don't fall under the mandate of our work.

This being said, we can do work auditing the Canadian Transportation Agency to determine what it does in relation to regulating the industry.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** That kind of goes to my next question. I did want to spend a little bit of time on complaints because dignity is top of mind for me as I hear from residents and the way they experience transportation.

You mentioned that the complaint data access is limited, especially for those private corporations. We hear that in housing too. We can't get a hold of data sometimes.

You mentioned that there are certain circumstances where data is not accessible. Can you let us know what those instances are? What are those certain circumstances, and how can we on this committee or the federal government help to get some of that data to improve the experience for travellers with a disability?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** You've highlighted many of the reasons why complaint data is very important. I'll go right into where the CTA currently does not have access, and I'll ask my colleagues to add details.

At present, if there is a complaint made to an airline, for example, it is the individual sending that complaint who decides where the complaint goes. If it goes simply to the airline, the Canadian Transportation Agency does not become aware of that complaint.

To give a comparison, in the United States, every complaint that goes to an airline also goes to the U.S. transportation board. Therefore, in the United States, they get access to airline complaints, including, for example, if a Canadian airline has a complaint made against them. That gives them the opportunity to receive the data, to identify barriers and to take action, whereas right now, in Canada, the CTA doesn't have that possibility. That's as a result of their own mandate and their authority.

I will ask if there are any details.

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** I can add that we've noted this, and of course, we did get information from CTA. They agree that they should have broader access to information. We are not in a position to demand or request that legislation be changed.

In their response, the CTA has outlined some of the actions, and I believe they will be asking for broader access to this information, as Ms. Thomas said, like the U.S. regulators have right now.

• (1645)

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I have a quick question. Do you believe that this committee should also make the recommendation that complaints go to the CTA as well, so that they have data to analyze?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** I think that members of Parliament and committees have an opportunity to influence in a way that, as an office with our mandate, we cannot. I think it's up to the committee to decide what it would like to do.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I'll take that away.

In relation to the audits, were there any intersections identified such as gender, age or race? Was there any data collected in those categories, which are protected under our charter?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** We didn't see any of that in detail, but we did recommend that a data strategy be put in place. A data strategy may allow the transportation service provider to be able to do those analyses on intersectionality. It's not something that was available because there wasn't a broad data strategy in place to be able to capture the data and have the data in a way that could allow those analyses.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Okay. Very quickly, for my next one, I wanted to talk about the training on physical assistance. I have heard from my constituents, many of them women, who have had a late flight or have come back late and have been transferred from their seat to their chair by a baggage handler, potentially, someone who has not been trained or does not want to do that work.

Is this something you've heard about or that arose in your audit, where you found out that.... I mean, we've obviously seen that people have not necessarily been trained, but did you feel that there were people in other areas such as baggage handlers who were being asked to ensure passenger transfers?

**The Chair:** Give a short answer, please.

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** We didn't have access to these types of details, but we saw the regulation and training requirements, and when it was done and not done. We didn't have the specific mapping of those individual cases.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Zarrillo.

Madam Martinez Ferrada.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I would just like some clarification on when the meeting is scheduled to end, given that we started a little later than anticipated. I know that it would take the consent of members of the committee to conclude at 5:30 p.m. but if we are in agreement, could we make sure that all the members have the speaking time they need to ask a few questions between now and the end of the meeting? Are the members of the committee in favour of this suggestion?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** There's just one round.

Madam Chabot.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I agree with what my colleague has suggested. The time should be allocated equitably so that we don't have to go through what we experienced at the last meeting.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

I take direction—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** You're welcome.

[*English*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I am the vice-chair.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** I can leave. You will be in the chair, Madam.

Okay, we're using time. We normally go with two five-minute and two two-and-a-half minute rounds. However, we just have the one round, so there's been a suggestion that we continue with the same rotation, but for five minutes each.

Is there agreement? It would be five, five, five and five, instead of dropping to two and a half.

I can call for a vote on it. The committee tells me what it wants to do.

Seeing no objection—

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Mr. Chair, just so I'm clear, are you saying you want to change the normal practice? Questions are done based on the number of elected officials from each party who are here. To have all four parties have the same amount of time isn't fair to the members at the table here.

I think we should continue on with the normal practice and the normal time we have. That's what's fair to the elected members who are sitting at the table here, with all due respect.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gray, but I have a suggestion that seems to....

I can put it to a vote. The committee determines its own path forward on these issues. I don't want to belabour the point.

Is there a will to divide the time up equally—five, five, five and five—as we move forward?

• (1650)

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Mr. Chair, I have a suggestion.

If we have one more round, let's—

**A voice:** No.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Do we have two more rounds? I'm sorry. I thought you said one round.

**The Chair:** No. We're at 5:30 p.m. Then the committee can choose after 5:30 p.m. That's our allotment of time.

**Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Just for clarity, can we do another round of however many minutes then? We can get two more rounds in. Is that correct?

**The Chair:** We should be able to.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Yes. If we're doing two more rounds, it's the—

**The Chair:** The request was to continue with five, five, five and five, as we proceed through.

I don't see a consensus. Without consensus, I'm reluctant to move away from our usual practice.

We'll continue with what's agreed to.

Mrs. Falk, you have five minutes.



**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We know this audit highlights some shortcomings in barrier-free transportation within Canada. We also know the Minister of Disability Inclusion intended on a framework legislative approach for Canada's accessibility act. That was Bill C-81, a couple of Parliaments ago. It leans almost entirely on regulations with that act.

I'm wondering about this: Are the regulations that have been developed sufficient to achieve the goal of a barrier-free Canada by 2040, or are there regulatory or legislative changes that would need to be done in order to achieve that goal?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** Thank you very much for the question.

I'm going to start off by saying that 2040 is a long time away. That's a long time for people living with disabilities to wait for those changes to be made.

With respect to changes of legislation, regulations and policies, those are decisions that are outside of our mandate. We look at the implementation of those regulations. My colleagues may have some insights into the effects and impact of the regulations. However, in terms of changes to those, that's something we typically don't do.

I'll ask my colleagues whether they have anything to add.

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** I'll maybe just add, as Ms. Thomas said, that 2040 is a long time away. We have seen some progress on the accessibility. We hope the progress continues and that it's front-loaded rather than making a lot more necessary progress closer to 2040. That's our hope.

We've identified, in our audit, a number of areas that we think can be improved. Given that the organizations we audited have agreed to the recommendations and have plans to make changes with reasonable timelines, we are cautiously optimistic that the area of accessibility will continue to positively move forward and, hopefully, at a good pace.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Do you have anything to add, Ms. Fortier?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** I could add something quickly.

We looked at two regulations. The first regulation is kind of the standard or the baseline. The second regulation is the detailed one where each one can identify its barriers in consultation with persons with disabilities. If the tools of consultation with persons with disabilities are used to identify what the gaps are and what the ways forward are to fix those gaps, those regulations can be used to move the stakes forward quite a lot.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you very much.

As Mr. Long mentioned, I was here during Bill C-81. I was very frustrated with it because it seemed like it came in at the eleventh hour. We had to just pass it and get it done.

We were very much focused on accountability, understanding that, when we are consulting with persons with disabilities, sometimes that will look different. It doesn't necessarily mean that we're sitting in a room having a conversation. There could be aides involved from various levels, even when we look at how people can

get to the consultation point. Obviously, that was pre-COVID, and the virtual realm wasn't as adapted everywhere.

I also want to ask how CATSA did not know that the regulations required its management to take accessibility training. It's quite alarming to me that it wasn't understood that this should be done, especially when we have a.... This is a culture change. This is something that needs to be discussed, and it has to be at the forefront. That accessibility lens has to be put on there. I'm just wondering why it wouldn't know that this was something that needed to be done.

• (1655)

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** It's something that could be asked of CATSA. What we do know, though, is that the service that is delivered by CATSA is delivered by third party contractor services. That might be a reason that it was more difficult to see what applied to CATSA, the Crown corporation, versus people on the floor who are not CATSA's employees but, really, third party security-screening contractors.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Would that be too many middlemen in between or we don't really know?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** It's different organizations, so different groups. They had training in place for the people who were on the floor and for the managers of people who were on the floor because the service delivery is really organized with the third party screening contractor. It's the way the business is handled.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Wonderful. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Falk.

Mr. Van Bynen, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the witnesses' coming forward and giving us some enlightened perspectives.

Last year, I optimized my own personal website for a wide range of impairments, including visual, auditory, motor and cognitive. The new accessibility options allow my website to be utilized by more people in my riding Newmarket—Aurora and by users across the country. In my opinion, websites have comprehensive accessibilities that should be universal features.

While the data suggests that website accessibility is an area that needs growth in the travel sector, can you point to any examples of progress with web-alternative formats for visually impaired travellers?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** I'm not sure that we have the technical details to go there. We looked at the website of the entity. We did see that the website of the regulator, of the CTA, was faring quite well. As for the rest, we really just rely on the regulation as it stands with the criteria that were part of the regulation. We tested those on the existing website and found the deficiencies that can be addressed.

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** Thank you.

What I'm looking at is that it seems the role of government is to set goals and objectives. It seems the challenge is in implementation, in changing the culture and in gaining commitments.

When I was working with the bank, one of the rules of thumb we had was that there had to be at least three layers of management that were firmly committed to the new principles and processes. Was there any evidence of that being an embedded culture in any of the organizations you reviewed?

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** In general, as we were doing our audit, which took about 12 months, plus or minus, we did get a better understanding of the culture at the three organizations we audited.

It's hard to get concrete evidence, but we do believe—given the answers we got and the responses when we were clearing the audit—that the culture is changing. It is, of course, never fast enough. There is progress on that front in all three organizations we audited.

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** Through any of these third-party contracts or the people who are actually delivering them—that's where the problem is, at the delivery point—did you ever review any of the contracts of the arrangements to ensure that any incentive programs would reflect progress as far as implementing the accessibility act goes so people would be rewarded for doing the right thing?

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** We didn't look at that specifically. However, we did look at training, for example. We looked at training programs at Via and at CATSA, including the training programs that were used to train third party providers.

We did note that in most cases, the training was adequate. There were some deficiencies with the training. For example, with CATSA, we noted that one specific deficiency in terms of training involved how to handle a support person for somebody with accessibility issues. We also noted a couple of gaps in training for Via.

• (1700)

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** Do you feel there should be some reporting standards for the accessibility data, particularly with respect to accumulating the complaints we're receiving? Should that be one of the government's steps to make sure this advances at a better pace?

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** In terms of data, in our section, especially with respect to CTA, we talked about training. We discussed how it would be ideal if they had access to more of the data their counterparts in the U.S. have.

We found that CATSA and Via were managing complaints on a one-by-one basis. In our view, it's better to have a broader view. A better data strategy that involves a number of things would give them a better view of what's happening out there as opposed to taking care of it on a case-by-case basis. Seeing the broader picture would be good.

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** Consolidation makes things more visible and modifies programs.

Are there any organizations in the transportation portfolio that are doing good work in terms of training and providing physical assistance? Are there some best practices that should be shared amongst these organizations?

**The Chair:** Give a short answer, please.

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** We would have to say that the two Crown corporations, even if there were gaps, put some programs in place that were already developed, and they were continuing to develop them. Continuing to do what the regulations ask for and continuing to further improve and do the refresher is the way to continue to improve.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Thomas, the Canadian Transportation Agency reports to the Minister of Transport. How did the minister react to the audit and to the report you submitted?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** Most of our conversations were with managers and senior managers at the organizations. We don't audit the department itself. We had a briefing with the minister and I believe he was receptive to our recommendations. He was pleased with the audit and said he would implement our recommendations.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** After seeing the challenges being faced by the agency in terms of preparing its reports, we can only hope that the minister responsible will get things moving.

In your opening address, you said that the agency couldn't have access to all the complaints. Do you have any recommendations about how agency access to this information could be improved?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** The complaints to which it did not have access were those sent directly to the airlines. A regulatory change would be required for the agency to obtain access to these complaints.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** That sounds rather daunting to me. Am I wrong?

I also read that complaints are sometimes categorized by type of complaint rather than in terms of whether it's a person with a disability who made it. That's not a criticism of your audit. Our committee's objective in this study is to learn how to strengthen the agency and the departments and how to obtain an accurate picture of the situation so that it can be rectified.

I agree with you, and I hope we'll be able to meet our objectives before 2040. I am accordingly trying to see what recommendations our committee might make to strengthen the data-gathering capacity, obtain more accurate data and give the agency the tools it needs to perform its role fully.

• (1705)

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** You're right about the complaints: they are categorized by type of complaint, and not by the status of those who made them. That, moreover, is why it's difficult to assess the available options for changes and for making decisions that would improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. I'm going to ask...

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chabot and Ms. Thomas.

[English]

Ms. Zarrillo, is it you or Ms. Barron?

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you very much.

It's me and then Ms. Barron will be taking up the next round of questioning for me.

I'll start by saying that it seems there is a message out of the Senate that the House of Commons' motion to the Senate about amendments to Bill C-22 has been adopted in the Senate. I guess it is on its way, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to speak a little about mechanisms to ensure that targets are met in regulatory requirements. It's mentioned here in the report that the target was 80% and that was 69% met. I'm wondering if there are fines or if there are sanctions.

What is the mechanism to ensure targets are met? What do we do if they aren't?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** The regulator has a continuum of activities that they put in place to make sure there is compliance, from informative discussion and to issuing fines. During our audit, they were more at the early stage of their continuum in terms of what they did to ensure compliance. We did see that this was removing some of the barriers.

Since our audit was completed, we did see in the public information that's available from the agency that some fines were issued in other cases.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Fines were issued.

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** On the public site of the regulator, there is information available.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Can that information be submitted to this committee?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** It's public information. Sure.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** That would be great. Thank you so much.

I want to get back to the question of dignity and persons with disabilities having equal access and dignity to travel. I wanted to ask specifically about third party training.

I note the third parties were doing more training than the actual agency themselves, especially at the executive and management level. Are there any numbers around what percentage of work is outsourced and what their turnover rates are like?

I'm trying to understand how much training would be involved with third party usage.

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** For CATSA, the services in the airport are all delivered by third party screening contractors. Part of their certification process is that they be trained before they start.

We did see that over the summer there was a lot of new hiring. There was a lot of discussion in the newspapers about this situation. We did see that it was part of their certification process before they started to be on the floor. We noted that as a good a practice—making sure that people delivering the service on the floor had their training done.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Would the agency be able to understand what that turnover rate is like and how much training would go on? I think that would probably be part of the cost of the contracts, to make sure that people are being trained adequately. Is there any information about what turnover rates are like in the third party?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** We don't have this information. We just know that, for CATSA, it's part of the certification process, so any new employees need to be certified as part of that process. Any new contractor needs to be certified, and as part of the certification process there is training on accessibility.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo. That is your time.

Ms. Ferreri, you have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much for being here. I really appreciate your time and insight into this important study.

I think it's really important to look at this. I think lots of us don't know what we don't know when it comes to barriers. Nobody really knows what a barrier is until they don't have access. Thanks for your work on this.

There are a couple of things that jumped out at me when I was looking at your report. For those watching at home, the report is, "Accessible Transportation for Persons With Disabilities" in the reports of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada.

In the last section, in the "Overall message", it said, "The Canadian Transportation Agency has very limited authority to request complaint data from the transportation service providers." Why?

• (1710)

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** It's simply not in their mandate to be allowed to collect that information, as far as I understand.

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** That's at the current time. As we know also, we do have a recommendation in this area. They do, of course, agree with the idea of having more access to full data, like their U.S. counterparts. We believe they will be looking to get further access.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** The way this is written, it says "to request", so why would requesting data be...? I understand that the CTA is not mandated to give it, but you're saying that they have a very limited authority to request it.

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** The directive allows them to have access to some information when they're doing a special evaluation or assessment of a specific case. In that context they may be able to ask the transportation service provider to have access to the information if it's a case that goes to the court side of the agency, for example.

The CTA doesn't have the mandate and they don't have the right to regularly access this information on an ongoing basis, such as “just give us your accounts of complaints that you've received related to accessibility on an annual or a monthly basis.” They don't have this right. It's only part of their investigation when there is a specific complaint that is being put in place that they can ask about this information.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** When I think about requests for information, if they don't provide it, there is no consequence. That is what you're saying, basically. Is that fair? I'm seeing a nod. That's good.

According to Statistics Canada, one in five Canadians, aged 15 and over, has one or more disabilities that could limit their participation in everyday activities. Of the 2.2 million persons with disabilities, who used federally regulated transportation in 2019 and 2020, 63%, or two-thirds—which is significant—faced a barrier.

As auditors, my question to you would be this: What's a realistic goal or number? Is it realistic to have 0% facing a barrier? What is that timeline? I know you mentioned that 2040 is too long to wait, but we also know that businesses are burdened with so many things, and it is absolutely challenging to make things accessible. It's costly. There are lots of things. I don't think it comes from a lack of compassion.

What do you think is a realistic number, from an auditor's perspective, versus 63%?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** To start off, we're probably not going to be able to give you a number.

Every Canadian has the right to fully participate in society, and I think that consultation is a critically important part of the act. One of the main principles is “nothing without us”. Therefore, that number should be.... The objective of the act is to eliminate barriers, and that should be the objective of the organizations.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I understand your position that you don't want to give a number, but I think a goal is really important to draw a line in the sand of what we should expect. To be fair, there's unanimous consent. Everybody agrees that every human deserves that right.

What is a realistic goal to achieve, in terms of a number?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** The goal for the Government of Canada is to eliminate all barriers. Therefore, organizations need to work towards eliminating barriers.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** What is the time frame?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** The time frame that has been given is 2040. That is the legislative requirement.

We're hopeful that organizations, as Mr. Duvnjak said, can front-load getting those barriers removed, as opposed to waiting until the very end, closer to that deadline.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Do you think the government right now, in the way that it's currently operating, is on a trajectory to meet that goal?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** The organizations we looked at have accepted our recommendations. They have action plans in place. We're cautiously optimistic that the organizations within this audit can move towards that objective and can positively achieve it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Ferreri.

Next, we have Mr. Coteau for five minutes.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Thank you very much.

Thank you so much for being here today. This report is, without question, a very important document. I'm glad that the organization is focusing on disabilities.

Have you done reports like this before within other sectors that speak specifically to disabilities? Is this the first of its kind?

• (1715)

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** Yes, this is the first one we've done since the act was put in place in 2019.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I'm assuming there are going to be more, because you could apply accessibility to so many other things.

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** Absolutely. We're in our planning stage right now for our future audits. There are definitely audits that are touching on this subject. They are on our list right now to determine which ones we're going to do in 2025 and further out.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I notice that in the actual user's experience with online technology, you used a standard from the World Wide Web Consortium. It was the web content accessibility guidelines 2.0. Is that an international standard?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** Yes, that's an international standard. It's the standard that is required to be compliant with the accessible transportation for persons with disabilities regulations.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Is that used all around the world?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** It's used in many organizations. There is a new version. Sometimes Europe uses a variant of this standard, but it is under the same principle. It's the same approach. It's 2.0 versus 2.1. That's a very technical detail. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Did you look at other standards that were out there and just determine that this was the best one?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** We picked this one, because this is the one that was required in the regulations.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** It's in the Canadian regulations. I got it. Okay.

I also noticed that in some of the findings you actually used data from 2021 from Statistics Canada and applied it to a report in 2023. However, the technology is so different, and there are so many changes. How did you justify taking data from 2021, and applying it to 2023 and these organizations?

It says, for example, on page 9:

Using websites to make reservations or look for information was a barrier faced by 3 out of 10 travellers with disabilities, according to Statistics Canada's Accessibility in Federal Sector Organizations Survey, 2021.

Is that a fair assessment to apply to this report two years later?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** We used the data that was available. It was very relevant data for our purpose. It was for people who had travelled both before the pandemic and during the pandemic. The experience might have been different there as well.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** For example, and this is 1.30, it states:

We found that 17%...of the online criteria tested at VIA Rail did not meet the required standards.

How did you find that out? Was it just by using that criteria and applying it?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** Yes, we selected a sample of criteria. We looked at some selected pages on the sites of each Crown corporation. We used an expert in web accessibility to do the testing, as well as a person with a disability who did the testing on our behalf.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Maybe I'm getting a bit too detailed, but did you find that the variants of programs used by the end-user sometimes varied so much that it was hard to really apply to that testing?

I was part of an organization that looked at digital literacy, for example. We found that it was really hard, because there are so many different types of programs. There are legacy programs that people have been using for 15 years, because they work so well. Sometimes, when different scripts change, it becomes more difficult.

Was there a way to get over that challenge?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** We clearly did not have all of the tools and everything, but we looked at some of the top two tools that are used for screen readers, for example, in a variety of browsers, which seemed to be the more frequently used as a representation of this. However, we didn't test all of the tools that could be used. We used a selective approach on what could be tested to get those results.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** When a report like this comes out and you have organizations like Via Rail, is there a follow-up meeting to figure out how they're going to move forward on some of these recommendations, specifically around accessing the online information?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** Absolutely. Our process is that during the course of the audit we interact with them frequently. We share the draft recommendations with them to ensure that they're actually going to achieve the outcomes that we think the recommendations will achieve.

We then table the report and they're then responsible for putting together both responses to our recommendations within our report, but then also an action plan in relation to the public accounts committee hearing. They have put together their action plan and shared that with that committee.

• (1720)

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Thank you for the good work.

I know that my time is probably up. I can feel the chair looking at me.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Thank you so much for this work and I hope this is the start of an ongoing process to increase more accessibility for people in Canada, so thank you again.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

Before we move to Ms. Gray, it looks like we'll have time for one full round, which is five, five, two and a half, and two and a half, if that's the wish of the committee.

Then it's five minutes for... Is it Mr. Aitchison? My notes say Mrs. Gray, but if you do that, we'll not get to Mr. Aitchison.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Thank you. I know we moved a few things around there.

Thank you again for being here today.

One of the things I wanted to touch on was that the report revealed that Via Rail and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority took steps towards engaging with persons with disabilities for specific activities when they should have consulted more broadly, such as on teaching methods for accessible training.

Based on your observations, was this a priority of those organizations?

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I think you forgot the opposition here on the questions.

**The Chair:** No, I said five, five, two and a half and two and a half.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** You missed two and a half and two and a half after Michael.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Maybe we need the vice-chair.

**The Chair:** I'm following the approved routine, the approved order that we go through when we're moving through a sequence like this, which is subsequent rounds, because we did not go with two panels. We just had one. I'm following the approved procedure.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Can we just allow the two members to finish up? What did they get, two minutes? Are we going to do that?

**The Chair:** Yes.

Mrs. Gray, because there's a group with only one witness, we're following the approved order so we'll end with two fives and two two and a halves.

Mrs. Gray, we'll start with your five minutes. You have the floor.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Maybe I'll just go through that again then.

I wanted to touch base on the consultation part.

Via Rail and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, they took steps towards engaging with persons with disabilities for specific activities, when they should have consulted more broadly such as on teaching methods for accessible training. Based on your observations, was that a priority of the organization, or what was your sense when you were doing the audit on this particular issue of where their focus was?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** I'm just a little unclear on the word "priority". Is that in terms of the teaching methods, or...?

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Yes, it's in terms of the teaching methods for accessible training.

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** I believe when the consultations were carried out, there was direction to participants to not talk about teaching methods because they really wanted to focus on the content of the training as well. I do believe that afterwards we did some follow-up work and determined that there was no follow-up in relation to teaching methods.

I'll look to my colleagues to see if I've missed anything there.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Great. Thank you.

With regard to the complaints, your report said that from 2017 to 2022, where Via Rail and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority categorized complaints under persons with disabilities, there were 83 complaints specifically. However, it said that more than 1,000 were made by or on behalf of persons with disabilities and those were categorized by the operational nature of the complaint.

Do you know why this data was not leveraged to identify and prevent barriers to accessible travel? Why was it categorized the way it was?

• (1725)

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** CATSA received the information and categorized it, as you said, by its nature. If they had been capturing it by status, it would have meant, for example, that a complaint lodged about a service dog, as opposed to being lodged about security screening, might have been lodged in relation to a person with a disability.

Had they done that, it would have given them the opportunity to better analyze the data and understand whether or not other actions should have been taken.

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** This is in relation to the data strategy that we talked about. We have a recommendation, and they've agreed with it, with the objective of getting a broader picture with a cleaner, more concise and consolidated dataset.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Thank you.

That's sort of looking forward. Do you think there's a way to capture the data that's already there and a way of disseminating it? Is there a way of recovering that data and categorizing it differently, or is it like they did the best they could based on what was provided so here is the recommendation for moving forward?

Is that the state of where it was left?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** I suspect that they've collected the data and they have the information. It would be up to them to determine what they can now do with that data.

I'm not as familiar with it to determine whether or not it's easy to go back and do work, or if this would be more for them moving forward to ensure that they accurately capture the information, analyze it and then use it for decision-making.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Thank you.

As part of that, looking at what the information is being used for, are you aware of anything or did you come across anything in your audit from the regulator's point of view? Are there opportunities there that should be looked at from a regulatory point of view and not just from an individual organization point of view, whether it's policy or benchmarks?

Is there anything that you came across as part of that process that maybe should be looked at from the regulator's point of view?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** We definitely referred in the report to the complaint data and the limitations that are currently in place.

I'll ask if there was anything else that we came across.

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** In the regulation for the plans and reporting on accessibility, there is a component where, in future reports, they can report on the feedback that they have received. It could be part of a data strategy to report on their complaints as part of that reporting.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** This is more of a general comment on the oversight from the regulator. In the analysis you did, do you feel that, up to this point, it's been a more reactionary as opposed to a proactive approach to this? Because they are the regulator, they're the ones to hold the organizations to account and make sure that they're fulfilling the objectives in the act.

Do you think they've been more reactionary to this point, based on your analysis?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** What we found was that they were finding barriers and identifying those that could be removed. In fact, in one of our exhibits we show those that were identified and those that were removed.

One limitation we did find was that their inspections were really focused on the design. They didn't go and test the actual service delivery. That would be an area where they could improve.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Martinez Ferrada, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Thomas, I'm going to tell you a little story. My brother has been disabled since birth, but we've travelled a lot with him. He is now 38 years old. He has made many plane trips and things were complicated every single time, even just to get him into his seat. When passengers are still babies or very young, it's not a problem, but I would challenge you to travel with a disabled person in a wheelchair who is 30 or 35 years old.

You talked about data and how the service is provided. I was wondering what you would like to see in other reports on how to evaluate this type of service. In the end, my brother was assisted by firefighters, because no one else could move him along in his wheelchair or get him out of it. You also mentioned the number of wheelchairs that were damaged, and it would be interesting to know more about that.

Could you tell us a little more about special assistance services, for planes, for example.

• (1730)

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** Thank you for telling us your story, which is very personal. I was moved by it and I can only imagine what it must have been like. We travel often and the number of complaints we've made is unbelievable. Our baggage has been lost or damaged, but that's nothing compared to equipment that is damaged or that fails to arrive at all.

I'll ask my colleagues to provide more details in connection with your question.

[English]

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** Yes, it's a very challenging and very sensitive area. We've seen it through our audit, and we've seen it through the eyes of some of the experts we have hired as advisers. We've seen a number of high-profile cases, of course, in the newspapers and the media.

In our view, this all starts with a high-level consultation with persons with disabilities. We then drop down to training, so we test the training, look at the programs and so on, and then when we get to the actual physical move. There need to be certain machines helping aides to do this. You have to have the right person who's properly trained for that machine, and have the machine in place to be able to offer the service the person needs.

Hopefully, it happens. We know it doesn't happen all the time—it's unfortunate—and then we get into cases such as those you are describing.

[Translation]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** That leads me to airline passenger rights. The minister introduced new measures to strengthen these rights and put the burden of proof on the carrier. How could that improve accessibility?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** We haven't yet studied that regulatory aspect. You're talking about the air passenger protection regulations, which are not the same as the accessibility regulations. As this was not part of our audit, I cannot, unfortunately, make any comments on that.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** I was in fact more interested in whether it could be applied to accessibility.

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** Could you repeat your question?

[English]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** The question is with regard to the passenger rights regime. Do you think the passenger rights regime...?

If the minister reviewed the measures of that regime, could that be applied to accessibility?

[Translation]

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** One aspect on which we can comment is related to complaints about accessibility, and the uniqueness of each case, and the fact that many of them are very specific. This is very different from what we saw with respect to the protection of air passenger rights. Accessibility complaints require further review,

and accountability is more difficult to demonstrate indirectly. On the other hand, access to information might provide a better understanding of the cases and be dealt with from the regulatory standpoint.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** I was trying to make the link in terms of responsibility, and also to property damage. The cost of damage to a regular or electric wheelchair is not the same as for a lost suitcase. And getting a wheelchair back can take months or even a year. As the person may be deprived of their equipment for a long time, their quality of life decreases. I was linking these situations to the rights of airline passengers.

You've spoken at length about data. Can you tell us more specifically what other data you would have liked to review?

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** Under U.S. regulations, airlines need to keep track of the number of wheelchairs on every flight as well as any damage that may have occurred. If this straightforward information were provided in Canada, it could be useful.

• (1735)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleague for her testimony. Even people who do not have a disability can encounter various problems when they travel. Everyone therefore understands just how time-consuming and sometimes demeaning it can be for persons with disabilities.

I can understand that these people may make complaints, because there are mechanisms for it. However, it's not always easy to assign responsibility. If we compare it to the health and social services system, where something might happen that makes someone want to lodge a complaint, but if that person got a response, they might forget about it and be happy to have sorted things out.

I would imagine that your audit mandates do not require you to consult the people covered by your report in order to determine how these incidents turned out. Beyond determining whether or not they made a complaint—and I'm sure that we might have a lot more testimony about this—how can we identify these people?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** In the course of our audit, we called upon three advisors to ask the questions. I will therefore ask my colleagues to provide further details.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Have we received the advisory committee report?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** No, it isn't a report, but rather a mechanism we use to improve our audits and make them more understandable, over and above the work done by our auditors.

[English]

**Mr. Milan Duvnjak:** It was an advisory service we looked to for advice. These are people with lived experiences.

Throughout the audit, we also consulted with and spoke to many organizations that either have or represent broad areas of people with various disabilities. Every conversation starts and ends with the fact that the most important part is consultation with persons with disabilities—the idea of “nothing without us”.

The second thing that came out of these discussions was prevention. If we consult with persons with disabilities, there's a much higher chance of preventing issues. If they're not prevented, we get into the identification, removal or mitigation of various obstacles. That's why our objective talks about “identifying, removing and preventing barriers”.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Welcome, Ms. Barron. We sit on another committee together. We couldn't have you attend and not participate.

Ms. Barron, you have two and a half minutes to conclude.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's nice to see you in the chair role.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm happy to be here, even for a short portion of this important study. I'm happy this work is being done. I'm looking at the report that has been provided. It looks like there is some good work happening, so that's good.

When I'm looking through the report—I don't know whether this has come up already—I'm seeing mentions of many of these invisible disabilities, such as brain injury and mental illness. However, when I'm looking at the framing around the regulation—the examples on how to provide accessibility and so on—it seems to be very focused on physical disabilities. Those are very important, but brain injury and mental illness, for example, are very interconnected and a very important part of this discussion.

I'm wondering if you can share whether this has been looked at. I know that, in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith, we have what's called mental health first aid, so people know how to respond when somebody is having a symptom of a mental illness, for example.

Has any of that been looked at through this process?

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** I will start by talking about consultation and how important consultation is.

You're right: It needs to be done with a variety of persons with disabilities and a variety of experiences. I think it's through those types of consultations that barriers can be identified and then removed.

I'm going to ask my colleagues if they have anything to add about what we found during the course of our audit work.

• (1740)

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** In our audit work, we looked at this through the training component. There is a mandatory training component that needs to be included. It includes elements about the various of types of disabilities, including disabilities that may not be visible or the type of disability that you were mentioning. This type of training needs to be included in the training content. For the organizations we looked at, it was included.

**The Chair:** Ms. Barron, you were disturbed by that...?

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I'm sorry. It was really hard to hear the responses with the conversations that are happening. They are right in the microphone.

**The Chair:** Please, those of you at the back, respect the committee members who are participating.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Hopefully, the translators caught it.

**The Chair:** Continue, Ms. Barron. You have time for another question. Then we'll conclude.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you very much.

I think I got the gist of your answer, but I don't have a follow-up because I didn't catch all of it, unfortunately. Could you just give me a few words on what you were saying?

Thank you.

**Ms. Casey Thomas:** Sure.

I mentioned that consultation is very important, and that the consultation needs to be held with a variety of persons with disabilities in order to address not just one type of disability but to enable this so that all barriers, regardless of the type of disability, can be identified, prevented and/or removed.

**Ms. Susie Fortier:** What I said was about the training.

There is mandatory training content. We did look at whether the content included the descriptions of the various types of disabilities and of some of the elements that you were mentioning about invisible disabilities and other elements that are maybe sometimes less thought about because they are less visible.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Barron.

Thank you to the witnesses.

That concludes today's meeting. Actually, it probably concludes the committee's schedule in this particular session.

To all committee members, thank you for your participation and do have a very good summer.

The meeting is adjourned.









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